

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**An investigation of the English language needs of Business English graduates in mainland China**

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**An investigation of the English language  
needs of Business English graduates in  
mainland China**

**By**

**Liang Liao**

**February 2015**



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***A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy***

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all English teachers around the world, particularly those involved with Business English and interested in email exchanges in the environment of BELF.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to use this opportunity to thank three groups of people involved with me while I was working on the present thesis. The first group are academics. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof Hilary Nesi (Director of Study), for her patience, her endless, highly helpful and effective support alongside continuous precious feedback. Hilary has always encouraged me to participate in academia e.g. by frequently telling me when opportunities to give a conference talk arose. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Ross Graham, for his support. Finally, I would like to thank the support staff, who welcomed me on my first day for enrolment and also helped in the decisive moments when this thesis was about to be submitted.

The second group are those subjects involved in my study who have voluntarily helped my data collection. Without their contribution I would not have collected such precious data.

The third group of people is personally involved with me and mostly non-academic. First of all, I would like to wholeheartedly thank my husband for his patience and support, particularly as the submission of my PhD thesis came closer. At the same time, I would like to thank my parents who also had to suffer with me through the ups and downs of this project because they were worried I might not make it on time, and also, my lovely son who has brought me plenty of joy during this hard time. Furthermore, there are numerous friends and colleagues whom I also would to thank for their kind support and encouragement when I had doubts about the success or relevance of my work.

## COVENTRY UNIVERSITY

**Title:** An Investigation of the English Language Needs of Business English Graduates in Mainland China

**Name:** Liang Liao

**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Date:** February 2015

**Thesis Summary:**

The Business English (BE) degree in China was established as an independent discipline in 2007. Business English used to be taught as a component of English language and literature degrees. There are now about 50 universities in China offering BE degrees, but the change in the status of Business English has not been without attendant problems. Most Chinese universities offering degrees in BE have failed to combine the teaching of English language and literature and the teaching of business in very meaningful ways, and have given English language learning a much larger share of the curriculum. Business English is taught in university English departments rather than in Business Schools, and most BE teachers only have a background in English language and literature, with no practical work experience in the area of international business. These teachers have little knowledge of how English is used in the workplace, and might have difficulty contextualizing BE teaching in real business situations where English is used as a lingua franca (BELF). The fact that non-native speakers' communications predominate in the BELF environment calls into question the emphasis on native-like correctness in university BE teaching.

Language needs analysis (LNA) was conducted in order to discover the English language needs of BE graduates starting work in Chinese companies with an international clientele. Data from questionnaires, interviews and business emails sent to and from recent graduates were analysed.

The findings from questionnaires and interviews indicate that emailing is the most frequent mode of communication in English in the Chinese companies that employ BE graduates, although speaking skills are also highly prized. All groups of respondents (BE teachers, company employers and RGs) thought standardized national English tests (e.g. TEM4, TEM8) were important for securing a job. It was found that most of the company employers and recent graduates believed that adhering to native-like norms was not important in a BELF environment where most of their clients were non-native English speakers who did not have a very high level of English.

The findings from analysis of my corpus of 86 business English email chains (307 messages, 34,837 words) suggest that MEMC graduates are communicatively adept at business email communication and can establish rapport with their clients and mitigate potential face-threats, despite the fact that their English is sometimes non-standard. Current teaching materials, methods and practices in BE teaching in China still place greatest emphasis on conformity to a set of native-like norms, however, rather than pragmatic competence.

These findings have interesting implications for ESP course content and the teaching of Business English as a lingua franca (BELF). BE lecturers might be unwilling

to use authentic BELF emails as models in the classroom, because the writers have a restricted command of English. There were no signs of any miscommunication in the email exchanges, however, and specifically BELF usage may well have had a disarming effect on clients, helping to achieve the writers' purposes more effectively than textbook English would have done.

Key words:

Language needs analysis, Business English, BELF, questionnaire, interview, Business email

## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>A list of abbreviations</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1 The development of business English in China</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2 The UIBE syllabus (2009)</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>1.3 The BE programme in MEMC</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature review</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>2.1 Language needs analysis and syllabus design</b> .....	<b>27</b>
2.1.1 Language needs analysis .....	27
2.1.2 Interrelations between language needs analysis and ESP syllabus design .....	30
2.1.3 Language needs analysis (LNA) in the workplace .....	32
2.1.3.1 Studies in the Inner-Circle .....	33
2.1.3.2 Studies in the Outer-Circle.....	36
2.1.3.3 Studies in the Expanding- Circle.....	40
2.1.4 Language Needs Analysis in Educational Institutions .....	49
<b>2.2 Business genres</b> .....	<b>51</b>
2.2.1 English as a Lingua Franca in Business Communications .....	53
2.2.2 Email communication .....	62
2.2.3 Request emails .....	75
2.2.4 Reconceptualising ELF in intercultural Business Settings (BELF) and its pedagogical Implications.....	93
<b>2.3. Application to Business English courses in the Chinese context</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<b>3.1 Conceptual framework of LNA</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<b>3.2. Questionnaire survey</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<b>3.3 Follow-up interviews</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<b>3.4 Data collection</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>3.5 The conceptual framework and methods for examining emails</b> .....	<b>112</b>
3.5.1 Methods for examining the linguistic features of emails.....	113
3.5.2 Coding scheme for emails .....	116
3.5.3 Methods for examining request emails.....	120
<b>3.6 Inter-rater tests of communicative function</b> .....	<b>122</b>
3.6.1 Summary and adjustments to the coding system .....	139
<b>Chapter 4</b> .....	<b>141</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>141</b>
<b>4.1 Questionnaire findings</b> .....	<b>141</b>
4.1.1 Questionnaires to company workers .....	141
4.1.2 Questionnaires to students.....	142

<b>4.2 Interview findings</b> .....	<b>143</b>
4.2.1 Business email writing in the workplace .....	148
4.2.2 The influence of culture on email writing.....	153
4.2.3 Views about grammar .....	154
4.2.4 Views about speaking.....	157
4.2.5 Views about standardized tests .....	163
<b>4.3 Findings from text analysis</b> .....	<b>166</b>
4.3.1 The email structure.....	167
4.3.2 The linguistic features of emails.....	168
4.3.3 Analysis of an email example from the textbook.....	172
4.3.4 Functional analysis of emails .....	173
4.3.5 Analysis of an email chain .....	180
4.3.6 The Move structure of request emails.....	186
4.3.7 Request strategy types.....	193
<b>4.4 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>200</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>204</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	204
5.2 Summary and discussion of findings .....	205
5.3 Implications for BE teaching in Mainland China .....	211
5.4 Limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research.....	215
<b>References</b> .....	<b>218</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>226</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b> .....	<b>226</b>
Questionnaire for company workers.....	226
<b>Appendix 2</b> .....	<b>229</b>
Questionnaire for Business English teachers at MEMC .....	229
<b>Appendix 3</b> .....	<b>230</b>
Questionnaire for the Business English majors in MEMC.....	230
<b>Appendix 4</b> .....	<b>232</b>
Chinese version of questionnaire for company workers.....	232
<b>Appendix 5</b> .....	<b>235</b>
Chinese version of questionnaire for BE students at MEMC .....	235
<b>Appendix 6</b> .....	<b>237</b>
Chinese version of Questionnaire for BE teacher at MEMC.....	237
<b>Appendix 7</b> .....	<b>238</b>
Definitions of functions before adjustment.....	238
<b>Appendix 8</b> .....	<b>239</b>
Definitions of functions of after adjustment.....	239
<b>Appendix 9</b> .....	<b>240</b>
Text book extracts from BE writing course edited by Su, G.H. (2007) (see included title page for source).....	240



## **A list of abbreviations**

BE: business English

BELF: Business English as a Lingua Franca

CET6: College English Test band six

CET4: College English Test band four

CNP: Communicative Needs Processor

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELF: English as a lingua franca

ENL: English as a Native Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EBP: English for Business Purposes

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

FTAs: Face-threatening Acts

JUFE: Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics

LNA: Language Needs analysis

MEMC: Modern Economics and Management College

NA: Needs Analysis

NNS : Non-native English speakers

NS: Native English speakers

PSA: Present situation analysis

SFL: Systemic Functional Linguistics

TEM 4: Test for English Majors band four

TEM 8: Test for English Majors band eight

TSA: Target Situation Analysis

UIBE: University of International Business and Economics

WE: World English

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

My PhD project aims to develop the idea of making BE education relate much more closely to the reality of English in the Chinese business world. There is a practical need to improve practice in BE education in my home university, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics (JUFE), where I have had four years of Business English teaching experience. My experience at JUFE led me to suspect that the types of discourse Business English students encounter at university are not very close to what they will encounter in real business contexts in China.

This study makes a contribution to our understanding of how BELF is used by Chinese participants in real business contexts in China, and attempts to assist the development of the BE curriculum by relating it to the Chinese business context.

#### 1.1 The development of business English in China

The role of English as the main lingua franca (ELF) of international business seems to be beyond dispute. There is a burgeoning global demand for 'Business English' (BE), or English for business purposes (EBP). BE was defined by Chen and Wang (2009:5) as the 'English language used in a variety of activities that are concerned with economy, business, and society, specifically including trade, management, finance, marketing, tourism, news and law etc.'. Moreover, empirical research in BE is increasingly being directed towards the actualities of business communities in the global context, as compared to the materials-led movement, dominant in previous decades, which tended to draw on BE practitioners' intuition and findings from the analysis of native speakers' business interaction. A shift has been observed from analysis of the language used in decontextualized written texts or speech events to analysis of contextualized communicative genres, stressing the organizational and/or cultural factors that help the completion of communicative events (editorial, ESP Journal 2005).

China has become an increasingly active participant in the global economy since its opening-up in the 1980s, even more so since its entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001. There is a rapidly growing awareness of the need to improve the nation's English skills, especially the skills of those doing international business (for example manufacturing and industry, foreign trade and services), who have a genuine need to learn English for Business purposes.

As the demand grows for professionally specific knowledge of the English language in the job market, Business English learning in China has also grown. Teaching English for specific purposes (ESP), and business English language teaching in particular, is receiving more and more attention. More and more universities in China are attempting to cultivate business English majors who study English language and literature plus business disciplines such as international trade and commerce, rather than traditional English majors who study only language and literature.

Before further elaborating on business English teaching and learning in universities in China, I would like to briefly introduce English language learning and teaching in secondary schools, because what students learn and how they learn English at school is the foundation for their further English study in universities. This is intended as background information that shows the test-oriented nature of English language teaching in China.

Secondary education in China lasts for six years, of which three are in junior high school and three in senior high school. English teaching and learning in secondary schools is still test-oriented and focused on reproduction and rote-learning. The exposure to English for students is very limited especially in cities that are not as developed as Beijing and Shanghai. The 'New curriculum for English teaching in senior high schools (1996)' clearly stipulated that the emphasis of teaching should be on improving students' reading ability, and reading comprehension is the largest section of the English exam in the Gaokao (College entrance test). Speaking, on the other hand, is not a compulsory part of the English test. It is widely accepted that students' later success is largely determined by their results in the Gaokao.

As there are still no standardized tests for Business English majors, since 2000 Business English majors in their second and fourth years in most universities in China have been required to take TEM4 (test for English major band 4) and TEM8

(test for English major band 8) . These tests were designed by the Chinese Higher Education committee of English majors in accordance with the 'New Curriculum' ('新大纲') for English majors. For Business English undergraduates, the TEM4 certificate is a pre-requisite for the award of a degree. It is widely believed that these TEMs achievement tests somehow reflect students' English language proficiency, but like the Gaokao they place great emphasis on reading and on grammar and vocabulary and neglect speaking skills. Besides these two standardized tests (TEM4, TEM8) for English majors, there are two other standardized tests, CET4 (College English test band 4) and CET6 (College English test band 6), designed for non-English majors. These two tests also focus on *reading*. Some English majors also take CET6, and many laypersons think CET6 is more difficult than TEM4 because of its band number. These standardized tests that focus on grammatical exercises barely make sense in terms of real life communication. They 'perpetuate grammar-oriented pedagogies without supporting the use of language for real purposes', as Mickan (2013:xiii) noted when talking about general national tests. Problems with the national tests are one of main reasons why there is a need to revise the language curriculum.

Business English has undergone many changes in the process of transformation into the modern discipline. 'Foreign trade English' was first established as a degree programme in China in 1951 at the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE). By 2009 only seven universities in China had been approved to teach Business English as an independent major, but since then the number has greatly increased. At the time of writing there are about 50 universities in China running such programmes.

During this period of transformation several problems have emerged. Most Chinese universities offering degrees in BE have failed to combine the teaching of English language and literature and the teaching of business in very meaningful ways, and have given English language learning a much larger share of the curriculum. Zhang (2007: 406) noted that Business English is taught in university English departments rather than in Business Schools, and most BE teachers only have a background in English language and literature, with no practical work experience in the area of international business. These teachers have little knowledge of how

English is used in the workplace, and thus might have difficulty contextualizing BE teaching in real business situations and integrating knowledge of intercultural business communication. Most BE textbooks used in China tend to be teacher-centred and regard learners as passive knowledge recipients (Ning & Dou 2011). According to my own observations, classroom materials tend to be out of date and are not based on naturally occurring authentic business discourse.

## **1.2 The UIBE syllabus (2009)**

The University of International Business and Economics (UIBE) in Beijing, the first Chinese university to introduce Business English as an independent discipline, drafted a set of guidelines in 2009 called ‘Teaching Requirements for Business English Majors at University level (Trial)’. These were described and reviewed by Chen and Wang (2009). The guidelines recommended a syllabus for Business English degree programmes in universities across China, and a version of this syllabus is due to be trialled in universities that have been approved by the Chinese Higher Education Department.

According to the UIBE document (2009), the training objectives of Business English major programmes are to produce multi-talented English graduates who have a solid foundation in English, broad international horizons, reasonable knowledge of international business and communication skills, and mastery of the basic theories of economics, management and law. These graduates should have received a good quality education in both humanities and intercultural communication, and should be able to work in the fields of business, economics and trade, management, finance, or foreign affairs. The competences for Business English major students are expected to encompass linguistic competence, strategic competence, discourse competence, pragmatic competence, cross-cultural competence and business know-how.

Business English programmes in tertiary education in China last four years. According to the UIBE guidelines, the training for Business English students should be delivered through four main modules divided into 15 sub-categories (See Table 1.1).

In terms of the training objectives and the type of modules, Business English degree programmes in China focus primarily on English language learning (see Table 1.1). Besides courses in general English skills, the BE program includes courses for specific business English skills (EBP) such as business English writing and business English speaking.

Specialist knowledge and skills	Modules	Sub-categories
	Language knowledge and skills	1. Phonetics, lexicology, grammar
		2. Listening, speaking, reading, writing skills
		3. Interpretation and translation skills
		4. Language communication skills
		5. Language learning strategies
	Business knowledge and skills	1. Economics
		2. Management
		3. Law (International Business Law)
		4. Business Skills
	Cross-cultural communication skills	1. Cross-cultural thinking ability
		2. Cross-cultural adaptability
		3. Cross-cultural communication ability
Humanities	1. Political and ideological literacy	
	2. Creative thinking	
	3. Chinese and foreign culture Literacy	

Table 1.1: Specialist knowledge and skills training

The total class time for major (specialized) subjects is recommended to be no less than 1800 hours (excluding basic/non-major compulsory subjects and basic/non-major elective subjects). Table 1.2 presents the credit distribution of the specialized major subjects. Twelve core specialized subjects are asterisked (\*) to denote essential compulsory subjects in Business English.

Type of subjects	Modules	Core specialized subjects	Percentage
Specialized subjects	Language knowledge and skills	Language knowledge: Introducing Linguistics*; Language skills: (Business English) Integrated course*; Listening and Speaking*; Reading*, Writing*; Translation*	50%-60%
	Business	Business Basics: Introduction of Economics*;	20%-30%

	Knowledge and skills	Introduction of Management*, Introduction of International Business Law; Other business skills courses	
	Cross-cultural communication skills	Cross-cultural communication: introduction of Cross-cultural Communication*; Business Communication Practice*, others	5%-10%
	Humanities	General Introduction of British and American Literature*; Others	5%-10%
	Internship		15% (not included in class hours)
	Thesis		
Total			100%

Table 1.2: UIBE recommendations for credit distribution of specialized major subjects

UIBE recommends that there should be three means of assessing Business English majors: final examinations of core courses, the national TEM4 normally taken in the second year, the national TEM8 taken in the fourth year, and a thesis in English written in the final year. TEM4 tests listening comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing. TEM8 tests listening comprehension, reading comprehension, grammar, knowledge of English literature and culture, translation and writing.

The four-year Business English programme at the Modern Economics and Management College (MEMC) follows UIBE guidelines (2009). MEMC is where I have worked and where a part of the data for this study was collected. It is located in the capital of Jiangxi province (Nanchang) and is a college of Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics (JUFE), which has been on the approved list to trial the business English programme for bachelor degrees since 2009. As a college of JUFE, MEMC draws on educational resources from JUFE and follows its teaching programmes. The difference between JUFE and MEMC is that the students' scores from Gaokao (the college entrance exam) are higher for entry to JUFE than they are for entry to MEMC.

The UIBE syllabus for Business English majors only specifies learning outcomes at three main stages: entry level, second year (level 4) and fourth year (level 8). The process of learning and teaching is not discussed in the UIBE guidelines, but it equates TEM4 and TEM8 with teaching aims at different levels, indicating that BE teaching in practice could be very test-oriented.



Chen and Wang (2009:5) describe the UIBE syllabus as ‘synthetic’ in that it divides the target language into discrete items, to be taught one at a time (Wilkins 1976, Long & Crookes 1992). In the current UIBE syllabus the learning objectives are predetermined as measurements of the ability to perform specified target tasks. My translation of the learning objectives for the module ‘language knowledge and skills’ from the UIBE syllabus are presented in Table 1.3.

Modules	Subjects	Requirements for entry level	Level 4	Level 8
Language knowledge and skills	Phonetics	Learners can proficiently use spelling rules and phonetic transcriptions to read new words; they can fluently and clearly read texts from English textbooks for grade 3 senior high school students with almost accurate pronunciation and intonation.	Learners have mastered the accurate pronunciation of words and sentences, have good command of rhythm in speaking; learners know the rules of phonetic variations, linking, plosives, assimilation and intonation for declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences.	Learners have correct pronunciation, natural intonation, and smooth speech.
	Grammar	Learners have mastered the morphological variations of lexis, countable and uncountable nouns, singular and plural forms; they have mastered the different forms and uses of pronouns, cardinal and ordinal numbers, frequently-used prepositions, conjunctions, the syntactic	Learners have mastered agreement between subject and predicate, predicative clauses, object clauses, attributive clauses and adverbial clauses, the use of particles, different tenses, the active and passive voice and word formation; learners can use subject clauses, appositive claus-	Learners have mastery of the strategies for making sentences and paragraphs cohesive, such as omission and substitution and can coherently convey ideas.

		functions of adjectives and adverbs, the formation of comparatives and superlatives, basic syntactic patterns and the general use of articles; learners understand the main forms indicating the tense and voice of verbs, the basic use of infinitives and participles and basic word formation.	es, inverted sentences and different conditional clauses; they have begun to master cohesion between sentences and paragraphs.	
	Vocabulary	Learners know no less than 2000 words including about 1200 frequently used words and a proportionate number of idioms, and collocations, and they can use these in written and spoken English	Learners know 5500-6500 words, including 1000 business-specific terms and terms used frequently in the classroom and in other contexts; learners can proficiently and correctly use 3000-4000 words and their basic collocations	Learners know 10000-12000 words including 3000 business-specific terms; learners can proficiently and correctly use 5000-6000 words and their basic collocations
	Listening	Besides understanding English lectures and questions in the classroom, learners can also understand at least 75% of Voice of America Special speed (American broadcast VOA); learners can understand the	Learners can understand 90% of the daily conversations of native English speakers, VOA normal speed broadcasts and BBC news programmes; learners can generally distinguish American English from British Eng-	Learners can not only understand all kinds of English conversations in the real world, but also reports, speeches and dialogues on different themes such as politics, economics, culture, education and technology from

		key points and relevant details of business conversation, for purposes such as telephoning, arranging appointments and product description.	lish; learners can also understand the key points and relevant details of business listening materials such as interviews, travel arrangements, conference organization and speech; learners can comprehend the speakers' attitude, emotion and real intention.	English radio stations and TV stations such as CNN, CCTV9 (the 24h English-language news channel of CCTV, China's largest TV network); learners can also understand business listening materials on complaint handlings, business reports, business speeches, business negotiations, company press conferences
	Speaking	Learners can engage in simple discussion and Q and A based on text content; they can retell paragraphs that have been read or heard; they can engage in simple conversations on topics in daily life; they can clearly and coherently narrate on familiar topics for at least 3 minutes	Learners can socialize with people in normal business occasions; they can use English to communicate with English native speakers, with correct intonation and pronunciation and error-free in grammar and pragmatics, in some business activities such as business receptions, product specifications, meetings and trade fairs.	Learners can use English to engage in conversations on important issues at home and abroad, and business specific topics concerning national economic policies, market analyses, price negotiations, business meetings, enterprise strategies, financial management, marketing, business negotiations and staff training. They will have relevant knowledge of business law and foreign trade procedures; they

				can express views and make speeches about business in a fluent, appropriate, thorough manner for no less than 10 minutes
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Table 1.3 Learning outcomes for the 'language knowledge and skills' module

The other major module that accounts for 20%-30% of the programme is 'business knowledge and skills'. The UIBE syllabus (2009) says that the module is intended to enable students to acquire knowledge of general and specialized business disciplines such as Economics, Management, Law and Business Skills.

In addition the module 'cross-cultural communication skills' is meant to help learners become acquainted with international professional etiquette and practice and cultural differences, in order to deal with different interpersonal relationships.

Wilkins (1976) explained that in a synthetic syllabus:

Different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up. . . . At any one time the learner is being exposed to a deliberately limited sample of language. (Wilkins 1976:2)

Several studies have criticised this approach. Long and Crookes (1992) describe synthetic syllabuses as being flawed since they wrongly assume that learners can immediately master target-like linguistic forms and their functions, presented to them separately and in a linear fashion. Long and Crookes (1992:28) claim that

'The synthetic syllabus relies on learners' assumed ability to learn a language in parts (e.g. structures and functions) which are independent of one another, and also to integrate, or synthesize, the pieces when the time comes to use them for communicative purposes'.

As Prahbu (1984:273) also noted, synthetic, structural and functional syllabuses all regard language acquisition as a planned process of input-assimilation, and seem to be based on the principle that what is learnt equals what is taught. Synthetic syllabuses take no account of learning as a gradual process that is not always in

one direction. However in reality time is needed to process what has been learnt and understand the precise meanings and their use (Long & Crooks 2009, Gass 1989, Kellerman 1984).

The learning objectives of the UIBE syllabus (2009) place great emphasis on both grammatical accuracy and native-like use. Learners are expected to be 'error-free' when speaking at level 4 and their listening ability at each level is measured in terms of their understanding of American English (Voice of America, CNN) and British English (BBC). The syllabus seems to be overly ambitious and unrealistic in this respect, and does not take into account the fact that learners in secondary schools in China have very little exposure to English outside the classroom, or to the fact that even native speaker communities are far from homogeneous.

As pointed out earlier, English teaching and learning in secondary schools is test-oriented and neglects communication skills in English. Even the university-level TEM4 and TEM8 tests lack a speaking component. It would appear more useful for language assessments, especially those for BE majors, to take account of social needs in the BELF environment. The UIBE syllabus seems to ignore the reality of the international business world, and the fact that BE graduates are more likely to communicate with non-native English speakers than with native speakers. Business communication in the workplace is dynamic, and requires knowledge of different communication strategies and communication styles consistent with the different situations, tasks, roles and cultural backgrounds of participants. The comprehension and production of native-like English might not in fact be an advantage in business environments where English is used as a lingua franca, and where many interlocutors do not have a high standard of English.

In terms of assessment, a standardized Business English test for Chinese universities has not yet been developed. TEM4 and TEM 8, the national standardized tests of general English skills, do not make reference to business contexts but are still used to assess Business English students. For this reason some general English textbooks for the module 'language knowledge and skills' are still in use for Business English teaching. It is important to help students pass these tests, as they are a major means of assessing students according to the UIBE guidelines (2009).

### 1.3 The BE programme in MEMC

The BE programme in MEMC teaches general English language skills and skills specific to Business English, and also includes courses in the Humanities (see Table 1.4). However, it does not follow the UIBE guidelines in that it does not include ‘cross-cultural communication skills’ as a separate module, because no teacher is available to teach this module in MEMC.

Specialist knowledge and skills	Modules	Sub-categories
	General English language knowledge and skills	1.phonetics, lexicology, grammar, linguistics
		2. listening, speaking, reading, writing skills for general purpose
		3. interpretation and translation skills
		4. English literature
		5.Rhetoric
		6. comparison between English and Chinese
	Business English knowledge and skills	1.international trade
		2.International marketing
		3. Business English Skills and knowledge (speaking, interpreting, writing, negotiating in business context)
	Humanities	1.political and ideological literacy
		2. creative thinking

Table 1.4 The modules of the BE programme at MEMC

The BE programme in MEMC follows the stipulations of the UIBE guidelines in that it mainly focuses on improving students’ general English language skills (i.e. reading, writing, speaking, and listening) which account for 60% of the programme,

while literature, linguistics (the theoretical study of language) and business subject courses from the module of 'business knowledge and skills' only account for a smaller share of the programme (5%-10%). Business English skills courses (EBP courses) such as business English reading, speaking and interpretation are also taught from the second year and account for about 10-15 % of the programme. The first two years of the programme are centred on four aspects of language training i.e. speaking; listening, writing and reading, and business subjects are only taught in the third and fourth years of the programme, through modules such as international marketing and international trade. Students usually spend half of the fourth year looking for internships and writing up their theses. Thus the time available for learning business-related subjects is greatly restricted.

According to the 'BE talent cultivation plan' in MEMC in 2011, the key subjects for the BE programme are 'basic English integrated skills' 'advanced English speaking', 'English listening and speaking', 'basic writing', 'English grammar', 'practical writing', 'business English speaking', 'business English interpretation', 'business English reading', 'English writing for international economics and trade contracts', 'American and British literature', 'linguistics', 'international business negotiation' and 'translation'.

'Basic English integrated skills' is regarded as a core course and is taught in the first and second year (six sessions per week). It is essentially an intensive reading course that emphasizes vocabulary learning and students' paraphrasing ability. The teachers usually spend plenty of time explaining vocabulary use and translating or paraphrasing difficult sentences. It is very TEM4-oriented and teachers always train the students' test taking ability, because TEM4 takes place in the first semester of the second academic year and the results of this national test also serve as a measurement of teaching quality.

'Business English reading' is taught in the first semester of the third academic year. The course is meant to improve students' extensive reading skills and business knowledge of topical global issues. For example, the textbook used in MEMC discusses topics such as 'roles of international organizations in the global economy'. The MEMC BE writing course includes 'basic writing' which is taught in first semester and 'practical writing' which is taught in the second semester of the second

academic year. 'Basic writing' generally teaches writing theory and stylistics while 'practical writing' is more practice-oriented and teaches students how to write notes, applications, invitations and emails. Students are taught rigidly that speech acts correspond with certain mood structures or certain prefabricated lexical units. The terms 'genre' and 'register' are not used in the book. The general structures of different communicative events are taught, but the move structures of different genres are not clearly specified. Differences in register, the ways in which the expression of face-threatening acts (FTAs) is affected by the degree of imposition and the power and distance between interlocutors (Brown and Levinson 1987), and pragmatic strategies to counter FTAs are not explicitly taught (See Appendix 9). The basic writing course briefly mentions that the tone of emails tends to be conversational and informal when communicating with colleagues and formal when communicating with a respected person or the head of the company, but the sample email presented in the textbook is very formal and the students are taught to write business emails in the same way as business letters. Differences between business emails and business letters are not sufficiently addressed. Grammatical accuracy is stressed through the course.

'English writing for International Economics and Trade contracts', taught in the second semester of the third year, focuses on formal legal language and explains how to write contracts in business contexts. However it would in fact be very rare for business English graduates to write business contracts; these graduates are usually engaged in international merchandising

Grammar is taught in the second semester of the first year and is mainly lecture-based. The teacher usually adopts a deductive approach, providing grammatical rules, theories and concepts (such as 'tense') first, and then asking the students to do relevant grammar exercises involving gap-fill or multiple-choice questions.

The Business English speaking course is taught in the second year and is more workplace-related than the general speaking course taught in the first year. It is concerned with the different communicative needs of daily work and it is meant to improve students' ability in English communication at work. The course book takes a functional approach and develops speaking skills in certain specific contexts, for example phone calls and meetings.



Business subjects such as ‘international trade’ and ‘international marketing’ are taught in Chinese by teachers from the Department of International Trade, because the BE teachers have no work experience in companies or out of school, and have a background in English linguistics and literature.

In my personal experience of being a business English instructor in MEMC, textbooks are used as the main teaching source and are relied on heavily in the process of teaching. They are highly-regarded because they are designed by experts in English language teaching, business English skills or business subjects, and because they are published by prestigious publishers. It is also easier and more convenient for teachers to use them than to design their own teaching materials. Teachers have great freedom to choose course books. Some teachers stick to certain textbooks for years out of convenience, and so the contents of the textbook become outdated in terms of information about business matters. This is especially the case in international trade where new terms are appearing all the time, and it is also the case in business writing where technology has greatly changed the mode of communication, and emailing is becoming more dominant than letter writing. Email writing taught in the ‘practical writing’ module seldom relates to writing in business contexts. There are therefore serious gaps between the BE taught at MEMC and English that is actually used in the workplace. This problem will be examined further and in depth in Chapter Four.

The BE programme in MEMC follows the teaching objectives suggested in the UIBE guidelines, with the same aim of producing multi-talented business graduates who have acquired both business knowledge and English language skills. The MEMC BE programme also has the same learning objectives and uses the same measurements for students’ language skills. The examinations for BE majors follow what has been stipulated in the UIBE guidelines: final examinations for core courses, the national TEM4, and a thesis in English written in the final year.

The majority of BE graduates find work in companies that are involved in foreign trade. Most of the people they communicate with in the workplace are non-native speakers from different parts of the world, and they communicate using ‘Business English as a Lingua Franca’ (BELF), a term that is now preferred to the more general ‘English as a Lingua Franca’(ELF) in the domain of international business.

BELF is not about conforming to the norms of native speakers. It is neutral because it does not belong to anyone and is shared by members of the global business community, who are referred to as BELF users and communicators rather than as non-native speakers or learners (Charles 2006, Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta 2005; Bhatia & Bremner 2012). In the environment of BELF, most communicators use non-native-like English to communicate, but draw heavily on their intercultural competence and transferable communicative skills to manage rapport in the course of negotiations.

Neither the UIBE syllabus nor the MEMC BE programme have been informed by language needs analyses (LNA) or investigations of the way business discourse works in reality. The design of both of these programmes was based on the intuition and experience of applied linguists in the area of BE teaching.

In this study my focus will be on Chinese speakers' use of English in BELF contexts, identifying patterns of use in terms of the enactment of social practices that can be systematically described at more than one level. The findings might be relevant to the design of BE courses throughout Mainland China, and might provide a useful supplement to the UIBE guidelines. Hence, the end goal of this study is to make a contribution to the understanding of how BELF is used by Chinese participants in real business contexts in China, and to use the results to assist development of specific parts of the BE curriculum.

When I started my research I already knew that the MEMC BE programme taught students how to write formal business letters and business emails, and how to produce grammatically accurate (or 'native-like') English, whereas the programme did not pay much attention to pragmatics or intercultural communication, or refer to authentic, up-to-date examples of business communication. Therefore it seemed reasonable to predict that the students graduating from this course would be quite accurate and formal in their writing, but would not have acquired the pragmatic competence or intercultural competence needed to communicate by email in BELF. On the basis of this prediction I expected to be able to conclude after my investigations that BE courses in China ought to focus less on native-like 'correct' language use, and more on the strategies needed to communicate on business topics in a BELF environment.

The study is structured in the following way:

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical literature and empirical studies relating to language needs analysis and its significance in curriculum design for Business English (BE). It also reviews some studies of different genres commonly used in intercultural business settings. Prior descriptions of ELF in international business settings and the implications for BE are also discussed. The review identifies the need to discover more about the perceptions of different groups of Chinese BE stakeholders and how Chinese people undertake cross-cultural business communication using English in the international workplace. The research questions are introduced in the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in this study, and the research design. Conceptual frameworks are generated to guide the proposed needs analysis.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings from data analysis. Detailed qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data are presented.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the thesis, which discusses its potential contribution to BE teaching in the BELF environment, and some potential directions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### Introduction

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section will discuss the theoretical literature and empirical studies relating to language needs analysis and its significance in curriculum design for Business English (BE). The second section will be concerned with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and intercultural communication via the medium of English in global business communities (BELF), relating to the influence of different cultures in business communication and the significance of effective business English communication and 'rapport management' in international business communication. This section considers how people from different cultural backgrounds negotiate or communicate differently in this global business community and what strategies interlocutors from different cultures adopt to overcome communicative difficulties and ensure effective communication. Some studies of different genres commonly used in intercultural business settings are also reviewed in this section, and the implications of BELF for BE are discussed. The third section will introduce the research questions for this study.

### 2.1 Language needs analysis and syllabus design

#### 2.1.1 Language needs analysis

The term needs analysis refers to procedures used to collect information about learners' needs. According to Richards (2001:15), an analysis of learners' needs is indispensable to a good education program. Language Needs analysis (LNA) has always been a primary concern in ESP course design. As Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:122) assert, 'needs analysis is the cornerstone of ESP and leads to a very focused course'. Different scholars have described different types of needs analysis, reflecting different perspectives on the ESP context, for example Bowers (1980), Chambers (1980), McDonough (1984), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), West (1994), and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:124-125) provide a list of terms concerning 'needs' and 'needs analysis'. 'Objective needs', 'product-oriented needs', 'end-products' and 'target situation analysis' (TSA) are concerned with professional in-

formation about the tasks and activities for which learners use English. On the other hand, 'learning situation analysis' considers the subjective, felt needs, wants or process-oriented needs perceived by insiders or the learners themselves. These can be interpreted as the 'affective factors' influencing the outcome of learning, such as learner's expectations and reasons for attending the course. 'Present situation analysis' (PSA), relating to the learners' current skills and language use, allows us to deduce their 'lacks' by estimating their strengths and weaknesses in language, skills and learning experiences. Lastly, 'means analysis' leads to the establishment of a workable course design by looking at the environment where the course will operate. The classroom culture and the management infrastructure are two key factors that need to be taken into account (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998:124-125, Holliday and Cooke 1982, Holliday 1984). Nation and Macalister (2010:25) divide needs into lacks (present knowledge), necessities (required knowledge) and wants (subjective needs). In essence, I think the notion of needs can be categorized into narrow needs and general needs that corresponds to the narrow-angle perspective and wide-angle perspective of language needs (Hyland 2002:387). Narrow needs require specific skills training, for example writing business emails. General needs are concerned with the 'common core' of language that all ESP learners will need regardless of their specialism.

Cowling (2007:428) also noted that the focus of needs analysis is now shifting away from 'outsiders' views to the views of 'insiders' such as company employees in the target language situation.

ESP 'came of age', as claimed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) after the development of the CNP 'Communicative Needs Processor' by Munby (1978), a well-known approach to TSA. The CNP framework (Munby 1978) encompassed eight variables of the target situation that affect the communication needs of the foreign language participant. These are dynamically related to each other. There are two parameters. The first (a priori) includes 'purposive domain, setting, interaction, and instrumentality'; the second (a posteriori) subsumes 'dialect, target level, communicative event and communicative key'. Munby (1978: 32) claimed that 'one set of constraints (a posteriori) depend upon input from another set of constraints (a priori) before they can become operational.' The Methodology chapter

will contain a more detailed examination of CNP. In the 1980s, 'Deficiency analysis' was used to address learners' present needs/ wants, an aspect which had been neglected in Munby's CNP (McDonough 1984, Coleman 1988). 'Means analysis' takes account of another aspect which Munby's CNP failed to address: the practicalities and constraints of the learning situation (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, McDonough 1984, Holliday 1984). Holliday (1984) argued that 'classroom culture' research is an essential part of Means Analysis and is a significant factor for ESP syllabus design. In Holliday's opinion (1984:34) 'significant learner needs derive from how they feel about things in the learning situation' and 'these needs have a lot to do with the way in which they behave in the classroom with their expectations about English, teachers, courses etc.'

The 'language linguistic audit' was a term coined by Pilbeam (1979:4) and was defined as 'a linguistic study whose main objective resides in identifying those strong and weak points of a company organisation, in terms of the communication process carried out in a foreign language'. 'Language audits' are normally larger-scale survey studies conducted by or for a company, an organization or even a country, providing data about current language needs in the sector, for instance what language is to be learnt, for what purposes, by how many people, to what level, in what type of situation, etc. According to Dudley- Evans and St John (1998) and Nelson (2000), the language audit suggests that needs analysis should account for both a target profile of the language skills needed to carry out communicative activities in the workplace (target situation analysis) and a profile of the personal ability and current skills of the participant (present situation analysis). Language audits enable us to decide what should be done to bridge the gap between present performance and target performance (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998:58, West 1994:12). West (1994:5) noted that a language audit is different from a needs analysis in scale. A language audit is an organisation-wide large-scale policy document whereas a needs analysis focuses on a specific learning group or even individuals.

### 2.1.2 Interrelations between language needs analysis and ESP syllabus design

West (1994:12) claimed that the scope of needs analysis has become broader after the 1970s and 1980s to include the whole educational process. Needs analysis began to be used to determine objectives, contents and curricula in order to develop and test new materials and improve the programme, and for teacher education and re-education. In the context of developing a programme, the key words here are 'objectives', 'contents' and 'curricula'. Nation and Macalister (2010:25) noted that 'the outcomes of needs analysis must be useful for curriculum design'.

Although there is sometimes confusion over the terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum' (Nunan 1988:3), syllabus design is generally regarded as one of the constituents of curriculum design. In the UK, at least, 'curriculum' is a more general concept and entails planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of education programs, whereas 'syllabus' is a narrower term and is mainly concerned with selecting and grading content (Nunan 1988:8). It is most often the narrower concept of 'syllabus', augmented by 'methodology' that comes to mind when writers in the field of ELT refer to 'course design'.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) claimed that 'ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning', and Munby (1978:2) defined ESP courses as 'those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of communication needs of the learner'. McDonough (1984:29) also noted that analysing the language needs of the learner is the basis for ESP course development.

English for Business Purposes or Business English (EBP/BE) is one of the major areas in ESP. Language needs analysis is fundamental to BE course design because of the varied needs of BE language and skills which are difficult to predict (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998:57). EBP/BE courses also need to be assessed using specific EBP/BE assessment methods.

McDonough (1984:111) argued that test instruments need to be devised based on target situation analysis and the language needs of learners. It is sensible to match testing procedures to courses and take a 'coherent approach' to evaluation, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 144) maintain. Figure 2.1 illustrates the cyclical relationships between needs, courses and tests (Carroll, 1980:9).

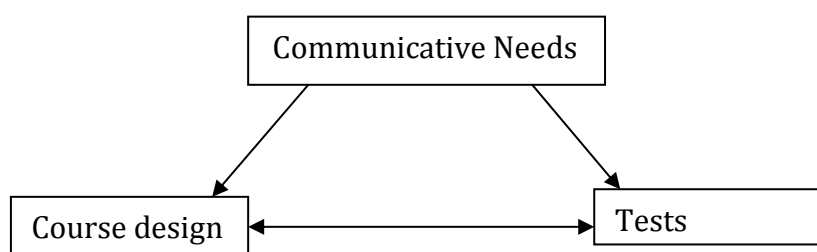


Figure 2.1: Relations between needs, course design and tests

Jones (1991) proposed an integrated model for ESP syllabus design in an attempt to translate language needs data more effectively into a syllabus design proposal. A questionnaire containing 70 questions about the frequency of use of different language skills and functions was chosen as the information gathering technique. Altogether 400 responses were received from FRANCE TELECOM employees who had already worked abroad for the company. Each language variable was placed in a 4-response matrix (OFTEN, SOMETIMES, RARELY and NEVER). Communication activities were then developed to practise the language functions according to their linguistic realizations in discourse.

Jones (1991: 164) claimed that topic-based courses offered the best prospect for maintaining the interest of participants when specificity of content had to be reduced. Macro-topics could be selected that corresponded to the speech events deduced from the component analysis, and sub-topics could then be identified to contextualize the language functions within the speech event, since it is difficult to have a one-to-one match of a topic and a speech event (Jones 1991:165). A variety of teaching activities (problem-solving tasks) could be introduced to maintain the interest of learners in case the topic itself did not engage their interest (Jones 1991:164-5).

Jones's (1991) method of ESP syllabus design informed by needs analysis incorporated both topic based and task-based approaches to syllabus design in an attempt to relate needs analysis to teaching. However the questionnaire was the only technique used in collecting Jones's data, and although he thought that it was the only possible instrument to obtain such a large number of profile-types of people in the target situation (Jones 1991:155), he also thought that his method had drawbacks such as the risk of non-response and the possibility that questions would not be completely understood. Interviews might have helped eliminate any ambiguity in



the questions and the respondents' answers to them, and it might therefore have been better to combine both a questionnaire survey and interview instruments to gain more information from participants.

### 2.1.3 Language needs analysis (LNA) in the workplace

In this section I will review studies about language needs analyses conducted in the business 'discourse community'. Swales (1990:29) proposed six necessary defining criteria for discourse communities: common goals, participatory mechanisms, information exchange, community-specific genres, a highly specialized terminology and a high general level of expertise. Membership of a discourse community is not restricted by geographical, ethnical and social differences, but the concept of a 'discourse community' seems problematic when looking at business discourse, because in the business world customers and staff do not always share the same 'goals' or the same expertise.

Within the global business discourse community, the results of needs analysis might differ from context to context. Chew (2005) claimed that the frequency with which a communicative task is undertaken in English depends on whether the organisation is international or local, and also depends on the participants' job and position in the workplace. While some English language needs will be shared, individual differences that are specific to certain contexts also need to be acknowledged.

In this section I will group studies based on the use or the role of English in three circles (the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle (Kachru 1985)) where the studies were conducted. The first group (Crossling and Ward 2002; Maes and Weldy 2007). comprises studies conducted in the Inner Circle countries – 'norm providing' (Kachru 1985) - where English is the native language (ENL) such as Australia and America. The second group (Li & Mead 2002; Chew 2005) comprises studies conducted in the 'norm developing' Outer Circle (Kachru 1985) where English is a second language (ESL) due to historical reasons, for example Hong Kong. The third type comprises studies conducted in the Expanding Circle countries- 'norm dependent' (Kachru 1985) - where English is a foreign language (EFL), such as Spain (Dominguez and Rokowski 2010), the Middle East (Holliday

1995), Brazil (Barbara et al. 1996), Finland (Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2008), and Japan (Cowling 2007; Kubota 2013). The studies are grouped in this way to find out whether the role of English would influence English language needs in different circles in the course of BELF communication. Differences between the needs of graduates working in different circle countries are to a certain extent expected because of the different status of English in these places.

All studies reviewed in this section are concerned with target situation analysis. They were motivated by the problem that information about the language skills learners would need at work was not sufficiently available for ESP teachers. The studies did not, however, undertake a 'present situation analysis' of current students in the university. Thus the discrepancy between the target situation (workplace) and present situation (university) was not sufficiently explored. Some studies partially examined employers' perceptions of language needs, for example, Crossling and Ward (2002), Maes and Wendy (2007), Chew (2005), while others partially looked at employees' perspectives (Dominguez and Rokowski (2010). A more comprehensive overview of language needs in the workplace would have to take both employers' and employees' perceptions into account, however.

#### *2.1.3.1 Studies in the Inner-Circle*

Crossling and Ward (2002) conducted a survey of employers to investigate the oral communication needs of business graduates (mainly from East and Southeast Asia) who had studied at Monash University in Australia. Twenty-four out of 96 relevant companies completed the survey. Sixteen of these had more than 200 employees and five were medium sized with 50-200 employees. Of these 24 companies, eight were chartered accounting companies, three banking or insurance companies, five in the manufacturing industry, and seven in service, retail and government.

Oral communication was confirmed to be used very frequently by business graduate employees. Respondents thought that oral communication skills were the most vital components of the success of graduates in the workplace and they also expressed their concerns about graduate employees' lack of good oral communication skills for tasks such as telephoning and communicating with clients.

The aspects selected for the investigation of the impact or importance of oral communication skills were recruitment, job success and promotion. Oral communication was regarded as very important for promotion and for job success by 95% of employers, and for recruitment by 87%.

The respondents were also asked to rate the importance of participation of graduate employees in meetings and the frequency of particular forms of communication. The majority of employer respondents regarded participating in meetings as important for job success. The most frequent forms of oral communication in meetings were participation in discussion (79%), followed by oral presentations (36%). Both 'persuading in meetings' and 'chairing and leading discussions were rated by 31% of participants as the third most frequent form of communication. These categories provided by the authors were not always clear however, because persuading is possible in both forms of meeting, that is, oral presentation and participation in discussion.

Crossling and Ward (2002) concluded that strong oral communication skills were important for success in the workplace. They recommended that experience and instruction in a range of oral communication settings were required involving communication in a range of different cultural, gender, and status groups. They believed critical thinking was important in order to choose a communication style appropriate to a particular situation.

The study suggested that oral communication in the workplace tends to be informal and mostly involves colleagues of similar status. Formal presentations were emphasized on the business course at Monash University, but were not frequently used by the business graduates. The most frequently used forms of oral communication were those that contributed to building rapport and consolidating good relations, such as 'building relations' during team work and 'participating in discussion' in meetings.

The questionnaire survey is an effective method of collating a large amount of data, which is relatively easy to analyse. However, mixing a quantitative questionnaire survey with qualitative interviews can help researchers to gain more insightful knowledge (i.e. their perception) of the use of oral communication among business graduate employees at work. Crossling and Ward's study simply identified the

need for knowledge of certain types of discourse, but did not further identify the characteristics of the discourse types, although this is important for further ESP course design.

Maes and Weldy (2007) conducted two studies in 1995 because, like Crossley and Ian, they perceived a gap between what was taught in business schools and what was actually required in the workplace. Their study analysed and assessed the language needs of business graduates.

In Study One, interviews were carried out with 15 managers in the Greater Gulf Coast area (USA) to discover the competences that they thought most important in employing college graduates for entry-level positions in small to medium sized companies. The seven competencies identified by the managers were oral and written communication, computer knowledge, problem solving, human relations, leadership, and delegation.

Revised questionnaires were then sent out to 500 company managers. Oral communication had the highest weighted score and was rated as one of the top five competencies by 231 respondents and as the number one competency by 65 respondents.

The second questionnaire study was to identify the important oral communication skills entry-level college graduates would need, and how frequently entry-level graduates used each skill. Questionnaires were administered to 150 randomly selected respondents from Study One. Oral communication skills, specifically in the context of communicating with the public, meetings, presentations, handling customer complaints and conflict resolution skills, were considered particularly important. Maes and Weldy (2007:77) pointed out that high ratings for communicating with the public, handling customer complaints and conflict resolution skills indicated that customer satisfaction and cooperative suppliers are emphasized in business today. This again indicates the importance of rapport management in the business world. Communicating with the public was also stressed in Crossling and Ward (2002)'s study, but the need to do this in English is perhaps specific to the Inner Circle.

Maes and Weldy (2007:78) found a gap between the skills provided by current business curricula and those perceived by the employer respondents. They

claimed few courses in business schools in the Inner Circle require students to conduct meetings or resolve conflicts in a classroom setting, while many business courses require formal classroom presentations. This accords with the findings from Crossling and Ward (2002). Maes and Weldy (2007) recommended integrating meeting skills and conflict resolution skills into classroom and group projects. This study suggests that competency in oral communication was more important than written communication for entry-level business school graduates in the Greater Gulf Coast area. However the figures are not sufficient to interpret the data conclusively. In terms of questionnaire design, a few open-ended questions could have been included, to enable respondents to qualify and explain their responses without being constrained by pre-set responses from the researcher. Further interviews with the managers would have been useful to find out their opinions regarding the importance of oral communication. Face-to-face interviews can also enable respondents to clarify and enlarge on their answers to questionnaire questions.

Both Crossling and Ward (2002) and Maes and Weldy (2007), studies conducted in the context of ENL countries, indicate the importance of oral communication skills for business graduates in their contexts. The findings may also apply in a global business context, but although Crossling and Ward (2002:56) claimed that 'all students seeking professional careers in business will require good oral communication skills if they are to be successful' their study only probed English language needs in the workplace in the Inner Circle. English language needs in the Expanding Circle, for example China, might be somewhat different.

The origins of customers for the businesses investigated by Crossling and Ward (2002) and Maes and Weldy (2007) were not stated explicitly, although this might have affected the language expectations reported by the employers.

Both Crossling and Ward (2002) and Maes and Weldy (2007) identified the frequent use of certain types of speech event, but they failed to examine the linguistic and discursive characteristics of business communications.

#### *2.3.1.2 Studies in the Outer-Circle*

The following two studies were conducted in the context of ESL, in Hong Kong.

Li and Mead (2000) carried out a multi-faceted case study of the English language needs of graduate merchandisers from two institutions in Hong Kong (PolyU and KTTI). The graduates had at least a year's work experience as merchandisers in the textile and clothing industry. The rationale for conducting this research was the need of the designers and teachers of ESP courses to gain familiarity with the communication needs of personnel in the real workplace and orient themselves to the working environment. This would enable them to update existing programmes to include guidance and practice in the use of channels of communication, especially in view of changes in the way participants were sending and receiving messages in the changing demands of the global market (Li and Mead 2000:352).

The design of this study follows that of Hutchinson and Waters (1987), using all the standard data collection methods listed by Hutchinson and Waters, including questionnaires, which were sent to 300 PolyU graduates and to 60 KTTI graduates, follow-up telephone interviews with 18 KTTI graduates, analysis of authentic workplace texts and visits to the workplace. The researchers did mention job shadowing as an additional data collection method, involving the researcher being attached to a worker for an extended period of time to observe their daily business activities. However this proved to be impossible given the available resources; half-day company visits were substituted. The executive director, the managing director and one merchandiser provided more information about the work of the company (Li & Mead 2000:363).

An extensive need for English was identified, even though the customers themselves were from non-English speaking countries. Business term abbreviations, business jargon, grammatical accuracy, connectives and sentence completion were deemed to be particularly worthy of attention (Li & Mead 2000:363), and extensive use of English was reported in business fax messages. English language skills were also needed for presentations, in contrast to the findings of Crossling and Ward (2002) and Maes and Weldy (2007) that formal presentations were not frequently used by business graduates at work. It is not surprising that the findings from one needs study do not match those of another. Differences in results might reflect differences in the types of needs required in L1 and L2 contexts and/or differences between types of industry.

This study collected rich data, which enabled the course designers, materials writers and ESP teachers to get a good idea of the language needs of merchandisers working in the textile and clothing industry who had graduated from the two selected institutes. However, the authors might be overgeneralizing when they conclude that 'it is believed that merchandising in many other industries such as electronics, toys and watches would have very similar needs ...' (Li and Mead 2000 :364). The findings from one specific case are not necessarily applicable to other cases around the world, as each has its own special features and variables. According to Swales' concept of discourse community (1990), different sectors have their own distinct discourse communities and conventionalized practices.

Chew (2005) examined how new entrants think the English language is used in the banking sector in Hong Kong. Chew's study was undertaken against the backdrop of the Hong Kong government's campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of workplace English. The aim of this study was to find out some of the communicative tasks that new graduate employees in various departments of four banks in Hong Kong were required to perform in their daily work settings. This study was part of Chew's doctoral thesis, which aimed to identify the extent to which the English language skills taught at university are those required in a specific type of workplace.

Request letters to participate in the study were sent to 20 banks in Hong Kong. One hour one-to-one interviews were conducted with 16 new bank entrants from the four banks. They were required to complete a questionnaire which gave details of their years of work experience, the nature of their jobs, their self-rated level of English, the communicative tasks they performed in English and in Chinese, any sources of difficulty, their training interests and the duration of English language training they required.

All written communicative tasks were found to be carried out in English while most oral communicative tasks were carried out in Cantonese, which is spoken by the majority of people in Hong Kong. They translated from Chinese to English when converting information gathered from talking to clients, the media and other professionals in the industry written in the form of memos, minutes of meetings, reports, rules and regulations for bank customers, opinions and complaint letters

from customers. For instance, two of the informants worked as corporate communications officers who needed to provide English reports for a non-Chinese boss. The participants were more interested in receiving speaking skills training than writing skills training. They were interested in learning presentation skills, oral English for daily use and social interaction, negotiation skills and business conversations. Three reasons for participants' stronger interest in speaking skills were summarized by Chew (2005: 432). Oral English training was considered inadequate in schools and universities, there were limited opportunities and a limited need to speak in English with their colleagues at work so participants wanted to seize this rare opportunity to practice speaking, and they may have expected more immediate results from speaking training than from writing training. However the participants did also want to receive training in writing reports, business letters, minutes and bank documents.

Chew (2005:434) summarized this study as follows. First, a clear divide was found between spoken and written discourse in the banks in Hong Kong. Most spoken discourse was in Cantonese, and most written discourse was in English. Second, translation skills were needed to enable communication in the two languages, and were deemed important for working in such places. Third, the author predicted that this study to some extent might influence the Hong Kong government's efforts to improve the English standards of Hong Kong workers, because there seemed to be a great need for bank employees who were fluent in both Cantonese and English. Chew's findings indicated that learners' wants and perceived needs do not necessarily align with the frequency with which the skill is required in the workplace. Employees may be very good at the skills they use frequently, and want training in the skills they do not often need. Nevertheless certain methodological weaknesses can be identified. For example, it is unclear whether the interview and questionnaire were administered at the same time. An initial questionnaire can help researchers identify relevant issues to be followed up in subsequent interviews, but if interviews are undertaken before a questionnaire is administered, the information gained can help to refine the questionnaire items. I also think the concept of 'new entrant' should be clarified, and the reason for choosing new entrants as participants should be explained. More in-depth study could have been undertaken



concerning the difficulties that participants encountered in their work, to clarify whether problems were due to lack of general English language knowledge, or to lack of ESP knowledge. It is possible that certain communicative strategies might play an important role in Hong Kong bank communications.

Both studies conducted in Hong Kong contribute to our understanding of the discourse types used in different industry sectors. Li and Mead's study even attempted to analyse authentic texts and found some characteristics of business fax writing. However, the importance of fax has now faded and emails have replaced faxes as the primary means of business correspondence.

#### *2.1.3.3 Studies in the Expanding- Circle*

The following studies were conducted in Expanding Circle countries (Kachru 1985) where English is primarily a school subject and is not used much for daily communication. Some similarities in terms of the need for English exist among these countries, but differences can also be found because of historical, geographical and educational differences. For example English language needs in Spain would be a bit different from those in China, because Spain is in Europe and more learners are exposed to English at an earlier stage.

Dominguez and Rokowski (2010) carried out a case study in a multinational company in Spain based on the concept of the 'language audit' (Pilbeam 1974), in order to identify differences between the English language taught in university and that used in workplace. It is a large large-scale survey study.

Dominguez and Rokowski (2010) analysed the weak points and linguistic problems that needed to be solved, either in the long run or on a short-term basis. A questionnaire containing ten questions about the use of English relating to the traditional four skills was sent to workers engaging in multinational companies in Spain who had learnt English for academic purposes in universities. Three hundred questionnaires were returned and sampled for analysis. The majority of those polled thought English deserved more attention in universities, and 88% felt that the English they learnt at university had not proved very useful for their work. Only 17% thought they had a high level of English, although 70% thought speaking in

English was very important and 62% said they frequently spoke in English while they were working.

Dominguez and Rokowski (2010) concluded that participants had not been prepared to apply their knowledge of English to a workplace context, though they were qualified for work in terms of their knowledge of disciplines after graduation. They proposed including inter-cultural communication in university-level English courses, arguing that cross-cultural differences should be accounted for, because cross-cultural variables affect customer and employee relationships in international communication.

Dominguez and Rokowski's study has a number of weaknesses. It only probed employee's perceptions and did not take into account employer's perceptions and expectations. It was intended to discover differences between the English language taught in university and that used in workplace, and respondents were expected to respond to the questionnaire in the light of their own work experience. However the longer the respondents had worked, the more they were likely to have forgotten how they learnt English at university, and the more likely they would be to have lost their initial explicit awareness of the communicative requirements of the workplace. This is probably the reason why Chew (2005) and Li and Mead (2000) chose new entrants as participants for their studies.

Holliday (1995) adopted what he claimed to be an ethnographic approach to language needs analysis for an oil company in the Middle East. The analysis aimed to identify the language needs of staff within the institution and to use these findings to recommend a curriculum framework and implementation phases for language training courses. Holliday (1995:117) justifies the employment of an ethnographic approach in the investigation, as he believes that it enabled him to see the whole picture, including the institutional cultural influences on individuals' needs, and the resources available for use, and thus gain deeper understanding of how the participants perceived their institutional English language needs.

Holliday (1995) adopted a 'go with the flow' approach with an open mind to see what ideas would be generated by the reality of the situation. His data sources were triangulated. A sample of supervisors and a sample of employees were interviewed when Holliday first arrived at the company. In addition, Holliday went to

the work places and looked at examples of writing done by national staff and examples which the company felt needed to be done by national staff. His ten-day limited stay could only enable him to carry out a very quick surface survey.

Holliday (1995:116) suggests that 'needs analysis and curriculum design' and 'means for curriculum implementation' influence each other, while they are all governed by institutional context i.e. resources and stakeholders. Holliday's mode of investigation was influenced by the institutional context; which to some extent determined the significance of the other three aspects. Holliday (1995: 116) agreed with Richardson (1988) and Swales (1980) in terms of the relationship between contextual factors and curriculum design, claiming that 'contextual factors, from institutional to methodological, should be seen as factors in curriculum design, not as constraints on a purer curriculum based on language needs alone'. Holliday argued that it is meaningless to conduct language needs analysis with staff if there are insufficient resources to train them afterwards or if the stakeholders or interest groups are unwilling to release the resources to train them. His definition of 'stakeholders' is given in great detail:

The stakeholders were not therefore just the people who were going to get the training, nor just the company management ... but also those, both within and outside the company, who had a stake in the way in which the training would be implemented. (Holliday 1995:116-7)

The stakeholders involved in Holliday's study were the national staff about to undergo training, the British Council, the local training establishments that were likely to undertake the training, and the company management (Holliday 1995:116). Holliday argued that the appropriacy of the resources, along with the interests represented by different establishments concerning relevant staff training, constitute the micropolitics of situations, which is an area often overlooked in curriculum design.

Language needs across departments were found to have much in common especially in engineering, the production sector and finance and administration. For example, staff needed basic 'general English' to communicate orally using a wide range of everyday colloquial language, but they also needed specific varieties of English, technical terms and expressions and the ability to communicate precisely

in writing, following technical and professional conventions. The staff did not care about grammatical accuracy (Holliday 1995:121).

Holliday (1995:125) concluded that factors such as the culture of the organisation, representing 'micropolitics', had to be considered when designing the curriculum. 'Language needs cannot be separated from the social context in which they play a role' (Holliday 1995:126).

While the emphasis on understanding context is admirable, Holliday's 10-day period of study may not be sufficient for the study to qualify as ethnographic. One of the main features of ethnographic study is prolonged engagement in the natural setting and the researcher's immersion in that place (Dornyei 2007:131)

Cowling (2007) conducted a case study of the needs of ESP learners working with a leading Japanese company, MHI, in order to design an intensive training course focusing on the English used in business situations. His study attaches importance to insiders' views such as company employees in the target language situation (Cowling 2007:428). This indicates that learners' subjective felt needs and wants are the focus of increasing attention. However, learners might expect to achieve excellence in every skill, while the limited time available for teaching and learning requires specific skills to be prioritized. Learners' felt needs should be compared with what is required in the workplace. Chew (2005) also noted that the skills the participants wanted to learn were not the ones they would use most frequently in the workplace.

This case study also adopted a multiple sources/methods approach to triangulate findings to ensure greater credibility and increase the quality of the data. The methods included unstructured, open-ended interviews with the clients, semi-structured interviews with a target group of teachers, open-ended questionnaires with the target group of students and open-ended structured questionnaires for students to complete with senior employees.

Cowling (2007:435) concluded that consideration should be given to time constraints, cultural differences, students' experience in the target language and the use of different informants besides the target students, such as senior employees, to generate more knowledge. The questionnaires that students completed with the support of senior employees proved a particularly effective way of analysing lan-

guage needs, because those already working in the target situation, referred to by Cowling as 'domain experts', could provide useful insights into workplace genres. This whole study was carefully administered and planned considering all the variables such as cultural aspects, the possibility of a conflict between students' needs and the institution's perceived expectations; the students' experience in the target language and the use of senior personnel to provide feedback.

A specific criticism is that this study focused only on the perceived intuitive needs of the subjects involved, and did not consider the spoken or written texts produced by informants who already worked in the company, something that was included in the studies by Li and Mead (2000) and Holliday (1995). Perception and production are equally important in providing information about how the English language is used in the workplace. The perceived needs of informants may perhaps be at odds with the actual needs of language users in the real context, because 'felt needs' deriving from both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are not necessarily exactly the same as the needs revealed by analysing the language used in the workplace.

Kubota (2013) used interviews to investigate the language use of Japanese expatriates and local Chinese office workers in three subsidiaries of six major Japanese manufacturing companies in China. She also examined the views of 'insiders' (Cowling 2007): managers and employees. Kubota's interviewees thought the 'ability to communicate' was associated with cultural knowledge, and the willingness to try to communicate, even with limited linguistic resources. They believed this to be the main skill required of expatriates working in China. The ability to communicate entailed the ability to convey meaning in a direct, simple, clear and yet polite manner but did not necessarily entail grammatical accuracy. Strategic competence was considered important to compensate for limited linguistic resources. In this respect Kubota's findings are similar to those of Holliday (1995); the staff in Holliday's study did not care about grammatical accuracy, although they were required to communicate precise information in writing.

Kubota's study findings indicate that the importance of pragmatic competence might override linguistic considerations. However, this study did not manage to examine texts produced by the stakeholders, which might have provided further evidence to support this conclusion.

Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008) carried out a study of the language needs of university graduates in the workplace in Finland, as perceived by the 'insiders' (Cowling 2007): the graduates' employers. Their approach concentrated on a 'common core' of language skills required in the workplace. The study reports on the findings from interviews with 19 staff members involved in recruitment or personnel management for 15 representative Finnish employers. The interviews covered broad themes concerning language skills and recruitment, language use at work and future needs. Previously, a structured questionnaire had been sent to graduates from this university in order to obtain information about the employees' actual use of languages at work and the frequency and type of use graduates made of different languages, five years after graduation.

The findings of this study indicated that language skills, and particularly English language skills, were important in professions, and were regarded as a basic requirement for recruitment in the Finnish plurilingual workplace. Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008:498) also referred to an important cross-cultural dimension: 'knowing how to act in a way untypical of one's own culture was reported as essential in professional contexts'. The need to master knowledge of cross-cultural differences was also concluded from Cowling (2007) and Kubota (2013).

Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008:499) concluded that close cooperation with employers was needed in order to create customized language courses for the future workplace, and recommended a shift of focus from the academic needs of students to workplace language needs.

Barbara et al. (1996) administered a questionnaire survey in the Brazilian business context, primarily to identify the extent to which English and Portuguese were used in Brazilian business settings and the specific communicative tasks undertaken by business organizations.

The one-page questionnaire was designed in Portuguese. It was delivered by post to organizations in the Sao Paulo area and also outside the Sao Paulo area, to see if any significant differences would be found. Altogether 214 complete questionnaires were returned. The return rate of 16.5% was relatively low.

The questionnaire items included both closed questions and open questions. The closed questions were about the size of the organization, the language used, the

medium of delivery and the types of document produced (reports, projects, memos, prospectuses, proposals, meetings and presentations). All the closed questions were multiple-choice for ease of numerical coding. The open questions included 'other' items - other classes of documents beyond what had already been nominated by the researchers and the 'type or purpose' and 'frequency' of each document type listed in the questionnaire.

Barbara et al (1996:69) drew four conclusions from their questionnaire-based survey. First, besides the universal use of Portuguese in Brazilian organisations, the wide use of English to conduct business either internally or externally confirmed the status of English as the language of international communication. Second, generally speaking, reports, meetings and memos were the most widely used. Thirdly, the frequency of use of English was also affected by the organization type (industrial or non-industrial) and size. Fourthly, names used for document types clearly differed, not only between researchers and respondents, but also from organisation to organisation. The findings did not corroborate Barbara et al's previous assumption that they would be dealing with the same set of document types and a single discourse community which 'would not only use them for the same purposes but would also use the same names to refer to them' (1996: 58). Barbara et al. admitted that they did not have a good rationale for their choice of the seven document types to list in the questionnaire; as their respondents were from different sectors of business, it might be argued that they belonged to different discourse communities and would therefore be expected to produce different genres, rather than just these seven types. They also concluded that there are more document sub-types than is commonly believed, as a consequence of developments within discourse communities. This fits in with Swales' idea (1990) that novice players in a discourse community often assume new roles and bring in new discursive practices, while at the same time continuing to conform to some of the conventions of the community.

The studies discussed above all focused on language needs analysis in the workplace to inform the design of business English (BE) courses. Only Cowling (2007) and Chew (2005) referred to the needs and lacks perceived by English language learners and explored the gap between the language needed in the workplace and

the language taught in university English courses. However, perceived needs and lacks may differ from actual needs and lacks. Needs analysis always involves interpretation, even if the methods are quantitative. Different researchers might reach different conclusions even from the same data sets, because it depends on how much emphasis the researchers place on various factors (e.g. employability, existing assessment schemes), and the views of different sets of stakeholders. The identification of learners' needs and wants is an important initial step towards developing courses for BE. In order to design effective courses practitioners must know what aspects of business English occur in real practice in the workplace but are missing from university BE courses. Besides perceptions from stakeholders (employers, employees of companies), any available written or spoken genres that are frequently used in the workplace need to be examined for their typical features in a specific cultural context. Discourse analysis of a typical mode of communication in the workplace, which can serve as a type of 'hard evidence', can be compared with and complement the ideas collated from questionnaires and interviews.

Some of the prior research suggests that oral communication skills are the most important for BE teaching, while other studies suggest the importance of written communication. Sometimes which type of communication is more important is dependent on the specific context of situation e.g. the role of graduates in the company, their tasks and the type of company they work for.

Language needs analyses are always specific to the context in which they are undertaken, so although analysts can draw on the methods that have been used previously, they can never automatically transfer the findings from prior research'.

Some of these studies have to some extent contributed to our understanding of workplace discourse. They have identified the need for knowledge of certain types of discourse that are frequently used in their specific contexts of culture. However, of the studies reviewed, only Li and Mead (2000) and Holliday (1995) collected and analysed texts produced by stakeholders. The findings from some studies may not be so valid now, because email may now be chosen in preference to telephoning or meeting face to face and of course is certainly chosen in preference to faxing. Many researchers pre-categorize the discourse types identified in questionnaires



or interviews regarding the frequency of their use without actually examining the specific texts.

Holliday (1995), Li and Mead (2000), Cowling (2007), Maes and Weldy (2007) and Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008) all used multiple sources and methods and this probably made their findings more reliable. Cowling (2007:429) justified the use of multiple sources and methods because more data of different types can be collected and triangulated in order to obtain higher quality results.

Both Crossley and Ward (2002) and Maes and Weldy (2007), studies conducted in the Inner Circle countries, have similar findings, i.e. the importance of oral communication skills especially in meetings in the workplace as opposed to the formal presentation skills that were stressed in EAP teaching at university. Li and Mead (2000) and Chew (2005), studies conducted in the Outer Circle (Hong Kong), have different findings concerning the language needs of business graduates in the workplace. Li and Mead (2000) found that English language skills were needed for business fax messages and presentation skills, whereas Chew (2005) found English skills were required for written communicative tasks such as memos, reports and letters. This is probably because business graduates from these two studies were doing different jobs. Chew (2005) investigated the banking sector, whereas Li and Mead (2000) studied merchandisers in the textile and clothing industry. Studies by Cowling (2007), Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008) and Kubota (2013) conducted in the Expanding Circle countries note the importance of English language skills in the workplace and concluded that business graduates should have knowledge of cross-cultural differences.

Differences in communication needs might be dependent on the extent to which English is used and also the extent of exposure to English use in different countries. Communication needs might also depend on the disciplines graduates have studied and the employment opportunities for graduates in different countries. The communication needs of BE graduates from mainland China may be similar to those identified in other LNA studies, or may be different, because of the specific circumstances they encounter in the Chinese workplace..

#### 2.1.4 Language Needs Analysis in Educational Institutions

I wanted to investigate the way language needs have been analysed in educational institutions in order to find out whether institutions prioritise native-like usage, or whether communicatively effective ELF usage is considered acceptable. Jensen (1995:41) argues that English language teaching has long been based on a native-speaker ideal, i.e. attaining native-like accuracy in linguistic forms based on modelling the interaction between a native speaker and another native speaker, even though this seems to be an 'unobtainable ideal' for those who teach and learn English in EFL contexts. The distinction between native-like correctness and effective communication is associated with the concept of accuracy and fluency as opposing educational objectives in English language teaching. Accuracy focuses on correctness of language forms, whereas fluency places emphasis on the communication of meaning appropriate to specific contexts. In China, grammatical accuracy is generally understood as strict adherence to grammar rules stipulated in grammar books in China, purporting to reflect actual usage by native English speakers. Studies of language needs analysis in the workplace reviewed in the previous section have pointed to the importance of intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity/awareness. Intercultural communicative competence comprises more than the acquisition of language forms. More importantly it involves the ability to act appropriately in intercultural situations; this requires affective and cognitive capacity, for example, knowledge of appropriate politeness strategies and other pragmatic aspects, the ability to adjust speech style, knowledge of the rules of conduct for establishing and maintaining intercultural relationships, and the capacity to acknowledge one's self-identity while mediating between cultures (Jensen 1995). It would be interesting to find out how both teachers and students of BE regard native-like correctness and intercultural competence in intercultural business settings, and their beliefs about what constitutes the most appropriate purpose and content of BE courses.

Trinder and Herles (2013) used interviews and mini-essays to compare teachers' and students' views of Business English teaching against the background of the teaching context at Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU). More than 200 advanced (third year or higher) students were involved over a period of four

semesters. The entire department of teaching staff (28) was then interviewed to provide the faculty's perspective. The research attempted to address students' and teachers' beliefs about good/ useful English at a business school, the nature of language learning, communication with NNSs as opposed to NSs and their views about the learning environment in WU, specifically concerning the extent to which the WU Business English programme can help them achieve those aims.

Trinder and Herles (2013:220) claimed that learners' beliefs about how language should be taught and what language courses should offer determines greatly how much effort they make in learning activities. According to this view, learners will be reluctant to learn if learning activities conflict with their expectations. Teachers' beliefs about effective teaching are shaped by contextual factors, and particularly the fact that English is the lingua franca in business interaction (BELF), and most international business interaction is between non-native English speakers.

Students were found to value communicative competence, i.e., the ability to express themselves and talk about a variety of topics in a fluent manner. 'Extensive vocabulary', 'good pronunciation', 'good knowledge of Business English', 'appropriacy' and 'accurate grammar' were listed as signs of a good command of English. Most students were also conscious that different communication skills, registers, and levels of accuracy are required in different situations. 'Speaking equals learning' was the belief of many student respondents. Exposure to native-like English and opportunities to speak were regarded as the principal drivers of language acquisition. Communicating with native English speakers (NSs) was preferred by many students as a means of learning 'correct' pragmatics, lexis, structure and pronunciation. Students believed that error-free language with native-like pronunciation and grammatical competence was important for their future careers. However, teachers thought that NS standards were less relevant in the current global business environment where most communication takes place in NNS settings. All students thought that group discussions, lectures in English, and oral examinations focusing on business would help improve the quality of teaching at the university. Most thought that it was necessary to emphasize business topics in a business school. However, individual students had different judgements concerning the use-

fulness of the strong business focus, depending on the level of General English they had attained.

The teachers' perspectives agreed with those of the students to a great extent regarding the importance of communicative skills, especially oral communication skills; however, teachers were less concerned than students about extensive vocabulary, grammatical correctness and accurate pronunciation as ends in themselves. In terms of language content, teachers felt that too much emphasis was placed on business English terminology while BE students needed more support in basic language skills. However, departmental policy in WU required language departments to stress content and terminology. It was also observed that teachers had no choice in selecting the textbooks used for the BE course.

This study to some extent reflects the current situation of BE teaching in the global context of BELF. The students in WU still adhered to native norms of English, while the teachers regarded effective communication in the context of ELF as more important. However, it is possible or it would be ideal to aim for both in some contexts (i.e. academic writing) and native-like correctness is not in conflict with effective communication.

It is also clear that local contextual factors may result in conflict between teachers' and students' aims, motivations and expectations (Trinder and Herles 2013:221).

## **2.2 Business genres**

LNA studies conducted in the workplace, which are reviewed in section 2.1.3, only uncovered the frequently used communicative events in the workplace without examining their characteristics. Genre-based studies which look at the discourse of workplace genres are reviewed in this section.

Swales (1990: 58) claimed that 'genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes... [The] rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choices of content and style'. Martin's well-known definition of genre within Systemic Functional Linguistics (1997:13) also emphasises the social nature of genre, which is regarded as 'the system of staged goal-oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives'. Recurrent social

practices are manifested in certain patterns of choice at the level of register. Both Swales and Martin believe that genre influences rhetorical choices at the level of register (i.e. the lexicogrammar) and also at the organisational level, and that the shared communicative goals/purposes of members in a particular community are linked to the communicative events that comprise genres. Each genre is associated with a distinctive organizing structure and distinctive patterns of use of vocabulary and grammar (Koester 2006, Yates and Orlikowski 2002).

The conventionalized linguistic and structural characteristics of genres enable them to be recognised and understood more easily by members of a given discourse community, helping these members to communicate more efficiently.

It is at the level of the 'context of situation' that genres are shaped most directly. According to Eggins (1994:9) 'three key dimensions of situations are identified as having significant and predictable impacts on language use'. These three dimensions are field (what is to be talked about or written about), mode (the kind of text being made) and tenor (the relationship between the speaker and hearer or writer and reader) (Eggins, 1994; Hassan, 2005; Halliday et al, 1964). 'Field' in the international business community is related to 'business' and language in the field of business contains specialized business terms and expressions. 'Mode' refers to the form of language used, whether face-to-face, on paper, via the telephone or via the Internet. The 'tenor' of business relationships is key to understanding business discourse, according to Charles (nee Lampi, cited in St John 1996:8). 'Tenor' is the dimension that is most sensitive to national, institutional and group culture.

Field, tenor and mode are important factors that have effect in determining whether a text belongs to a given genre, but the communicative purpose of the text must also be taken into account. Even email messages within the same field, sent and received within the same communicative settings and domains, can vary greatly in terms of tenor (the power and distance relationships between interlocutors), and in terms of their rhetorical purposes) (Koester 2006:22). For this reason emails are not usually regarded as belonging to a single genre.

Business genres here refer to different types of communicative event or activity (such as business meetings, telephone calls, business emails, presentations, or interviews) that occur in the business discourse community. The purpose of a busi-

ness genre does not refer to an individual's private motive for communication, but the one that is socially constructed and recognized by the relevant business community for use in typical situations (Yates and Orlikowski 2002).

St John (1996:15) considered that it was essential to identify more of the generic features of different events such as meetings, to find common features of effective communication and also to be aware of the role of cultural differences and how language and business strategies interact. People from different cultural backgrounds have their preferred way of communication; the impact of culture on genre therefore cannot be ignored. Bhatia (1993:12) argued that cross-cultural factors, which sometimes influence the realisation and understanding of specific genres, should be taken into account when analysing a specific genre, as the same (or functionally similar) genres can be differently realised in different cultural contexts. St John (1996:7) claimed that 'acceptable moves and their rhetorical and linguistic realisations can be both culturally and language - bound'. This means that cultural differences and different native languages exert some influence on organisational structures of genres and their rhetorical and linguistic realisations.

I will now selectively review studies of specific genres used by the international business community, such as negotiations, meetings and emails, in an attempt to offer a general idea of how these genres are used in the environment of BELF in international business settings.

### **2.2.1 English as a Lingua Franca in Business Communications**

Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005:404) have defined BELF as a 'neutral' and shared communication code. BELF is neutral because it does not belong to any one cultural group, or to either native or non-native speakers; it is shared because the members of the global business community who use BELF to conduct business interactions are referred to as BELF users and communicators rather than as non-native speakers or learners. BELF is a resource shared by the international community involved in specific business activities around the globe (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta 2005; Bhatia & Bremner 2012).

Although English is beyond dispute the lingua franca of the international business community, the cultural differences between different nations cannot be neglected

when conducting business transactions. It has been argued in many studies of needs analysis in business contexts that cultural awareness is important for good customer relations and for peer relations in multinational companies (Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2008; Chew 2005; Cowling 2007; Dominguez and Rokowski 2010). According to Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008: 498), it is essential to know how to behave in the professional global business context; bearing in mind that global business behaviour may be different from behaviour in one's own culture.

The term 'culture' can be interpreted as a set of commonly shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize a nation, an institution, and a group (Butt et al. 2000). Attitudes/beliefs/values influence patterns of behaviour, which have a bearing on how goals and practices are realised at the level of discourse in situations of language use. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005:404) point out that BELF communicators bring into business interaction their own discourse practices and culture-bound views about how to communicate. Culture-awareness is closely related to politeness in intercultural communication; it helps relationship development and hence plays a significant role in rapport management. People from different linguacultures may have different perceptions of politeness. Haugh (2010:143) pointed out that speech practices may be interpreted differently by different groups (e.g. Japanese speakers' repeated silence may be interpreted differently by westerners as lack of interest in the discussion), and diverging sociocultural values may lead to perceptions of intercultural impoliteness. The perception of politeness is situationally contextualized, for example power, distance and rank of imposition, the three contextual factors noted by Brown and Levinson (1987)) are locally and culturally determined and have their influence on the perception of politeness. In other cases politeness can be determined out of context. This is what Leech (2005) claimed as absolute politeness scale. It seems likely that utterances that appear to be sincere, and to indicate warmth and gratitude, are more likely to be regarded as polite irrespective of cultural differences.

Brown and Levinson's (1978) notion of politeness has been influential in the field of pragmatics. It is concerned with two aspects of face: positive face (i.e. the want to be accepted) and negative face (i.e. the want to be unimpeded) and their corre-

sponding politeness strategies (positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies) used to counter possible face-threatening acts (FTAs). Brown and Levinson's theory has however been subject to criticisms, the major criticism being that it is not as universal as they claim and is biased towards western individualism, i.e. prioritizing individual's wants and freedom of action. If this is so it may not be applicable to Eastern cultures which are typified by those of China and Japan (Gu 1990, Leech 2005, Chen 2010). Leech (1983, 2005) proposed a Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP) that puts a high value on others and a low value on the speaker himself in an attempt to cover both Eastern and Western cultures. The employment of GSP is meant to ensure that offence/ discord is avoided, even in cross-cultural communication (Leech 2005: 12). A further consideration is that the traditional Eastern concept of collectivism is less evident among the younger generation in China; and there may be a growing tendency in the East to care more about individualism and the desire to be unimpeded.

Business communication in the global context tends to be complicated by the diverse cultural backgrounds of these BELF communicators, and it is important to consider the impact of cultural differences on performance in BELF interaction

Research into cross-cultural business event types includes studies of negotiations (Charles 1996; Garcez 1993, Planken 2005.), business meetings (Handford 2010, Poncini 2002, Rogerson-Revell 2007, 2008, 2010), and email, a universal medium in current business settings (Li & MacGregor 2010, Gains 1999, Gimenez 2000, 2006; Gimenez-Moreno 2011). In what follows, selected studies in each of these three areas are examined in turn. A separate section is devoted to a functional subtype of email, request emails.

Charles (1996) investigated the particular ways in which negotiation discourse is shaped by the extra linguistic business context, thus creating a mutual interdependency. She was particularly interested in how buyers and sellers individually and jointly initiate and develop their cases within the restraints of their professional status and roles. NRNs (new relationship negotiations) and ORNs (old relationship negotiations) were examined separately. An NRN is the negotiation where the negotiators concerned are unfamiliar with each other and have not done business previously, whereas ORNs are negotiations where the negotiators have estab-



lished business relationships over a long period of time and have done satisfactory business with each other (Charles 1996).

Charles' data consisted of fifteen hours of audio-recorded business talk, recorded in a buyer's office in England in 1988-1989. Research interest focused particularly on the ordinary, routine events of everyday business. Interviews were used to supplement the audio recordings. Altogether in the six comparable negotiation events, all the speakers were native speakers of British English, except for one Finnish management trainee. The topics discussed and the nature of the events was roughly similar.

Charles (1996:24) noted that politeness strategies of the kind identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) were a major feature of the discourse. The concepts of Professional Face, a Face Threatening Act (FTA) to Professional Face, and Tactical (Professional) Face Saving strategies were used by Charles to describe the tactical and professional nature of the status and role concerns of buyers and sellers in the sales negotiations. Charles (1996:25) claimed that 'behaviour aiming to save Professional Face links up with the status-bound expectations, rights and obligations of buyers and sellers.... an FTA threatening professional face will occur when a buyer or seller behaves in a manner contrary to status and/or role expectations, and will require the use of linguistic hedging devices to mitigate the FTA'.

Charles' study implies that establishing a business relationship and managing rapport are primary in business negotiations even though different types of face-saving strategies (i.e. professional, personal and social face-saving strategies) are adopted in different stages of a business relationship. Whatever types of relationships are involved in business negotiation, they are in essence business relationships; making profit is the primary aim and this is facilitated by establishment of rapport.

Since managing rapport is deemed important in business negotiations, different social customs need to be taken into account in negotiations involving negotiators from different cultures.

Planken (2005) carried out a small scale study focusing on new-relationship sales negotiations by analysing and comparing two corpora of quasi-natural negotiation discourse, produced by professional negotiators and aspiring negotiators who

were all lingua franca speakers of English for specific business purposes. The study investigated how face work is used to achieve interpersonal goals in intercultural sales negotiations. It analysed and reported two aspects of 'rapport management' in a negotiation context. First, it analysed 'initiation of interactional (safe) talk' by looking at the frequency and locus of occurrence of safe topics. Second, it looked into 'the use of personal pronouns as indicators of the negotiator relationship' (Planken 2005:383/4).

The negotiations were conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone. These quasi-natural negotiations were categorized as intercultural new-relationship negotiations, because the participants were from different nationalities and had never met each other before (Planken 2005:385). The negotiations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; aspiring negotiators were classed as 'IB' (inexperienced buyers) and 'IS' (inexperienced sellers). 'PB' and 'PS' stood for 'professional buyers' and 'professional sellers'.

Altogether eight categories of 'safe talk' were distinguished: initiator, business relationship, future business, business environment, product information, corporate information, invitation and non-business. Both corpora had 'initiator', i.e. greeting, introduction etc., but the aspiring negotiators failed to exchange initial greetings adequately. The 'business relationship' category, referring to pre-negotiation contact, was found in both data sets. 'Future business', incorporating talk about future business cooperation and deals also occurred in both. The categories of 'business environment' for talk about the market, target groups, competitors or the economy, 'product information' and 'corporate information' only occurred in professional discourse, not in that of the aspiring negotiators. 'Invitation', used in the closing stages of a negotiation, and 'non-business talk' were found in both data sets.

All the professionals engaged in the safe talk initiation, in comparison to 8 of the 10 aspiring negotiators. The professionals also initiated safe talk in all three stages (opening, bargaining and closing) of their negotiations. Aspiring negotiators only did so in the opening and closing stages (Planken 2005:392).

The use of first and second personal pronouns ('I' and 'you') and the use of plural pronoun (inclusive vs. exclusive or institutional 'we') was analysed to investigate

the degree of solidarity and involvement expressed through the participants' verbal behaviour.

The majority of professionals used higher proportions of inclusive 'we' than the aspiring negotiators. Similar proportions of 'I' were found in both corpora. The professionals were more consistent in using institutional 'we' throughout their negotiation. Institutional 'we' was not only used as 'distancer' to protect the speaker from an FTA but to reinforce the negotiator's professional face.

This study implied that interactional safe talk was an important constituent of professional negotiators' discourse. The professionals engaged in safe talk more frequently than the aspiring ones and produced longer safe talk sequences. The safe topics identified were more transaction-related and not purely out of their professional role. Planken (2005:397) suggested that the role of this kind of 'safe talk' in rapport building (face supportive) was not incongruent with its role of reinforcing a negotiator's professional identity (face-protective).

'By maintaining and reinforcing their professional identities, negotiators effectively emphasise their professional commonalities, which may contribute to the feeling of solidarity between them' (Planken 2005: 397).

Although they were from different cultures, participants were found to create a temporary in-group of (fellow) non-natives, and aimed to build rapport and promote solidarity via maximizing similarity or attending to positive face (social as opposed to professional face) by discussing their good experiences with the other's culture.

Planken concluded that differences in the verbal behaviour of the two groups were mainly pragmatic or strategic (such as safe-talk adoption and professional pronoun usage as a 'distancer') as he observed that professional negotiators had just as limited a linguistic repertoire as aspiring negotiators but were more adept at using pragmatic strategies to maintain their professional identity and manage rapport.

Planken's study only examined quasi-natural negotiation discourse elicited using role-play. The generalizability of the findings may therefore be called into question, because real business negotiations are contextualized like any form of naturally occurring discourse.

Garcez (1993) discussed stylistic differences in point-making used by Brazilian and American negotiators. These differences and the ensuing interactional problems affected discourse organisation and hence natural conversation.

Garcez considered point-making in business negotiation to consist of two elements: the statement of one's intentions and the evidence used. Garcez (1993:103) claimed that Americans make their points in a direct self-explanatory way while Brazilians make their points in an indirect way which demands more conversational involvement from interlocutors. He points out that in intra-cultural communication, conventions are largely shared and this makes the understanding of messages and meta-messages easier. In cross-cultural communication, Garcez argues that such signals may not be understood, even if they are made explicit (ibid: 103). One of Garcez's findings is that point-making styles between Brazilian and American negotiators differ with respect to how topic coherence (achieved by consistently referring to a topic or the consensus) is accomplished. In Garcez's data, the American style of point-making coherently upheld the point, restated it and offered additional evidence. Everything was directly stated and topic coherence was accomplished locally (1993:107). On the other hand, the Brazilian style assumed that an active role would be taken by the listener (1993: 108). For instance, when a Brazilian manufacturer tried to convince his American importer that they were able to increase their production, his utterances were not directly related to the previous ones and required the listener to put together the bits of background information to form one coherent point. Hence, the Brazilian point-making style can be characterised as indirect and coherent upon completion by the listener / interlocutor (1993:113). Garcez also describes atypical situations where Americans used indirect point-making strategies and Brazilians more direct ones, but this can be explained from the interactional context. For example, an indirect point-making strategy was used to avoid a face-threatening act when an American negotiator gave a lengthy explanation of how precise their other business partners were and thus implied that the numbers of their Brazilian business partners needed to be checked (ibid:111).

Turning to business meetings, studies have shown that the influence of corporate culture and other levels of culture must be considered when examining interaction in a multicultural business context.

Poncini (2002) reported studies on discourse and business relationships at meetings in an Italian company attended by distributors from 12-15 countries, company members and occasional outside participants. Common ground was emphasised in a variety of ways, through language choice (e.g. English, Italian, German), evaluation strategies and the use of pronouns and specialized lexis. Four categories of linguistic and discourse features were chosen for analysis: personal pronouns, the role of specialised lexis in positive image creation or negative evaluation, shifts in frames and the positioning of participants. Sometimes pronoun use would be inclusive in tone, which contributed to solidarity among members of the group, while at other times the distributors shifted their roles to present themselves as independent business people who were concerned with sales in their own market.

Rogerson-Revell (2010) also analysed the discourse of international business meetings in a European organization (an EU funded consultative body) to explore some conventional resources and mechanisms that participants used to facilitate mutual understanding and accommodate communicative differences and difficulties. Mechanisms such as strict adherence to the agenda, tightly controlled turn and topic management and a focus on information giving and reporting were used to accommodate the diversity of the participants' sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, but these could also hinder opportunities for informal or spontaneous contributions. Strategies used to accommodate linguistic differences and difficulties included normalization strategies such as "let it pass" and "lack of other repair" which focused on message content delivery rather than form, and speech convergence, which includes "careful speech style" (i.e. clearly spoken language delivered at a speed that accommodates listeners) and 'low context language' (information explicitly explained).

Handford (2007) analysed meetings collected in CANBEC (the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Business English) to compare turn taking, the role of the Chair, power issues concerning the relationship between speakers, and lexicogrammatical and functional features in internal meetings (IM) and external meetings (EM).

Nine meetings recorded in a single company (an ISP provider) were selected, approximately reflecting the ratio of EM to IM in the whole corpus. There were between two to five participants in these meetings, all of whom were English native speakers.

Handford looked at frequency and keyword lists, clusters and concordances. A qualitative approach was then used to analyse the lexicogrammatical items in context. This involved combining discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and genre analysis techniques, and gave attention to pragmatic markers (vague expressions, modality, idioms and evaluative nouns), speaker relationships, speaker goals (interpersonal/ transactional goals), strategies, and face. Handford (2007:71) also collected contextual information such as company type and size; the relationships between speakers and the topics and purposes of the meetings. This information was collected in the follow-up sessions with the participants, and from company information documents and speaker information sheets, supported by the researcher's own insights.

The findings in the framework study suggested that business meetings are categorizable as a genre with a fixed structural organisation (Handford 2007: 152). Similarities were found between business meetings and everyday English (as evidenced in CANCODE) in terms of the frequency of commonly used words, but the key word comparisons indicated differences between everyday English and business meetings, and some clusters containing idioms, modals such as 'we need to', hypotheses (semi-fixed expressions such as 'if (you) (were to) say...') and hedges such as 'kind of' were frequent. There was a contrast between IM and EM in terms of turn taking; for example there was 'more attention to face, overlapping, and diversion from the agenda, elaborate opening and closing sequences, and less interruption and conflict' in EM. Differences were also found in IM/MS (manager-subordinate) meetings and IM/P (peer) meetings. 'IM/P meetings, unlike MS meetings seemed to have more equal length of turns, with more disagreement, overlapping and interruptions' (Handford 2007:152). A six-stage model of meeting organization was created. Handford (2007:315) claimed that 'the originality and power of the model lies in its ability to account for the repetition and the variety which

typify the genre.' The empirically-supported stages support the main hypothesis of Handford's thesis, i.e. 'business meetings can be characterized as a distinct genre'. It can be concluded that the study of business meetings is complicated, with many factors intertwined, such as the relationships between the speakers, their position and power, the setting, meeting topics and the purposes of meetings and individual agendas of participants. These factors combine to influence the discourse of business meetings in terms of lexicogrammatical choices and communicative strategies. It can be reasonably inferred that business discourse as a whole, including written and spoken genres such as business emails (see page 52), meetings and presentations, commonly used in business communities, are also affected by these factors. The following part will deal with studies of email communication, mainly within business communities. The main language for international business emails is English (Nickerson 1999, Louhiala-Salminen 1996, Barbara et al. 1996) and the number of email users is increasing rapidly. According to a report by the Radicati Group (a technology market research firm), around 1.88 billion people around the world used emails between 2010 and 2014. This is almost twice as many as ten years previously (Matrix Information and Directory Services, cited in Cairncross 1998:93).

### **2.2.2 Email communication**

According to the Royal Pingdom Blog (2010), the top 10 countries on the Internet in 2010 have changed dramatically compared to 2000. There were four native English-speaking countries on the list in 2000 (America topped the list with the UK in 6<sup>th</sup> place), while in 2010 only two English-speaking countries were in the list (America and the UK). China with 420 million users was at the top of the list, and other newcomers were India, Brazil, Russia and Nigeria. Non-native English speakers using English to communicate via the Internet outnumber native-speaker users. Gimenez (2000), Gimenez-Moreno (2011) and Li (2000) have noted that email communication has emerged as multi-modal, with characteristics of both spoken and written communication, midway between telephone conversation and the letter.

Gimenez (2000) investigated whether other forms of internet-based communication have influenced business email writing. The register and the style of 63 business emails that were sent to and from an import-export company in the UK were examined and then were compared with 40 business letters from the same company. The business emails were sent to and from customers around the world, most of whom were either requesting or giving information (2000:240).

In Gimenez's study the email writers preferred to use simple coordinated syntactic structures rather than subordinate ones, demonstrative modifiers rather than definite articles and elliptical forms rather than full ones (2000:242). According to Gimenez, these language features occurred even more frequently in emails written to and from customers who had already established relationships with the company (ibid: 242). These features showed that stylistic similarities were found between emails and unplanned spoken discourse (p244).

Gimenez (2000: 244) also found decapitalization, wrong punctuation, misspelling and grammar mistakes were also common in his data. These are features of internet-based communication. An article in the *Economist* (1996:37 cited in Gimenez 2000:243) argued that 'the internet will collapse if you use flowery language' and 'The five-word sentence doesn't rattle on the screen as much as it does on paper'.

Many unconventional abbreviations, contracted forms and colloquial informal lexical items (e.g. *just drop me an email*) found in the business emails indicated that they were informal and personalized (ibid: 243). Different forms of address ranging from no salutation to the more formal 'Dear Sir' also showed that the style of business emails was less rigid than in formal business letters (ibid:245).

A comparison between 40 business emails (randomly selected ones from the already examined 63 business emails) and 40 business letters from the same company showed that the business letters were very rigid and they contained no contracted and elliptical forms. The business letters also had twice as many subordinate clauses, definite articles, demonstratives and complete sentences as the business emails (ibid:247).

Gimenez (2000:248) concluded that internet-based email communication, an informal medium of business communication as opposed to formal business letters



is a preferred medium for those who have established relationship, as opposed to formal business letters.

Gimenez (2006) examined 123 emails from a participant in the UK, who corresponded with 13 other participants. The participants used English for international communication but were native speakers of four different languages (Dutch, English, Italian and Spanish); all of them worked for a satellite communications corporation or for its partner companies in five countries (the Netherlands, Australia, UK, US and Mexico).

Altogether, 52 samples of embedded emails were analysed from the databank of 123 emails. 'Embedded' emails are composed of a chain of messages on a single subject (also known as 'mosaic messages', 'email-dialogue' and 'embedded messages' (Markus 1994; Eklundh & Macdonald 1994; Yates et al. 1999)). The use of carbon copy (CC) facility and 'RE' for reference and 'FW' for forwarding in the subject line were particular generic features of embedded emails as opposed to one-way messages, and Gimenez argues that the CC facility in particular enables embedded emails to meet the new demand for a higher degree of accountability in the international business community. The CC facility can invite all the members of a geographically dispersed team to participate and witness the decision-making process, and also helps keep record of the communication of the members.

Personal abbreviations such as 'Brgds' (best regards), 'Fyi' (for your information) and 'Tks' (Thanks) also appeared in Gimenez's data. Hyperlinks for further information were found to be incorporated in more than half of the analysed emails, as a means of enriching the knowledge base of the corporation and creating new textual spaces (Gimenez 2006:167). Gimenez (2006) provided examples of embedded emails in his dataset, which used the various textual features he described, but did not quantify the occurrence of these features.

Gimenez (2006:167) pointed out that composing embedded emails poses new challenges for international communicators, as they need to consider the contextual information in the 'chain initiator' and identify whom to copy in as witness to the activity. He noted, however, that it is difficult to make generalisations across business contexts, given the context-specific, corporate culture-based nature of email communication.

Embedded emails are very common in the current business world. Gimenez-Moreno (2010) conducted register analysis of a corpus of 224 business emails in English that include embedded emails to examine the key parameters of register variation (RV); 120 of these were single emails (labelled “bidirectional communication”) whereas the others were embedded. The main donor to this corpus was a senior female executive in London. The selected emails involved professional communication among 54 business senders who were all native English speakers. They were suppliers, buyers, company directors, PR and marketing executives and assistants in relation to the main donor.

Ten native speakers who were business professionals, including the donors, were asked to work as informants throughout the corpus analysis to classify the single messages in terms of three main tones within the professional register: ‘formal’, ‘neutral’ and ‘casual’. They were also required to identify the main features that characterized the tone (Gimenez-Moreno 2010: 23). The informants were then asked to focus on the messages they had labelled as casual, to identify each message in relation to three main daily life registers: ‘social’, ‘amicable’ and ‘intimate’. About 35 out of 120 (29.1%) single emails were identified as ‘professional formal’ (F), 23 as ‘professional neutral’ (N) and 62 as ‘professional casual’ (C).

The noticeable features of professional formal emails were identified as follows.

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(Gimenez-Moreno 2010:24)

Twenty-three single emails out of 120 (19.1%) were characterized as having the following professional neutral (N) features:

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(Gimenez-Moreno 2010:25)

Gimenez-Moreno (2010:25) claimed that the professional neutral (N) tone was used when the writer was not sure about his recipient's response to the email and so kept the tone open for variation. A neutral tone was generally employed when the communication was between interlocutors who had a close working relationship but had to maintain professionalism due to work requirements.

About 50% (62) of the single emails were in the professional casual register, which had the following features.

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(Gimenez-Moreno 2010:26)

Gimenez-Moreno (2010:26) pointed out that only eight single emails were purely professional casual, and that there was a high rate of fluctuation between other registers, particularly the social and amicable registers, because of changes in interlocutor roles and other contextual factors.

Gimenez-Moreno (2010:27) noted that 'Social register often appears before or after some professional formal / neutral fragments to keep face and ease relationships, mainly in complaints and apologies'. The social register was particularly common in the PS section of emails, and had the following features:

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(Gimenez-Moreno 2010:26)

The amicable register was marked as having the following features:

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(Gimenez-Moreno 2010:26)

The amicable register helped the writer to save face when apologizing, admitting weakness and prepared the ground for rejection.

In embedded emails there was 'the general progressive relaxation of the interaction along the flow of messages' (2010:30); in other words the register of the email became more informal and incorporated more social and friendly features in the course of the exchanges. Table 2.1 shows the register variation occurring in two chains of six messages (6.1 and 6.2), where F refers to 'formal', C refers to 'casual', N refers to 'neutral', S refers to 'social' and A refers to 'amicable' registers. Both embedded emails start with a formal register but end with either casual or amicable registers.

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**Table 2.1 Register variation of two chains (Gimenez-Moreno 2010:30)**

Gimenez-Moreno claims that the professional formal, neutral and casual registers together with social and amicable language features are more and more common in business email nowadays (2010:31). Gimenez-Moreno also claims that the use of register variation in business email writing and the adoption of language features used with friends helps enhance communication and improve relationships with colleagues and clients.

Li & MacGregor (2010) conducted a case study of English usage in a small to medium-sized company in China, as part of an analysis of its employees' English skills.

The company had offices in Hong Kong and Mainland China, and had business transactions with customers in about 20 countries. Besides English as the major language used for communication with other companies, Cantonese and Putonghua were also official working languages.

Questionnaires were completed by 38 staff in the Shenzhen office of the company. About 78% of respondents rated written English on a 6-point scale as 'extremely important' to their current job. 'Always' or 'often' writing (66%) and reading (75%) external emails in English predominated in their responses (Li & MacGregor 2010:12).

A textual analysis was made of 111 of the workplace emails (10,364 words) exchanged between the company employees and international customers over a two-month period in 2008. All the emails were concerned with the details of the company, samples and payment. The emails were categorized into three tiers according to the English proficiency: near native, fluent and flawed. Near-native emails only had typographical errors or a small number of grammatical mistakes. Fluent emails had some structurally incorrect sentences. Flawed emails were scattered with grammatical mistakes such as subject verb agreement, tense errors, lack of articles, pronoun misuse, wrongly constructed sentences, lexical mistakes and wrong style (Li & MacGregor 2010:14).

Although only 20% of the whole sample of emails was regarded as fluent and near-native emails between the parties that were considered effective in terms of basic information exchange, and no miscommunication was found (Li & MacGregor 2010:14).

Li and MacGregor found that 79% of the emails exchanged externally started with 'Dear' plus the first name of the recipient (see Table 2.2). About 83% of the emails had a closing (see Table 2.3). However they point out that many email accounts can generate a closing and signature automatically when the email is sent (Li & MacGregor 2010:16).

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**Table 2.2 The style of openings used in the emails in Li and MacGregor's study (2010)**

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**Table 2.3: The style of closings used in the emails in Li and MacGregor's study (2010)**

The findings were summarized as follows:

- The emails were typically short, both in terms of word length and overall message length. The mean word length was only 4 letters and the mean length was 84 words'.
- The number of contracted forms on the whole was not large although several contracted forms (e.g. we'd, it's, don't) across the three tiers of emails appeared as frequently as their full equivalents. Abbreviations were not very common: the most frequently used was 'pls' for 'please'. The use of punctuation in many emails was incorrect; very often the initial words of the sentence were not capitalised.
- Question marks and exclamation marks such as '???' or "!!!" were frequently used to express emotions.
- There was frequent use of ellipsis, which had the effect of making the sentences short and brief.
- Some colloquial expressions and sentences functioning as small talk were found.
- The time was important in emails requesting a fast response.

The word 'please' or its contracted form 'pls' was identified as one of the main politeness markers. It was the 8<sup>th</sup> most frequent word in the list generated by WordSmith Tools and occurred altogether 138 times, or on average more than once in each email. Request for action using modal verbs and phrases including 'please' were found to be more typical in the emails than using imperatives ((Li & MacGregor 2010:20).

Li & MacGregor (2010:21) concluded that 'as long as the function of the email is clear and the relevant information is present and accurate, the grammatical and lexical accuracies are less important'. They thought that requests for a fast response and posting to multiple recipients may lead to less rigorous checking procedures than in formal letters. The occurrence of contractions, abbreviations, and ellipsis made the emails informal, but in terms of grammatical constructions and

the presence of politeness markers the emails resembled traditional business letters.

Gains (1999:81) also noted that emails embodied distinct linguistic and stylistic features as a new medium of written communication which was not widely included in textbooks for English learners. Gains examined a corpus of two sets of real emails (commercial emails and academic emails) specifically in terms of linguistic and stylistic features from two different settings. Sixty-two commercial emails were written by 29 writers to three employees in the Leeds area office of a large UK insurance company. Fifty-four academic emails were written by 30 writers to two academics and two postgraduate students from different universities in the UK.

Only about 8% of commercial emails used greetings as opposed to about 62% of the academic emails. In terms of closings, 42% of commercial emails had the sender's name only and 40% of them used some variation of 'thank you' (*many thanks* etc.) as the closing; about 24% of academic emails had the sender's name only, about 9% of them had no closing, and the rest of academic emails had different varieties of individual forms of closings (e.g. *(much) love and respect, cheerio for now*) (Gains 1999: 85-6)

The majority of commercial emails conformed to the standard conventions of written business English using fully formed and correctly punctuated sentences (Gains 1999:86). However, commonality of stylistic register was not found in academic emails. A wide range of registers was found within the files of a single data provider fluctuating from the formal (student to tutor), semi-formal (academic to academic) to the informal (friend to friend) (ibid: 93). Discourse features of conversation were adopted by many writers of academic emails. The features were adjacency pairs, one-sided conversation and the use of dialogic devices (e.g. *well, I hear you say*), echo questions to initiate self-repair (i.e. writers responding to imagined questions without the presence of their interlocutors), unplanned talk with the frequent use of *and*, and features of telephone conversation (e.g. *how are you?; 'well, that's it for now'* etc.)(ibid: 95).

Gains concluded that there was no marked difference between commercial emails and academic emails in terms of greeting and closing. The standard conventions

for written business communication followed in most of the commercial emails can be explained by the fact that emails from an insurance company had legal status and could be used as a permanent record, whereas the high frequency of conversational features in academic emails suggested that writers regarded email communication as a medium for pseudo-conversational interaction (1999:96).

Gains' (1999) findings also indicate the relationship between email communication and telephone conversation, and raise the question of whether telephone conversation skills and email writing skills go together. Gains' finding that the same provider produced a wide range of different registers indicates that register varies according to the relationship between the writer and the reader, and the purpose of the communication.

Li (2000) examined the similarities and differences between emails written by native and non-native English speakers at a Hong Kong university. Li classified the emails as 'official' or 'personal', and compared findings with those of Gains (1999). Seventy-six official messages written between August 1999 and January 2000 were collected and 332 personal emails from roughly the same period. Of these, 40% were written by native English speakers and 60% by native speakers of Chinese, plus a small number of other Asians and Europeans. These emails were compared with Gains' 62 commercial emails from a UK insurance company

Thirty-five out of the 76 official emails (53.9%) from Hong Kong adopted the salutations 'Dear colleagues/ All/ Friends', but only one 'dear' occurred in Gain's data. The Hong Kong group tended to use 'Regards' for both informative and requestive messages (Li 2000:25)

Most of Li's personal emails did not include a subject line, and 71% were replies to previous emails. Li chose 77 personal emails out of 332 from Chinese writers for further comparison with Gains' 54 academic emails from the UK. The comparative

findings are summarized in Table 2.4 below.

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Table 2.4 comparative findings of greetings in interpersonal emails and academic emails



Li (2000:26) claimed that communication among UK academic writers appeared more 'dynamic and carefree'. The Chinese academic writers in Hong Kong were more cautious about using a conversational style in their emails.

Li referred to the conversational features of email that Gains discussed in his study (1999:93), that is, 'one sided conversation', 'questions initiating self-repair conversation', 'unplanned talk with frequent use of 'and' and 'omission of subject, decapitalization, and carefree use of punctuation marks'. When writing informal emails, both EFL writers and native speakers decapitalized and used wrong punctuation.

Other features of the emails which are worthy of note were the wide use of abbreviations (such as 'f2f', 'fyi' 'byn' etc) and register-specific words like 'cc' and 'offline' which were found in the non-native English speakers' emails. In addition, code-mixing and code -shifting were also used by non-native English speakers. Chinese writers in the corpus mixed English and Chinese Pinyin, to add colour to the message, to cover their language deficiency or to express Chinese proverbs and idioms (Li 2000:29).

Li (2000) found a high correlation between speaking ability and email writing competence, and argued that speaking ability influenced the ability to write fluent emails. She also pointed out that test-taking skills would not turn students into good email writers. It might be true that certain English skills are interrelated, and that skills for speaking and email writing (a pseudo-conversational form of communication) are somehow transferable, as they share some common features.

Li (2000) concluded that 'email style is influenced by communicative needs and by usage, not by rigid rules' (p29) and an email is 'an organic, evolving and dynamic hybrid between writing and speech'(p29).

Liu (2011) examined cross-national emails as part of a writing activity designed to enable EFL students to exchange opinions with native English speakers, and to explore cultural differences, thus creating a sense of community and a shared knowledge base (Liu 2011:257). The aim of Liu's study was to examine EFL students' perception of the power relations and strategies they used to negotiate power with native English students. (Liu 2011:259)

Hofstede (2001:98) writes about power and distance in terms of 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a coun-

try expect and accept that power is distributed unequally'. According to Hofstede, people from low PD countries (such as America, the UK) think power relations are consultative and equal, whereas in high PD countries, such as China, Malaysia and India, inequality is acknowledged and accepted and hierarchical social status is rooted.

The participants in Liu (2011)'s study consisted of 17 juniors in the schools of Business and Social Science from a top-tier national university in Taiwan and 12 juniors and seniors in the department of English from a state university in America. The Taiwanese juniors' English proficiency was high intermediate to advanced. The students were paired for the email exchange activity, and were not given any topic restrictions. At the end of the semester two surveys were conducted through email, and semi-structured interviews were administered to the Taiwanese students. The participants were also asked to write a reflection paper expressing their thoughts about the email exchange experience. No monitoring of the students' correspondence was involved. Sixteen Taiwanese students and ten American students voluntarily submitted their selected emails. 65 were submitted by the Taiwanese students and 57 by the American students.

Both the NNS and NES students perceived that there was an unequal relationship between participants, with the majority of the Taiwanese students (11 out of 16) reporting that they felt less privileged than their American pen-pals. Liu (2011:263) claimed that the students' perceptions of power differentials and their interactional styles determined the strategies of negotiation they used. Three categories of styles were identified among the Taiwanese students: balance, endurance, and resistance.

Under the category of 'balance', some Taiwanese students perceived themselves as 'peers' to their American counterparts and that the relationship was an equal one. The discursive strategy they used incorporated 'friendly, informal and conversational style'. Their writing had few hedges and mitigations, which sometimes appeared rude to their American pals. Chen's (2006) coding scheme was used to analyse informal styles; this involved examining opening greetings, closings, interjections, conversational markers, reduced forms, phonetic spellings ('u'), internet acronyms ("LOL", "THX"), contractions, subject 'I' deletion, or verb 'be' deletion in

questions (“ everything ok?”), paralinguistic symbols (up case, multiple vowels “ sooo”, multiple punctuation marks, audio-visual attachments, and emoticons (Liu 2011).

One American student who responded in the same ‘balanced’ interactional style reflecting equal power seemed to be more euphemistic than her Taiwanese counterpart (NNES). She used more modal and hedged constructions to mitigate and soften tones, and more collective pronouns (‘we, us, they, westerners, Chinese’) and inclusive modifiers or boosters (‘all, obviously, very, apparently, always’). Emoticons were used to mitigate the disagreement and reduce the power differentials with her NNES counterparts.

The ‘endurance’ interactional style was adopted when one party or both parties perceived asymmetrical power relations. American students took the role of experts in English and assumed the control in email exchanges. The Taiwanese students changed their expectations of making friends with them and used strategies to confront power differentials in the course of email writing. Some imitated their American counterparts’ discourse styles and adopted emoticons to sound more casual, while others adopted a more formal and academic writing style when their American counterparts responded passively, or avoided talking about something personal. Impersonal topics were introduced in order not to offend or to keep a distance.

The Taiwanese students who had a ‘resistance’ style underwent a drastic change from being polite in the beginning to being aloof or unfriendly after perceiving unequal relations with their American counterparts. Their writing style changed from informal to formal, or from open-minded to biased. They chose the topics that they were familiar with and often sent late replies or even no reply. Collective pronouns that created an interpersonal divide (‘you and us’) were widely used.

Liu (2011:267) noted that ‘the detached, academic style that they learnt in their previous English classes did not always work to reduce the power differentials. Instead the colloquial, playful language discouraged in academic prose sometimes worked for shortening the social proximity with the American students’.

Liu (2011:267) claimed that the findings of the study have significant implications for cross-national email writing. She argued that writers who are privileged in the

target culture, language, or in specific domain knowledge should not be ostentatious, in case the disadvantaged understand the power relationship negatively. She also recommended those who felt disadvantaged to improve their discursive and non-discursive strategies of negotiation to make 'culturally appropriate and contextually effective linguistic choices' depending on the situation for online communication. She argued that all email writers including native English speakers should be aware of the varieties of English across the globe and acknowledge the existence of world Englishes.

The findings from this study of email exchange between NS students and NNS students has relevance for the study of email interaction in the international business community, as perceptions of power differentials are likely to exert an effect on business writers' interactional style.

In his study of the level of formality in international students' emails written to academic staff, Bjorge (2007) examined sociopragmatic choices about forms of address and complimentary closings, because the choice of form reflects how the correspondents perceive their relationships. Bjorge (2007) found that formal greetings and complimentary closings were more likely to be chosen by those from high PD cultures than those from low PD cultures.

The choice of different interactional styles can either be a matter of individual preference or a company policy that applies to everything an employee says or writes. Making appropriate choices is dependent on the specific context of situation involving interlocutors, level of urgency, and purposes. In the BELF environment with a diversity of situations involving people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, it might be difficult to prepare students with diverse styles for all kinds of situations, but the students' awareness can be raised regarding the importance of getting meaning across, a universal principle in communication.

### 2.2.3 Request emails

Pragmatics is defined by Cruse (2004: 14) as the study of meaning and functions of language that go beyond conventionalised lexical meanings, but are nonetheless naturally occurring and recognisable in context. It is concerned with the communi-

cative purposes or objectives speakers (and hearers) are trying to achieve in their concrete discourse contexts.

Applied linguists also need to investigate how the pragmatic rules of a particular language have relevance for L2 learners, and how they can be acquired in order to achieve successful communication. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984:196) noted that universality presents one of the basic challenges in pragmatics, as it is not obvious to what extent the rules that affect language use in context differ according to culture and language. Intercultural pragmatics investigates English language use by interlocutors from different cultures. Cross-cultural research in pragmatics investigates this. Interlanguage pragmatics, on the other hand, is more concerned with non-native speakers' L2 acquisition. According to Kasper and Dahl (1991:216), interlanguage pragmatics studies 'non-native speakers' comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their L2- related speech act knowledge is acquired.' (Kasper and Dahl 1991:216). Both terms are related to the impact of interlocutors' cultural backgrounds on their meaning comprehension and performance of acts.

In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) argued that "there are a number of utterances that do not report and are not therefore 'true or false', but rather that the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, an action." In this case, the uttering of some words equals the performing of an action. Mey (1996:110) pointed out that although the term 'speech act' implies that it is only concerned with 'speech', that is, the oral medium of language production, the concept applies across other media as well. Searle (1969:16) sees speech acts as "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication." A speech act is produced by uttering a locution (phrase, word) e.g. "can you reach the salt?" Based on the context of the whole situation and how the utterance was intended by the speaker and understood by the hearer, the locution may consist of one or more illocutionary acts. In the previous example, the utterance could be a genuine enquiry (a yes or no question), or could be a request from the speaker for the hearer to pass the salt at the dinner table. The illocutionary act (request) is performed indirectly by way of performing another (enquiry). Second language learners might fail to communicate effectively even if they have a good grammatical and lexical knowledge of the target language. Their pragmatic

failures have been found to be related to cross-linguistic differences in speech act realization rules (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984).

Mey (1993) noted that the wording of the act is one of the causes of miscommunication; the typical 'speech act verb' is often not used. For example, instead of the verb 'promise', the verb 'do' is substituted in the marriage ritual response. Some languages might use more explicit speech act verbs, for example the Danish verb 'promise' has a wider sphere of usage rather than the corresponding English verb (Mey 1993: 117).

Miscommunication is related to 'communicability' that involves intelligibility (knowing an expression), comprehensibility (understanding the meaning of the expression), and interpretability (understand what expression means in a particular sociocultural context). Communicability is intended to cover all aspects of the understanding of spoken and written language, including illocutionary forces (Hino 2012, McKay 2002). Interlocutors' communicability prevents miscommunication from occurring in all kinds of interactions.

Searle (1975, 1991: 266) observed that indirect speech acts can lead to miscommunication and added that the problem is even more complicated by the fact that although some forms such as *can you...?* are used conventionally as indirect requests concerning the hearer's ability to act, it cannot be guaranteed that the hearer will interpret the meaning that the speaker intends. This would be particularly the case in intercultural communication. Bornmann (1999:15) noted that different social norms and assumptions of the culture have an impact on how speech acts are performed in different languages. He suggested that typical pragmatic aspects of English should be explicitly taught to avoid potential confusion and misunderstanding, because language learners tend to apply the pragmatics of their first language when speaking the second.

Previous studies have compared the speech acts of native English speakers with those of Chinese speakers (Gu 1990, Bornmann 1999, Kong 1998 etc.). Discrepancies have been found in various aspects such as greetings and leaving-takings, giving complements and receiving complements, and requesting and rejecting requests. Some Chinese idiomatic expressions have different functions (such as

'have you eaten?' as a greeting) and the conversational style is different, with less frequent use of please and thank you.

The context of situation is important to understand indirect speech acts (Mey 1993, Searle 1969, 1975). It helps reduce miscommunication. 'Can you open the window?' can be understood as a mere request for information under very specific circumstances, when the window is checked for some specific reason, but is understood as a request to open the window when the room is hot. Aijmer (1996:25) also said, it is difficult or impossible to determine the illocutionary force of an utterance without reference to the preceding discourse, the setting and certain general principles of politeness and rationality. Searle (1991, 1975) also points out that inferences are crucial to understanding indirect speech acts, and need to be made to recognise, recover and understand the implicatures within utterances..

Indirect speech acts can be interpreted by following the theory of "conversational implicature" associated with Grice's cooperative principle (CP) and maxims (1975). Grice (1975) argued that people infer indirect meaning by referring to a set of broad shared conventions about what to expect from others in conversation. That means that the speaker's intention to be understood and the listener's intention to be informed should both be satisfied.

Grice (1989: 26) defined the CP principle in the following way: "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (ibid.). Grice's four maxims concern information quality, quantity, relevance and manner. Interlocutors are expected to be cooperative and their utterances are expected to be informative, truthful, relevant, and concise. If a maxim is flouted, an implicature of underlying meaning is created and the co-operative principle still seems to be at work (Kong 1998:239). However Johnstone (2008:235) noted that implicatures are very much dependent on context and the beliefs of the speakers and hearers. Grice's model did not consider that people from different cultures have different ways of expressing and observing maxims in different situations. Chinese people like asking lots of personal questions as a way of small talk even in the first encounter, and this might be considered a violation of relation by some people. Expressions such as 'we can meet up together next time when there is a chance' are

commonly used by Chinese as a polite way of showing no further interest in the interlocutor. Such expressions may however be considered as violations of the maxim of quality in some contexts.

Like utterances in a conversation, utterances in emails have locutionary force (literal meaning), illocutionary force (indirect meaning) and perlocutionary force (potential effect on the reader). Unlike face-to-face conversation, however, email communication cannot resort to audio-visual cues to help communicate indirect speech acts, and this might add difficulties, especially when cultural differences are involved. This is one reason why it is worthwhile to examine how email writers from different cultures perform particular speech acts, and whether readers recognize such acts.

Searle (1975) identified four criteria for classifying speech acts: illocutionary points, direction of fit, psychological state and content. This led to Searle's (1977) five categories of speech acts that take into account the possible relationships between one's words and the world (i.e. direction of fit). Holtgrave (2005) has summarized these five categories (see Table 2.5).

Illocutionary point	Direction of fit	Examples
Directive	World-to-words (hearer)	Request, order
Assertive	Words-to-world	Conclude, predict
Commissive	World-to-words (speaker)	Promise, warn
Expressive	Null	Thank, apologize
Declarative	World-to-words and words-to-world	Declare war

Table 2.5 categories of illocutionary points

Directives attempt to change the world in accordance with the speakers' wishes. Assertives carry 'true' or 'false' values, and words have to match the world in order to be true. Commissives have the same direction of fit as directives, but the direction of the obligation created is different; commissives or promises create an obligation in the promiser whereas the request does so in the requestee. Expressives convey the psychological state of the speaker and have a subjective character. One kind of 'declaratives' (originally called 'performatives') cause immediate changes



to the institutional state of affairs, for example by nominating or appointing (Mey 1994, Kong 1998, Holtgrave 2005).

Byon (2004:1674) noted that the request is a directive and is an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, generally for the benefit of the speaker. Requests are 'face-threatening acts (FTAs)' and considerable cultural and linguistic expertise is required to mitigate the threat appropriately.

Request speech acts provide a noteworthy focus for further discussion of email communication, as requests may be dispreferred because of their inherent threat to both the writers' positive face (the want to be accepted) and the recipients' negative face (the want not to be impeded) (Brown and Levinson 1978). Thus it would be interesting to know how people from different cultures can manage rapport while making requests, especially in international business communication where good relationships have to be maintained.

An important notion that is associated with request acts is the notion of the distinction between directness and indirectness. Zhang (1995:82) observed that English and Chinese have different rules operating on the 'directness-indirectness' distinction. English indirectness is usually manifested at the syntactic level, for example by the use of interrogative clauses, while Chinese indirectness is realized at the discursive level, either by small talk or supportive moves (Zhang 1995). Pan and Kadar (2011:1535) also noted the significant role of small talk as a discursive politeness strategy in Chinese face-to-face interaction. Chinese indirectness is also related to topic deferral where the main points are often delayed (Zhang 1995); an idea corroborated by Scollon and Scollon (1991:115): 'the Chinese and other Asians generally defer the introduction of the topic until after a considerable period of small talk.' Scollon and Scollon describe this speech behavior as the 'inductive pattern of topic introduction', as opposed to the 'deductive pattern of topic introduction' that is typical in Westerners' speech (1995:75). Together with Pan and Kadar's observation that topic deferral and indirectness are widely used in Chinese, this suggests that discursive strategies and the inductive pattern of topic introduction play a more important role in Chinese politeness than syntactic structure.

In their cross-cultural study of speech act realisation patterns (CCSARP), Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) compared speech act realisation patterns for requests and apologies across cultures (Australian English, American English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew and Russian) and between native and non-native speakers. Their study developed an analytical framework for the investigation of directness and indirectness in performing requests and apologies. According to the CCSARP request coding scheme (1984), the conventional indirect request has two subcategories, i.e. suggestory formula (e.g. why don't you get lost?) and query preparatory (e.g. can/ could I borrow your notes? I was wondering if you would give me a lift.). Query preparatory is defined as an utterance that refers to such preconditions as the ability, willingness, and permission on the part of the hearer and the possibility of act being done.

A discourse completion test was used as a controlled elicitation procedure to obtain the data. The informants were asked to complete dialogues that represented different social contexts, providing the speech act appropriate in the given context (ibid. p.199).

In terms of making requests, the utterance or sequence of utterances supplied by the informant was analysed into the following segments: (a) Address term(s); (b) Head act; (c) Adjunct(s) to Head act. For instance, in the sentence ' Danny/ could you lend me 100 pounds a week/ I've run into problems with the rent for my apartment.', 'Danny' is the Address term, 'could you...' is the Head act, and 'I've run into problems..' is the Adjunct to the Head act.

Three major levels of directness in relation to requesting strategies were identified:

- (a) The most direct, explicit level, realized by requests syntactically marked as such, such as imperatives, or by other verbal means that name the act as a request, such as certain performatives and 'hedged performatives'
- (b) The conventionally indirect level; procedures that realize the act by reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance
- (c) Nonconventional indirect level, i.e. the open-end group of indirect strategies (hints) that realize the request by either partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act, or by reliance on contextual cues.

(Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984:201)

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain claimed that one of the techniques to minimize the degree of imposition of directive acts is to adopt indirect request strategies. Their three main levels of directness were subdivided into nine strategy types (see Table 2.6, adapted from Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984:202). Only English examples are presented because my own research is about making requests in English.

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**Table 2.6: Request strategy type- definition of coding categories and English examples (1984:202)**

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain also identified four types of request perspectives. The hearer or addressee-oriented perspective emphasizes the role of the hearer in the speech event, who is 'under threat'. The personal pronoun 'you' is used. The speaker or addresser-oriented perspective stresses the role of the speaker. Normally the personal pronoun 'I' is used. The speaker and hearer-oriented perspective includes both the speaker and the hearer and the personal pronoun 'we' is used. The impersonal perspective uses neutral agents or passivation, as in 'so it might not be a bad idea to get it cleaned up'. Not using the addressee as the main performer of the act helps soften the impact of the imposition (ibid. p203).

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain observed the use of syntactic downgraders as a means of mitigating the speech act. These include the interrogative (e.g. could you do the cleaning up?), negation (e.g. I wonder if you *wouldn't* mind dropping me home?), the past tense (e.g. I wanted to ask you for a postponement) and the embedded 'if' clause (e.g. I would appreciate if you left me alone.) Other downgraders are paralinguistic elements. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's four categories of downgraders are italicized in the following examples.

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(ibid. p204)

In contrast to downgraders, upgraders (intensifiers and expletives) are a means of increasing the impact of requests. Intensifiers are elements by means of which the speaker over-represents the reality denoted in the propositions, as in 'Clean up the mess, it's disgusting'. Expletives are lexical intensifiers by means of which the speaker explicitly expresses negative emotional attitudes, as in 'You still haven't cleaned up the bloody mess!' (ibid. p204)

Downgraders and upgraders are internal modifications to the requests that operate within the 'head act'. Besides or instead of internal modification, external modifications (i.e. adjuncts to head act) that support or aggravate requests can also be used. The categories of external modifications are listed below (ibid. p205).

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(ibid. p205)

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's analytical framework for realisation patterns of requests can provide a good basis for future studies of request acts. Their project relied on elicited responses, however, and sometimes what subjects say in role-play might be different from what they actually do in reality. For this reason it would be worth investigating how these request patterns are manifested in real-world contexts.

Lin (2007) compared the form, content, and distribution of the conventionally indirect 'query preparatory' requests used by native Chinese speakers in Taiwan (NS-C), English speakers in the US (NS-E), and Chinese EFL learners. A discourse completion task (DCT) was also used to elicit expressions of request from 180 college students (60 in each group- NS-E, NS-C and EFL). Coding was done using CCSARP, the scheme Blum-Kulka and Olshtain derived from their cross-linguistic study of requests and apologies.

The conventionalized linguistic forms of query preparatory that emerged from Lin's data can be further categorized according to the function of the modals as follows (Lin 2007:1641):

T  
h  
i  
s  
i  
t  
e  
m  
h  
a  
s  
b  
e  
e  
n  
r  
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m  
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v  
e

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Lin (2007:1643) also found universal conventions in the requestive behaviour in his data; conventional requests were usually realized by question forms and the range of modals that performed this function was similar in the two languages, manifesting ability (can/could in English and its Chinese equivalent 'neng' in Chinese, willingness (will/would in English and its Chinese equivalent 'yuanyi') and permission (may in English and its Chinese equivalent 'keyi'). Sometimes requests in both languages were realized by presenting a guess (I was wondering ...), a negative politeness strategy that helps to reduce the imposition of the illocutionary force and avoid the risk of being directly refused. English seemed to include a larger conventionalized indirectness repertoire of query preparatory request strategies than Chinese. Six types of query preparatory strategies were found in the native English speakers' data while only five of these were used by their Chinese counterparts. Some query formulas such as 'would I ...?' (e.g. 'would I be able to ...') were only used by native English speakers and not the Chinese EFL learners. Lin (2007:1648) explained that some request expressions were rarely taught in the EFL classroom.

Compared with NS-Es, The Chinese English learners made more use of the prominent modal 'may' ('可以 keyi') because of the effect of negative native language transfer (Lin 2007:1645).

According to Lin (2007:1646), the most noticeable difference between the two NS groups was the Chinese EFL learners' lack of tense marking on the modals, possibly due to their lack of English proficiency. Low proficiency Chinese EFL learners used the present tense 'can you...' much more frequently than 'could you...', while

high proficiency EFL learners and native English speakers used 'could you' more often than 'can you...'

Lin (2007:1646) noted that one of the major differences between English and Chinese syntax is that the subject is indispensable in many kinds of English sentence, whereas it can be dropped in Chinese sentences. However pronouns were not dropped in the interlanguage data (p1648).

In terms of 'point of view operation' that concerns the choice of the type of pronouns in the request modal expressions, Chinese EFL learners and native English speakers were found to have different orientations. Chinese EFL learners tended to be hearer-oriented and used the noun phrase (NP) 'you', whereas native English speakers were inclined to be speaker-oriented and used the NP 'I'. The native English speaker group might have been more competent than the EFL learners in making use of linguistic devices and switching the perspective to reduce imposition. The speaker-oriented perspective avoids directly naming the hearer as the doer of the requested act and reduces the degree of coerciveness from the request (Lin 2007:1651). 'Can I ...' instead of 'can you...' sounds more indirect.

Lin (2007:1654) concluded that the findings from this study confirmed Blum Kulka's (1984) generalisations regarding the conventionality of indirect requests. Though the same types of modals are used in Chinese and English, the preference orders of modals and the form, function and distribution of substrategies are different in the two languages.

Kong (1998:245) noted that directives (requests) have received great attention in business discourse research, mainly because getting jobs done is regarded as the most significant institutional objective and asking someone to fulfil a request can be regarded as the most face-threatening act. According to Kong the request as an illocutionary act is crucial and very complex in business contexts. He aimed to examine the underlying differences between Chinese and English business request letters, with a peripheral objective of identifying possible discursal transfer by comparing request letters written by Chinese non-native English speakers and by English native speakers. The data for Kong's study consisted of three sets of authentic data: English business letters by L1 speakers of English, English business letters by Chinese L2 speakers of English, and Chinese business letters written by



Chinese L1 speakers - 30 letters in total (p.108). Most letters in Kong's corpus are initial trade enquiries, requesting information about products, services, or a catalogue from one company to another.

Kong (1998) noted that a routine business request letter describes what information is requested by the sender, and can also mention previous correspondence so that it is easier for the recipient to trace the record and hence find what the sender requires. Another function of routine business request letters is to build rapport with clients and to encourage further communication with the receiver.

Table 2.7 shows Kong's move structure for a typical English request letter and the microlinguistic realisations of each move.

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**Table 2.7 Move structure analysis of Business English request letters from Kong's study (Kong 1998:112)**

Kong (1998) found that the move identifying the source of information or making reference to previous correspondence was more common in the English L1 business letters than in the Chinese L1 business letters. On the other hand, three out of the ten Chinese business letters began with a description of the company or background information without referring to any previous communication between the sender and receiver of the letter (cf. p.118). This means that the move of referring to previous communication was optional in the Chinese letters whereas it was mandatory in the English business letters. The move of stating conditions and hinting at future business appeared in seven out of the ten English L1 business letters whereas it was found in none of the Chinese business letters. According to Kong, one possible explanation for this is that the Chinese might want to establish the relationship between the two companies first and avoid destroying their good 'image' by discussing terms or conditions early on.

Another major difference between the Chinese and English L1 business letters is the order of moves. The Chinese followed the structure JUSTIFICATION + REQUEST while English letters used the REQUEST + JUSTIFICATION structure. Kong also found linguistic differences in how the moves were realised. The Chinese business letters followed a rigid pattern with CAUSE before EFFECT, CIRCUMSTANCE before EVENT, BACKGROUND before FOREGROUND etc. (cf. pp.120-124). This corroborates with findings from Zhang (1995), Pan and Kadar (2011) and Scollon and Scollon (1991). The English letters were more flexible about the order of sentence constituents. Kong argued that Chinese people place greater importance upon building interpersonal relationships as a business strategy, and therefore use more interpersonal propositions. Indirect face strategies were usually established through a (因为... 所以... (because ...therefore ...)) sequence rather than a (therefore... because) sequence.(cf. p.125).

Yeung (1995) examined the formulation of polite requests in English and Chinese business correspondence in Hong Kong to see if the three variables proposed by

Brown and Levinson (1987), i.e. power (P), distance (D) and the ranking of the imposition (R) had any effect on linguistic choices. Yeung (1995)'s study shared similar aims with Liu (2011)'s study that was to examine the EFL students' perception of the power relations and its influence on their use of strategies and linguistic choices when communicating with their native-speaker pen pals.

Altogether 360 English and 181 Chinese letters and memos were gathered from a range of organizations (e.g. utility companies, educational institutes, government departments, banks etc.) over two years in Hong Kong.

Lists of requests which were frequent in the Chinese and English samples were generated and given to two groups of qualified informants to rate in terms of politeness, based on their views of the standards and norms of politeness held in their own culture.

Eight request formulations were found in the English sample. The mean politeness rating of each item is presented below. Yeung (1995:512) claimed that 'the larger the mean, the less polite the expression appeared to the raters'.

1. It would be much appreciated if you would respond quickly. Mean:2.4
2. I would appreciate it if you could respond quickly. Mean:2.6
3. We would like to invite you to respond. Mean:2.9
4. I hope you will respond quickly. Mean: 3.1
5. I should be grateful if you could respond quickly. Mean :3.7
6. You are requested to respond quickly. Mean: 5.7
7. I should like you to respond quickly. Mean: 5.8
8. Please respond quickly. Mean: 6.0

Two raters were then asked to rate the effects of contextual factors (D, P and R) in both samples. A three-point scale was used to rate both D and R. A rating of zero for D meant that the speaker (S) and hearer (H) knew each other very well, whereas a higher scale rating indicated further distance between S and H. A rating of zero for R meant the request would cause minimal or very little imposition. A five-point scale was used to rate power. Zero reflected equal status between S and H.

Statistical analysis showed that only imposition had a significant effect on polite English request formulation, but that the combined effect of all three contextual factors also had a significant impact. However, none of the contextual factors had

any statistically significant effect in the Chinese sample. All three factors inter-related with one another.

Yeung (1995:517) considered that the fact that social distance had no statistical effect on polite request formulation was probably due to two factors. On the one hand, business correspondence is semi-formal in style and conventional forms of courtesy are expected, thus expressions for intimacy are not normally used. On the other hand, the tenet of good business writing is to be friendly and not too formal. Considering these two factors, the influence of social distance on linguistic choices might be neutralized at the both ends of the politeness scale.

The effect of power was found to be greater than distance but also subject to situational context. There were no clear-cut correlations between the degree of politeness and relative status, and the linguistic forms that signified equality might have been used by superiors to disarm subordinates into compliance when other strategies were not sufficient (Yeung 1995:517).

None of the three contextual factors showed a significant effect on linguistic formulation in the Chinese sample. It is possible that imposition might not be thought of in the same way as in the English-speaking world. The wish not to impose on others might be more important in a western individualistic culture than in a more group-oriented culture such as China, as Hofstede (2011) claimed members from China, a high PD country tend to accept inequality and hierarchical social status. Yeung (1995) considered that the principles of on-record appropriateness and that of reciprocity are popular in the Chinese context, and on-record requests are only considered appropriate when the speaker is considered to be in a position to make the request. Otherwise, indirect off-record requests or the use of intermediary to do the work on one's behalf should be chosen. The principle of reciprocity reduces the burden of imposition. The strategy is to stress the sincerity of one's gratitude as an indication of the desire and commitment to bring mutual benefit at some point (Yeung 1995:518). However, the acknowledgement of thanks is usually moderated by using a modal and a conditional in English such as 'I would be grateful if...' to make it sound less imposing. The use of a mitigating device is a mark of negative politeness, which reduces the negative affective feeling (Yeung 1995:517).

This study suggests that Chinese and English have different systems of politeness strategies, and that Chinese business writers are influenced by the principles of on-record appropriateness and reciprocity.

Like Yeung (1995), Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) also looked at the formulation of polite requests. Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) conducted a microanalysis of the request sequences in everyday German conversations. It used the framework of conversation analysis to explore the relationship between grammar and social interaction by examining how turn constructions are oriented to the sequential context of performing the request act.

Pre-request sequences that are used as interactional devices to elicit the possibility of a request act were examined to see how they were constructed linguistically (Taleghani-Nikazm 2006: 18). Three types of pre-requests in German everyday conversations were examined in particular sequential contexts: questions, accounts and expressing likes/ dislikes in a particular sequential context.

Pre-requests were found to take the form of a question to check the availability of the object and service to be requested. It was noted that a request in the form of a question helps maintain social solidarity. The speakers employed this affiliative conversation strategy to pursue a preferred response (i.e. the request being granted). A speaker's expression of likes or dislikes was also perceived as a pre-request in the sequential context, as were accounts which provided background explanatory information as a way of avoiding a face threatening act (2006: 21-29).

The account as part of a request strategy was found to occur in two different positions within request sequences, performing different interactional functions. Accounts that were given immediately after the request utterance and before the response from the interlocutors were in the 'before-request-response' position. Accounts placed after the interlocutors agreed to grant the request were termed as 'after-request-acceptance' accounts.

Taleghani-Nikazm (2006)'s study shows how perceptions of the value of particular moves depend on their placement in a request sequence.

There is a dearth of studies regarding the way Mainland Chinese people perform request speech acts in intercultural business email exchanges where ELF is used. Performing request acts is closely associated with the issue of directness and indi-

rectness. Whether the first language (Chinese) with its frequent use of small talk or typical topic introduction pattern would have an influence on making English requests remains a question to be investigated. I am interested in the question of whether Chinese writers adopt similar request moves to native English speakers and which other strategies they employ in making requests to manage rapport and build relationship with their interlocutors.

#### 2.2.4 Reconceptualising ELF in intercultural Business Settings (BELF) and its pedagogical Implications

Crystal (2003:61) estimated that the number of English users is about 1.8 billion, with 320 million to 380 million native English speakers. The global spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has enjoyed an important status in international business settings. The concept of three-circle countries proposed by Kachru (1985) divided countries according to the role of English. They are the *Inner-Circle* countries (the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand) where English is used as the first language; the *Outer Circle* countries (India, Singapore, Hong Kong and Nigeria) where English has an official status and English has become nativised; the *Expanding Circle* countries (Brazil, China, Germany and Japan) where English is taught as the most popular foreign language.

Different views concerning the ontological status of ELF have been noted (Cogo 2012, Sowdon 2012). For Cogo (2012), ELF is not about identifying the core features of a specific variety in a specific geographical location, but is rather a natural 'contact language' spoken by people from different linguacultural backgrounds including native speakers and non-native speakers. 'ELF is not monolithic or a single variety' and it is influenced by local cultural and linguistic resources. (ibid: 97-8). Sowdon (2012) seemed to simplify ELF and regard it as the culturally neutral ('value-free') means of communication and suggested that ELF be seen as an identifiable and tangible identity, more similar to the versions of English spoken by non-native English speakers. However, Sowdon also noted the difficulty of giving a complete and definitive description of ELF in practice (Sowdon 2012:91). Sowdon still proposed that the Anglo-Saxon native speaker model should retain its dominant role rather than being replaced by ELF (2012:96), mainly because the atti-

tudes of learners and teachers towards ELF are not positive and they still favour the native speaker model.

Jenkins (2006:38) gives a definition of ELF as 'an attempt to extend to Expanding Circle member the rights that have always been enjoyed in the Inner Circle and to an increasing extent in the Outer'. Her definition reflects the rising importance of English varieties from the Expanding Circle. People from the Expanding Circle mainly rely on classroom teaching to learn English and exposure to English outside the classroom is very limited.

Friedrich (2012) to some extent shared Cogo (2012)'s concept of ELF in terms of its intangibility and wide application in different contexts. She noted that ELF 'is a function of language given its possible domains of use' and that users bring in linguistic variations as well as different values and beliefs (2012:93-4).

With regard to the use of ELF, Friedrich (2012:96), Cogo (2012:99) and Björkman (2011:961) noted and emphasized the importance of the communicative strategies that speakers use to negotiate linguistic and other differences, rather than 'surface-level' linguistic features in ELF settings. Surface-level features are very variable, because speakers adapt English creatively to meet the needs to convey meaning. Cogo (2012) pointed out that ELF cannot be simplified because speakers of ELF around the world create new idiomatic expressions to suit their communicative needs in their contexts. Cogo advised that English language teaching should be approached from a wider and different perspective, involving 'a whole range of communication skills, knowledge such as communication strategies, pragmatic competence and cultural awareness and positive attitudes rather than just focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (2012:104)'. Friedrich (2012:111) noted the amount of strategic competence ELF users required to negotiate meaning in contexts where the preeminent role of native varieties' had diminished.

Both Cogo (2012) and Sowdon (2012) to some extent agreed that it is difficult to define the uniform complete set of core features of ELF that are shared by all the speakers of English around the world. As Gnutzmann and Intemann (2005:17) shared the same view that 'the use of ELF is as diverse as the competences of its speakers are and it is difficult to identify structures which are common to all speakers' I agree with Cogo's view that English language learning in the ELF envi-

ronment should stress pragmatic competence and the ability to accommodate a wide range of English varieties, since there is no way to characterize the core features of ELF around the world. As Gnutzmann and Intemann (2005:17) observed, the question of whether ELF can be assigned status as a single, separate variety of English still has not yet been satisfactorily answered.

Sowdon (2012)'s idea of preserving the leading role of native-speaker English seems less realistic, because emerging varieties of English from expanding-circle countries together with established English varieties from outer-circle countries are challenging the status quo of native-speaker English from the Inner-Circle. English communications among non-native speakers are becoming increasingly frequent, especially in international business settings.

Attempts have been made to conceptualise ELF in terms of phonology (e.g. Jenkins 1998, 2002), pragmatics (e.g. Rogerson Revell 2010; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta 2005, Seidlhofer 2004) and lexico-grammar (e.g. Seidlhofer 2003, 2004) and ELF is gradually establishing its own norms, independent of those established by native users. The majority of research has been on spoken ELF (Sowden 2012). Seidlhofer (2004) noted that this is due to the fact that variation from the familiar standard norms is particularly salient in spoken discourse, because of the immediacy of interaction and reciprocal negotiation of meaning. Written discourse is more reliant on established native-like norms which are maintained by a process of self-regulation, although some written modes might also adopt some of the distinctive features found in spoken ELF as the number of ELF users grows (2004: 223). This also indicates that the native-like variety cannot be dismissed in the context of the globalisation of English.

Seidlhofer (2004:218) has summarized the pragmatics of ELF as used in VOICE (the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English). VOICE is dedicated to capturing the use of ELF by speakers from a variety of first language backgrounds, mainly in oral communications and in a range of settings (professional, informal, educational) and functions (exchanging information, enacting social relationships). In ELF:



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Seidlhofer (2004:218)

Seidlhofer (2004) summarized the lexicogrammatical features of ELF she observed in VOICE. These features are:

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Seidlhofer (2004:220)

This summary is descriptive and can be taught in the classroom, but the features might not be found in some varieties of English emerging in real international communication.

As different varieties of English spawn in the ELF environment, there arises a major practical question concerning the English language teaching: which variety of English should be chosen as the instructional model (Matsuda 2012)?

Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) proposed three options that are available for instructional purposes: the 'international variety of English', 'the speaker's own variety of English' and 'an established variety of English'.

They claimed that teaching a 'standard' or lingua franca 'core' variety of English, i.e. 'international variety of English' in international contexts is unrealistic. Besides the above-mentioned intangible nature of ELF (Cogo 2012, Friedrich 2012) and its wider application (Sowdon (2012, Cogo 2012, Friedrich 2012) and they also thought the pursuit for a standard international variety of English 'would create an additional layer in the English language hierarchy to which different people would have different degrees of access, and that, as a result, would generate greater inequity among speakers of different Englishes'.

Teaching 'the speaker's own variety of English' may be not feasible, especially for those from the Expanding Circle countries which were regarded as 'norm-dependent' (Kachru 1985), i.e. very much dependent on native speaker norms. Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) argued that English varieties from the Expanding Circle are not sufficiently mature and systematic in terms of their linguistic features and pragmatic functions to be suitable as instructional varieties, because students' communicative needs will go beyond the use of English in any individual expanding circle country (2012:108). Nevertheless, attempts have been made to teach speakers' own varieties of English. Hino (2012), for example proposed a model of Japanese English (MJE) in classroom teaching as an alternative to Anglo-American English, as a means of enabling Japanese users to communicate effectively while expressing their own unique indigenous values. The model was offered as a possible one for learners to use, but learners were still given the freedom to choose any other variety of English (American, British or Indian English etc.) to suit their communicative needs. Hino argued that the introduction of a nativised variety of English with its particular phonological, grammatical, lexical, sociolinguistic and discourse features could emancipate the English learners from the Anglo-American framework. The majority of students reacted to 'Japanese English'

positively and regarded as a valuable means of international communication. Frequent classroom exposure to interactions between speakers using their own variety of English and other varieties of non-native English helped students realize that Japanese English can be used to communicate effectively in international settings. This finding contrasts with the beliefs of Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) regarding varieties of English from the Expanding Circle. Hino claimed that though the models for English varieties from the Expanding Circle may be incomplete and unclear, they could be improved and perfected in the process of teaching.

On the basis of this claim we might assume that 'China English', a localized English variety in an Expanding Circle country, can eventually be successfully introduced to business English classroom teaching in China. The term 'China English' was coined by He and Li (2009) and was defined by them as 'a performance variety of English which has the standard Englishes as its core but colored with characteristic features of Chinese phonology, lexis, syntax and discourse-pragmatics and which is particularly suited for expressing content ideas specific to Chinese culture' (He and Li 2009:20).

However, Hino (2012) did not manage to address the question of whether Japanese English would be intelligible to speakers of languages other than Japanese. Even though there will be more non-native speaker communication in the new era, communication with native speakers will still be unavoidable. We lack evidence that Japanese English, China English or other local varieties with their own distinctive linguistic and discourse-pragmatic features can be relied upon in very formal multinational business settings. Thus the limitations of teaching only the learners own national variety of English need to be considered.

Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) proposed selecting one of the established varieties, widely accepted in many contexts (either from the Inner Circle or from the Outer Circle), as the main instructional variety, and presenting other varieties alongside it to raise students' awareness of the fact that they might encounter speakers of other, different, varieties of English. They argue that the selection of the dominant instructional variety should be based on the goal of the course and the needs of the students, and should take other contextual factors into consideration, such as societal attitudes, the availability of teaching materials and the teachers' backgrounds.

If the goal of the course was to prepare students to study in Britain, for example, then British English in academic settings, and British academic culture, should be the major focus of the course. Native speaker usage could serve as an idealisation, and offer an orientation framework for learners rather than a frame of reference to indicate errors (Genutzmann 2005:117). Received Pronunciation (RP), for example can serve as a pronunciation model for non-native speakers 'from which one can diverge' (Gnutzmann 2005:117). Teaching, however, should be as tolerant of errors as possible and dogmatic insistence on the norms of the native speaker variety is not feasible (Gnutzmann 2005:117).

The boundaries between established varieties and varieties from the Expanding Circle might lessen in time. Rapid economic growth, China's growing recognition in the international political world and the increasing number of Chinese using English might offer China the chance to make its indigenized English (China English) an established variety in the future. Kachru's three circles (1985) might then no longer have the same relevance.

What Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) suggested about teaching any established variety sounds reasonable. However, it is debatable that English varieties from the Outer Circle (such as Indian English) should be chosen as suitable instructional varieties in other Expanding Circle countries such as China, because the Outer Circle varieties might be too restricted and only useful when communicating with people from a specific Outer Circle country. Therefore the established variety probably should be restricted to the ones in the Inner-Circle countries. On one hand, attaining intelligibility or mutual understanding in either native and non-native speaker communications or non-native and non-native speaker communications requires the use of mutually -recognised linguistic forms intelligible to both speaker and listener (or writer and reader); on the other hand, the selected established variety of English should not be so privileged that the indigenous value of local speakers' English varieties is not acknowledged.

Linguistic proficiency cannot be measured solely in terms of linguistic accuracy. What is more important for BE and ELT in the ELF environment is to prepare students to view English as a means of communication, involving people from around the world where a whole range of communication strategies and pragmatic compe-

tences are valued, rather than just the mastery of one specific variety of English. This is a view endorsed by a number of researchers of ELF (Cogo 2012, Matsuda 2012, McKay 2002, Seidlhofer 2004, Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta 2005).

He and Li (2009) administered questionnaires to 210 college teachers and 820 students to discover their views about models of college English in Mainland China. One tenth of the participants (82 students and 21 teachers) were subsequently interviewed to further probe their views. The majority of respondents were aware that China English is influenced by the Chinese language and has its own distinct phonological, lexical, syntactical, and discourse-pragmatic features. More than half agreed that only China English could appropriately express ideas specific to Chinese culture. The majority of the questionnaire respondents wanted to sound like native English speakers and believed that they would be able to speak Received Pronunciation. He and Li's findings suggested that a standard variety of English, for example 'General American' was preferred as the main instructional model, but that this should be supplemented with systematic China English.

Besides the fact that China English shares lexical-grammatical features with ELF, as summarized by Seidlhofer (2004), China English has also its own distinct features that are influenced by the first language.

In terms of grammar, differences between Chinese and English are caused mainly by the preference for hypotaxis in English and parataxis in Chinese. Chinese sees no change in the form of a word, no noun inflection or verb inflection (Yu & Zhang 2008, Pan 2002, Li 2002). This may help to explain why Chinese learners tend to drop the third person present tense -s and make mistakes in using articles (definite or indefinite). Frequent subject drop in Chinese sentences (Lin 2007). Another feature of Chinese is reflected at the level of discourse, that is, topicalisation. Chinese texts are usually structured in inductive manner where the main idea tends to come after a large amount of background information has been introduced, while English texts are usually structured deductively where the main idea comes in the beginning (He & Li 2009; Scollon & Scollon 1991). There are also English words in use in China that are not in use in other parts of the world, because the things they

refer to only exist in China. For example the Chinglish phrase ‘no zuo no die’ is quite popular recently in China.

It is important to raise Chinese EFL learners’ awareness of these typical Chinese features that influence the form of China English.

McKay (2002:127) proposed the following teaching goals for teaching English as an international language.

**Goals:**

- Ensuring intelligibility rather than insisting on correctness
- Helping learners develop interaction strategies that will promote comity (friendly relations)
- Fostering textual competence (reading and writing skills for learner- selected purposes)

McKay’s proposal suggests a shift away from fascination with English as a native language (ENL) towards the cross-cultural role of ELF. The learners’ development of interaction strategies that help promote friendly relationships is stressed, rather than the correctness of forms. Sensitivity to cultural differences and local cultures is also emphasized.

Seidlhofer (2004) also argues that instead of the idealistic notion of achieving perfect communication through native-like proficiency in English, EFL teaching should orient itself towards capabilities that are vital in ELF talk, such as communication strategies and accommodation skills. These include utilizing extralinguistic cues, identifying and establishing shared knowledge, evaluating and adjusting to the interlocutor’s linguistic repertoires, supportive listening, signalling non-comprehension in a face-saving way, asking for repetition, and paraphrasing (2004:227).

Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005:419) claimed that “BELF perspectives should be in the forefront in language training” and they summarized three pedagogical implications that corroborate claims made by McKay (2002) Seidlhofer (2004), Cogo (2012) and Friedrich (2012). First, emphasis should be placed on the pragmatic communication aspects of language use, i.e. effectiveness and efficiency in communication rather than linguistic correctness. Learners should be taught to be communicators to perform real jobs and fulfil needs. Second,

learners should be trained to use contextual cues and to identify the implicit opinions of other BELF interactants. Third, learners should know both their own and their interactants' discourse practices, conventions, and cultural preferences.

### **2.3. Application to Business English courses in the Chinese context**

Very little has been written about conducting needs analysis in the workplace in Mainland China, to inform the design of courses in English for Business Purposes. China's role in the international business world is increasing rapidly. Current statistics show the incredible spread of English in the Peoples' Republic of China, and the estimated number of English speakers in China is "over 200 million and rising" (Bolton 2002, Seidlhofer 2004). There is an urgent need to explore how Chinese people undertake cross-cultural communication using English in the international workplace and what typical linguistic and pragmatic features of ELF Chinese speakers use. The samples of either written communication or spoken communication in the workplace can be collected and examined as a part of needs analysis to corroborate the perceptions from interviews or questionnaires and provide more solid details to inform BE syllabus construction.

Some researchers, for example Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008), have complained that information about students' future careers and the language skills they need at work are not sufficiently available to undergraduate language teachers working in universities. Needs analysis could inform syllabuses to prepare students to enter the kind of workplace where English is needed to conduct business with people from other countries. The needs analysis studies reviewed in this chapter were conducted in either the workplace or the educational institution, and have provided different perspectives from employees/ employers and teachers/ students. Their findings can serve as a good point of reference for NA conducted in the context of Mainland China.

In the light of these studies, the overarching question of my study is: what are the English language needs of BE graduates starting working in Chinese companies with an international clientele? This includes the following two sub-questions,

1. How do different stakeholders perceive the English language needs of BE graduates at MEMC?

2. What are the linguistic features and communicative functions of the texts most frequently produced by new BE graduates? .

The term 'stakeholder' is explained in great detail by Holliday (1995). The main stakeholders in my study are BE students, teachers, graduates from MEMC and their employers.



## Chapter 3

### Introduction

My study combines ontological constructionism and epistemological interpretivism in order to discover how employees actually communicate regardless of their formal training. The aims of the study necessitate knowledge of participants' individual ideas and their experiences of using English language in the workplace. Additionally, this study takes into account the effect organizations (companies and universities) exert on each individual, and the active participation of individuals and the continuous interaction between organizations and individuals. A quantitative research method, the questionnaire survey, was adopted in the early phase of the study in order to get an overview of the research context. This survey would provide a stepping-stone towards further in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. My study did not involve corpus linguistics techniques, but emails, the genre most frequently used by participants in their places of work, were analyzed manually to complement the findings from questionnaire surveys and interviews. Some findings from the questionnaire surveys may be applicable to a wider BE workplace context than my study sites, for example the frequency of use of various communicative events, the range of interlocutors BE graduates communicate with and the wish expressed by all stakeholders to improve the BE syllabus. However the findings regarding their individual views of English language needs are specific to the business discourse community I studied in China, and are influenced by various local factors, such as business English teaching resources, the role of China in the international business world and the role of English in China.

### 3.1 Conceptual framework of LNA

I am adopting a semi-ethnographic approach to needs analysis. This means that although I was involved in the teaching of the participants who graduated from MEMC in 2011, and I know the BE teaching situation and these graduates very well, I have not interacted closely with them or their employers, over an extended period of time in the companies where they now work, and I have not analysed all the communicative events they engage in. Multi-sources and multi-methods are

adopted in my study, aiming to obtain deeper understanding of business English needs perceived by different sources involved in this domain and subsequently to suggest possible changes to syllabus for business English majors at MEMC. The study examines the views of business English teachers in MEMC, current students in MEMC, recent BE graduates from MEMC and employers of those recent MEMC BE graduates concerning Business English teaching and learning and its practical use in companies. Questionnaires, semi-structured one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, visits to these recent graduates' companies and a collection of emails are used, and the results from different types of data source are triangulated to produce credible and quality data. Job-shadowing to investigate participants' job performance, as practised by Li and Mead (2000) to closely look at how subjects perform their jobs on a daily basis, is not used in my study because the permission to observe subjects' daily performance was not granted by the companies. The methods adopted in this study aim to answer the over-arching question, 'what are the English language needs of BE graduates starting working in Chinese companies with an international clientele?'

A slightly modified version of Munby's 'communicative needs processor' (CNP) serves as the main conceptual framework in my study, but an additional variable – educational institution - has been added. Educational institutions are the domains where English learning and teaching takes place. The main stakeholders include learners, teaching staff and policy-makers from the Ministry of Education. This study also takes into account variables such as learner's wants from the perspective of the learners themselves, and learners' lacks as perceived by learners, teachers and employers. The questions asked in the questionnaires and interviews are based on this model (Figure 3.1). For instance, questions 1 to 7 are designed to obtain general information from the 'participant' (gender, his/her company type, whether and how often he/she uses English at work); questions 8 and 9 are designed to get information about the 'setting', 'interaction' and 'dialect', (Whom do you need to communicate with in English? Where are your clients mainly from?); question 10 is designed to find out about the 'instrumentality' (mode of communication) and 'communication event' (what does the participant need to do?).

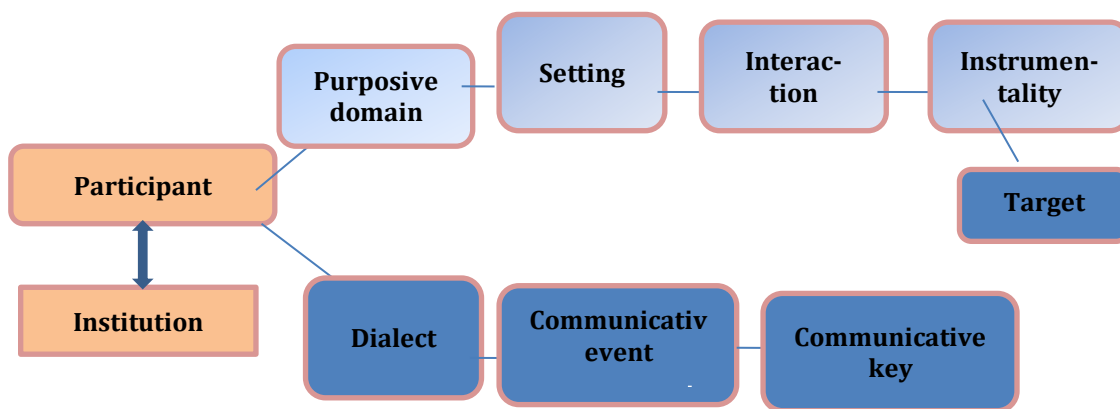


Figure 3.1: A modified diagram of Munby's (1978) communicative needs processor (CNP)

In my study informed consent forms were signed by every participant. The recruitment of participants in the study was based on a 'voluntary' principle, and participants were given reassurance that the study was being conducted for purely academic purposes. I ensured that the participants fully understood the nature of the study and explained that it would have possible benefits for them, as it helps improve the MEMC syllabus. The procedures involved in the study were clarified before the study began. I ensured that the data collected remain confidential and secured. Data and documents obtained from the study were stored on a password-protected hard drive during the data collection and analysis stages. Nobody had access except the supervisory team and me. The data reproduced in this thesis have been fully anonymised. Names have been changed, and it is impossible to trace employees' responses back to specific people and specific companies. This ensures that employers and respondents are not disadvantaged in any way by their participation in the project. In a word, every possible means has been used to protect the participants.

### 3.2. Questionnaire survey

Three questionnaires were designed for the three main stakeholder groups, that is, students, company workers and teachers and were intended to obtain an overview of their perceived BE language needs concerning teaching and practice. The questionnaire included about 70% closed questions and about 30% open-ended ques-

tions. The questionnaires to both current BE students and BE teachers were only one page long containing six questions respectively so as not to cause inconvenience to the recipients and achieve a higher response rate. The questionnaires to the company workers had three parts. The first part containing ten closed questions was meant to obtain the general profile of the respondents (gender, size, and the type of companies they work in and their departments they work in, whom they interact with in English, frequency of different modes of English communication at work); the second part was for MEMC graduates and contained three open-ended questions; the third part was for those who were responsible for recruitment and contained three close-ended questions and three open-ended questions (see Appendix1).

The questionnaires were piloted with two current business English teachers, an employer and five recent graduates from MEMC to check the clarity of the questionnaire items and gain feedback. The time reported to complete them was within 15 minutes. The feedback on the whole was good, and any ambiguities in the questionnaire items due to translation from English to Chinese were corrected. For instance the Chinese translation of Question 4 in the draft questionnaire seemed to have a similar meaning to Question 5 in the questionnaire for BE students (see Appendix5). Question 4 was 'Which of the following do you think are given more emphasis in business English teaching at university?' [4. 以下哪些方面, 您认为在大学商务英语教学中给予更多的重视?]. Question5 was 'Which of the following do you think the university has neglected and you think important?' [5. 以下哪些方面, 您认为应在大学商务英语教学中是重要的, 但是却被忽视了?]. The original Question 5 could be interpreted as the skills training regarded as important from the students' perspective, similar to Question 4, but the real intention of Question 5 was to learn what was neglected in the university teaching of business English majors. Question 5 was therefore changed to 'which of the following skills are neglected in business English teaching at university?' This gives importance to what is neglected in teaching.

The questionnaire survey with the company workers was then carried out. I sent the questionnaire via email to companies in Beijing and Shenzhen that had posted

advertisements for business English majors on job-hunting websites, but no response was obtained from these sources. However with the help of contacts amongst my former university classmates I received 93 valid questionnaires: 38 from trading companies (tertiary sector), 31 from manufacturing (secondary sector) and 18 from other types of company including communication (tertiary sector), the oil and gas industry (secondary sector), the chemical industry (quaternary sector), and logistics (tertiary sector). Just four questionnaires were received from consultancy firms (tertiary sector), one from finance and one from IT. Most of the respondents were from the business and trade departments of these companies.

### **3.3 Follow-up interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as a follow up to the questionnaire survey. Twelve companies were visited; in all twelve recent business English major graduates from MEMC were involved in foreign trade: nine companies in Shenzhen, one in Ningbo, one in Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, and one in Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province where MEMC is located. Nine of the companies were small or medium sized, while three were large. Shenzhen, adjacent to Hong Kong, is the first special economic zone established in China since the opening-up policy of 1979. It is renowned now as the one of the fastest growing cities in the world. The privileges it enjoys from government support and its geographical location have enabled it to become the third busiest container port after Shanghai and Hong Kong. It is the place where there is a particularly great need for Business English for interaction with foreign countries. For this reason, it is a particularly suitable location for the investigation of business communication in English. Twelve out of the 84 newly graduated business English majors from MEMC are now working in companies in Shenzhen involving foreign trade.

In ten of the twelve companies those interviewed were company owners or heads of departments. In the other two companies I have interviewed the senior workers in the department who were involved in recruitment. These senior workers and company owners or heads of departments were referred to by Cowling (2007) as 'domain experts'. According to Cowling (2007), conducting interviews with these experts is a particularly effective way of analysing language needs, because they

are already working in the target situation and can provide useful insights. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews contained closed and open-ended questions. The native language, Mandarin, was used in the face-to-face interviews. The interviews were all recorded and every sentence except non-relevant social interaction was translated into English.

I used a coding system to conceal the identity of interviewees, to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. For example SZFT 1 refers to an interviewee who works in a foreign trade company in Shenzhen. SZ are the initials for the location, and FT are the initials representing the industry sector. Codes were also used to indicate the six business English teachers who were interviewed from MEMC (BET), and the members of the three focus group interviews which were also held: 26 third year students (S3), 8 fourth year students (S4) and 10 recent graduates of MEMC (RG).

All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed into the interview language, i.e. Mandarin Chinese. Nvivo 9 was used to analyse the transcripts of the interviews from the five groups (company workers, BET, S3, S4 and RG) to compare the views of different groups on the same question.

As the participants in each of the focus group interviews tended to concur in their views, so I coded multiple expressions of the same or similar opinions as a single 'node'. The meaning of the propositions rather than the frequency with which particular opinions were expressed was examined.

Further online interviews via online interfaces such as MSN, QQ messenger (the Chinese equivalent version of WhatsApp) or email were conducted to clarify some points and fill gaps in the data collected after the fieldwork in China.

Questionnaires and different forms of interviews help to answer the first sub-question, that is, 'How do different stakeholders perceive the English language needs of BE graduates at MEMC?'

### **3.4 Data collection**

Business emails are confidential and they are difficult to access. I asked the email donors to forward to me all the emails they had sent and received in the first six months of their employment in their company, but it is impossible for me to guar-

antee that this is exactly what they did. They might not have sent me all the emails they had sent and and received. Understandably, some of the donors may have deleted or changed sensitive business information (such as the names of people and companies, or prices) before forwarding their emails to me, but if such information is missing from the correspondence I do not believe this has affected the quality of the data. I am confident that the emails are broadly representative of the kind of written texts received and produced in the early stages of the donors' careers.

Table 4.6 gives an overview of the corpus used in this study.

Tokens	Number of emails	Number of embedded emails
34,837	307	86

**Table 4.6 overview of the email data**

Altogether 307 emails are embedded within 86 email exchanges. (The term 'embedded email' was defined in section 2.2.1, Chapter 2.) The length of each email ranges from a minimum of three lines (see example SZM3 (a) HK051 in Table 4.8) to 25 lines. The average length is 8 lines with roughly four to 15 words per line.

Particular generic features of embedded emails discussed in Gimenez (2006) such as CC, RE, and FW were also found in the corpus. However, these features had probably been removed from many emails before they were sent to me, thus figures about these cannot be generated.

These emails were categorized as 'out-emails' that were sent by the email donors and 'in-emails' that the donors received. Altogether nine companies, that is, SZL8, SZFT1, SZFT&M2, SZM3, SZL8, SZFT9, NBFT11, SZE and TZM contributed emails. The email donors and their clients belonged to the same discourse community according to Swales' (1990) definition, in that they had a similar shared communicative purpose (to make business deals) and a set of rules concerning what could be done and how it could be done (e.g. shipping, punctual payment). They also had knowledge of highly specialized business terminology and expertise in foreign trade, and they used a community-specific genre, the business email.

Each of the nine companies in this study had one email donor apart from SZM3, which had two donors (SZM3 (a) and SZM3 (b)). One email donor from SZL8 was a

senior staff member doing international logistics, the other nine email donors were Business English graduates from MEMC who worked in overseas sales departments and had been working about half a year when the emails were collected. Table 3.30 presents an overview of the emails I collected. The origins of the incoming emails were either confirmed by the donors in subsequent online communications, or were apparent from the emails themselves, for example from email headers (if they were not removed) showing the internet domain (e.g. XXX.com.hk,) or from the writer's signature at the end of the message. When the origins of incoming emails were not identifiable they were regarded as unknown and coded 'U'.

Email Donors	Company type	Emails OUT (Total)	Emails IN	Countries of origin
SZM(3)a	Manufacturing	42	43	France (F) 17
				Hong Kong (HK) 20
				Japan (J) 4
				Russia (R) 2
SZM(3)b	Manufacturing	17	9	America (A)2
				Hong Kong (HK)2
				Japan (J) 1
				Unknown(U)4
SZFT(1)	E-business/foreign trade	5	0	Unknown (U) 0
TZM	Foreign trade	8	8	Brazil (B)5
				Germany(G)3
SZE	International exhibition agent	43	49	America (A)33
				Germany (G)2
				Hong Kong (HK) 12
				Vietnam (V)2
SZFT(9)	Foreign trade	23	23	Germany (G)2
				Israel (I) 1
				Singapore (S) 1
				Serbia (Se) 11
				Unknown(U)8
SZL(8)	International logistics company	8	9	Brazil (B)9
NBFT(11)	Foreign trade	10	11	Thailand (T) 11
SZFT&M(2)	Foreign trade and manufacturing	3	3	Dubai (D) 3
Total	314	159 (in)	155(out)	

Table 3.30: Corpus Overview by country and author



I also examined the BE writing textbook used in MEMC- 'BE writing course' edited by Su (2007) - to examine what differences could be found between the business email writing samples from the textbook and business emails written by MEMC BE graduates in the workplace.

### 3.5 The conceptual framework and methods for examining emails

Questionnaires and interviews as approaches to BE language needs analysis were complemented with textual analysis. The previous literature had suggested that the internet is widely used for business correspondence, and the findings from both questionnaires and interviews suggested that the most frequent mode of workplace communication was emailing. It is noted in Chapter 1 that the BE students in MEMC are taught to write business emails in the same way as formal business English letters. Some prior studies reviewed in Chapter 2 suggested that other forms of internet-based communication have influenced business email writing (Gimenez 2000, Gimenez-Moreno 2011). However there is little research on how Chinese BE graduates actually write BE emails in the workplace. The stakeholders also said in their questionnaire and interviews that speaking was 'important' and 'problematic', but I was not able to collect spoken data because I could not obtain permission to collect it. The answer to the second sub-question of my research, 'What are the linguistic features and communicative functions of the texts most frequently produced by new BE graduates?' therefore concentrates on email writing. The emails have been examined from different perspectives: functional analysis, macro-structural move analysis and microlinguistic analysis of request moves.

Some prior studies of the discourse of emails have concluded that they share some of the characteristics of both spoken and written communication (Gimenez 2000, Gimenez-Moreno 2011 and Li 2000). For this reason, the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al. 1999) that discusses differences between spoken and written registers was used as a reference source against which to compare the business email data. I intended to find out the extent to which the clause types and verb forms of business emails resembled those of conversation.

This would help me to ascertain whether my business email data had conversational features.

I followed Handford's approach to analysing business meetings (2007) in my approach to email analysis; this involved analyzing linguistic, generic and pragmatic features, but did not involve conversation analysis because business emails are in essence written documents and one of principal features of conversation analysis, turn-taking, cannot be applied to business emails.

### 3.5.1 Methods for examining the linguistic features of emails

I examined the grammatical and semantic patterns in the emails in order to reveal how attitudinal and expressive meanings were conveyed, and I examined generic patterns to see how the interactants structured longer chunks of continuous text in order to negotiate shared social positions.

At the clause level the major patterns that serve to enact roles and role relations are those of **mood**, with the subsystems of **polarity** and **modality** (cf. Eggins & Slade 2001:74). Mood patterns are interrogative, imperative and declarative (cf. *ibid.*). Polarity is concerned with whether clause elements are asserted or negated. Modality allows speakers to mitigate or qualify their messages with a range of options, because 'the variability and uncertainty of our world view becomes part of what is negotiable and part of our identity' (*ibid.* p. 99).

My analysis of email discourse will refer to the following basic mood types:

1. declarative (full or elliptical)
2. imperative (full or elliptical)
3. interrogative (full or elliptical)
4. exclamative (full or elliptical)
5. minor clauses

A declarative can be defined as a clause in which the Subject appears before the finite (SV: subject-verb order). The function of declaratives is usually to put forward information for negotiation in interaction, which means that the speaker takes an active and initiatory role in the talk (cf. *ibid.* p.85).

Interrogatives are polar interrogatives and *Wh*-interrogatives. Polar interrogatives are *yes-no* questions. They can be identified as clauses where the finite element occurs before the Subject. *Wh*-interrogatives are questions that begin with a *wh*-question word, such as *who, what, which, when, where, why, how* etc. *Wh*-interrogatives are used to elicit a response to the missing elements of the clause structure. For example *what* enquires about either the subject or the complement (object) of a clause (cf. *ibid.* p.87).

The different mood types can appear in full or be elliptical. In **full** English clauses no elements have been left out, or **ellipsed**. Elliptical clauses omit some elements but not the 'informationally significant' components of the structure (Eggins and Slade 1997:90). They are typically produced in response or reaction to an earlier clause depending on interactants' interpretations of previous initiations (cf. *ibid.*). According to Biber et al. (1999: 441), clausal units with ellipsis can be associated with non-clausal units, i.e. 'fragmentary units' which neither have the structure of an independent clause, nor are part of an independent clause. The ellipsis will be of some clausal element: the subject, verb, object, predicative or adverbial (cf. *ibid.*).

The Subject in a clause is its pivotal element. Without a subject, the main thing the proposition is concerned with, there can be no argument or negotiation. Generally, we can expect a subject to be a nominal element: a noun or pronoun group (cf. *ibid.*). The Subject can consist of one or more words, or even a whole clause.

The second important part of a clause is the finite. It can be defined as expressing the process, and it enables us to argue about the Subject participant (cf. *ibid.* p.77). The finite can be identified as a verbal operator, a sequence of words that indicates the process, action or state the Subject is engaged in (cf. *ibid.*). The finite expresses either tense by reference to time, or modality by reference to the judgement of the speaker.

Related to the finite is the Predicator. It encodes the action or process involved in the clause and also gives content to the verbal element of the proposition, so that addressees know what is or was happening (cf. *ibid.* p.78). The Predicator is part of the verbal group. The Predicator consists of all verbal elements minus the finite, which is always the first verbal element. If the verbal group has only one constituent, this element functions both as Predicator and finite (cf. *ibid.*).

While the Finite element serves to anchor the subject of the talk by specifying such dimensions as polarity, tense and number, the Predicator gives content or representational meaning to the process the subject is engaged in.

(Eggins & Slade 2001:79)

Biber et al. (1999, 2002) observed that the four structural types of independent clauses generally correspond with the four basic speech act functions shown in the following Table 3.1 (Biber et al. 2002: 249), although sometimes there is not an obvious correspondence between structure (locutionary force) and speech act function (illocutionary force).

Speech act	Functional	Clause	Structural	Example
Informing	Statement	Declarative clause	SV structure	It's strong
Eliciting	question	Interrogative clause	VS structure <i>Wh</i> -word+VS structure <i>Wh</i> -word structure	Is it strong? Where is she? Who was there?
Directing	command	Imperative clause	V structure (no S)	Be strong!
expressing	exclamation	Exclamative clause	<i>Wh</i> -word+ SV structure	How good she is!

**Table 3.1: Major Classification of independent clauses**

Minor clauses tend to be very brief and have no mood structure at all. There are three types (Eggins and Slade 2001:94): lexicalised minor clauses, formulaic expressions and non-lexical items. Lexicalised minor clauses are usually adjectives or adverbs and have evaluative functions (e.g. *right, exactly*) or are swear words (e.g. *Bloody hell!*). Formulaic expressions such as greetings and thanking usually occur in reciprocated pairs, for example one speaker says *Hi* and the other responds with *Hi* (cf. *ibid.*). Non-lexical items have no standardised written form but include, for example, backchannels such as *mmm and uhhuh* in conversation (cf. *ibid.*).

According to Eggins and Slade (2001: 95), minor clauses can either lead up to negotiation, as in the typical reciprocal use of minor clauses in greetings such as *Hi-Hi*, or in closures, or they can act as follow-up reactions to contribute to dialogical communication. although they do not have full negotiation status because they are not full independent clauses.

Biber et al. (1999:449) used a different term, ‘**inserts**’ for these minor clauses which can either stand alone or be attached to a clause or non-clausal structure. They identified eight major categories of **inserts** in conversation: interjections (e.g. *hey*), response-getters (e.g. *okay?*), response forms (e.g. *right*), polite formulas (e.g. *thank you*), and expletives (e.g. *damn*) (cf. *ibid.*), and claimed that inserts contribute greatly to the interactive nature of speech because they act as signals of relationship between speaker, hearer(s) and discourse

I will use the term ‘insert’ to ‘minor clause’ to describe these syntactically non-clausal units or elements. In my data greetings, closings and polite formulas such as ‘thank you’ will be categorized as inserts, along with any onomatopoeic expressions and non-lexical items such as the emoticons ☺☹ and ^\_^.

Some linguistic features (different forms of ‘greetings’ and ‘closings’, internet acronyms etc), and paralinguistic features (e.g. multiple vowels, punctuation marks, emoticons etc.) that are found in email writing do not occur in conversations.

### 3.5.2 Coding scheme for emails

I focussed on communicative functions in my email analysis. The function of each clause of the email was examined and the overarching purposes of each email were also established. I also examined how the speech acts are realised from both grammatical perspective and a pragmatic perspective, because I would like to discover the frequency of different clause types in realizing particular speech acts and see whether the speech acts are realized in a way that pays attention to the face of the other interlocutors or manage rapport.

In order to analyse the features of the emails I drew on the methods described by Cutting (2012) for her structural-functional analysis of airport ground staff dialogues. Cutting’s semi-authentic dialogues were transferred to Excel databases, and each line was coded for verb forms, functions, and attitude markers. An attitude marker was defined as ‘a generic term covering overt stance and mood indicators, and lexical positive and negative strategy markers’ (Cutting 2012:6). The data was categorised into “functional-situational speech events” or ‘scenarios’, and were analysed using the coding categories listed below.

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The percentage of high frequency verb forms and functions were calculated using Excel advanced searches, with a frequency cut-off point of 10%. The 10% cut-off point was chosen because from this point on, differences started to emerge.

Cutting's (2012) system of coding dialogues is a useful one for the analysis of my emails. Transferring emails to an Excel database helps organize the data in a systematic way. Each email was given a unique code indicating the donors' workplace and the country of origin of the email, and each line of each email was also given a

specific numeric code to indicate the chain it formed part of, the email it formed part of, and the position of the line in the email. For example, '10.15.1' (see Table 3.31) in the example below means the first line of the fifteenth email of the tenth chain in the corpus. The data is divided into two categories, the emails that were received from customers (incoming) and those that were sent out to customers (outgoing). These are indicated in the 'IN/ OUT' column. Email chains share the same subject.

Code	IN/OUT	Line	structure	Verb form	Function	Overarching purpose	Text
SZM3(a)HK051	IN	10.15.1	Insert		Insert	Inform	Hi Sophia
SZM3(a)HK051	IN	10.15.2	declarative	Pc	Inform	Inform	Not yet, we are still working with the design
SZM3(a)HK051	IN	10.15.3			closing	Inform	Rex

Table 3.31. Example of SZM3(a)HK051

As in Cutting's dialogue exchanges, every clause of an email can be assigned a specific speech act. I will code each main clause according to type, verb form, function, ellipsis if some informationally insignificant elements of the clause are missing and the presence of subordinate clauses if it is not a simple independent clause. The overarching purpose of the email will then be established in order to discover how speech acts are realized in the data through different grammatical, semantic, discourse and generic patterns.

In terms of categories used to code the data, Cutting's coding categories are relatively detailed, because of the nature of the ground staff dialogues, which were largely question and answer sequences. Cutting differentiated between 'question1'/'inform1' (about self), 'question2'/'inform2' (about the interlocutor), and 'question3'/'inform3' (about a third party). For my analysis I use only the generic terms *request* (ask for information) and *inform* (inform about self/ interlocutor/ a third party) because the more detailed categorization was not appropriate for my data.

Cutting (2012) had two additional categories, 'request' for requesting action, described as 'could you do this?', and 'order' (i.e. 'Do this', 'You must'). There is potential for overlap here as both categories refer to requests for action. In order to avoid confusion I have used the term 'directive' for all requests for action.

The categories to code functions in my study were also expanded during the process of analysis to suit the specific features of business emails such as greetings, closings, and attachments. Cutting (2012) only includes 'greetings and closings' in the larger category of 'greeting/farewell and please/thanks', which she treats as politeness markers. Functions such as 'greeting' 'closing', 'metatext1', 'metatext2' were added to my coding system. The examples of non-verbal attitude markers given by Cutting (2012) were not coded in my email data because they are more easily identifiable in speech, where intonation, audio cues and visual cues such as facial expressions can provide additional information about attitude. However, I added categories for the non-lexical positive and negative strategy markers 'expressive', 'mitigating' and "reassuring'. Business emails stress rapport-management and are usually intended to build business relationships. The functions 'phatic', 'grounder' and 'promise', used to alleviate face-threatening acts were also added to Cutting's list. .

The coding scheme for my email data is presented below. New categories, not used by Cutting (2012), are asterisked.

Verb forms: PC (present continuous), PS (present simple), PASTS (past simple), PP (present perfect), PASTP (past perfect), future (going to, will),

aux (other auxiliary verb), imp (imperative), -ed ( clausal ellipsis with past participle), -ing(clausal ellipsis with present participle), zero (clausal ellipsis –no verb form)

Functions:

- ★-Inform (Inform about self; the interlocutor; third party, event etc)
- ★-Request (Ask for information),
- ★-Directive (Ask for action),
- Offer (state own action, offer goods, price or service that could potentially benefit the recipients),
- ★-Promise (Assure the recipient of something or pledge to something in the near future),
- ★-Reassure (Calm and be supportive to the recipients)



- Confirm (Echo, short affirmative response “ok”)
- Complain (Protest that price is high or quality is bad for instance),
- ★-Greeting (Forms of address e.g. hello xx, Dear xx, etc.)
- ★-closing (Complementary closes e.g. regards, best wishes, etc.)
- Thanking
- Apologize (‘I’m sorry’)
- ★-Mitigating (Use non-verbal attitude markers such as *hehe* or emoticons to reduce the face-threatening acts)
- ★-Phatic (Phatic expression is used to perform a social task, as opposed to conveying information)
- Suggest (‘you could do this’, give advice and bring another idea to mind)
- ★-Expressive (Express pleasure, appreciation)
- ★-Grounder (Reason for dispreferred response, e.g. sometimes for asking for action and sometimes for delay in response)
- ★-Metatext1: Text referred to in the email
- ★-Metatext2: Text referring to an attachment

Excel advance searches were carried out to find the lines with each of the verb forms and each of the clause types and functions, and then calculate the percentage of those lines out of all lines.

### 3.5.3 Methods for examining request emails

In my analysis I will focus particularly on request emails, because requests occur extensively in daily business transactions. Trosborg (1994:187) defined a request as an illocutionary act where a requester asks a requestee to perform an act which is beneficial to the requester. The act can be a request for non-verbal goods, i.e. a request for an object, an action or services, or it can be a request for verbal goods and services, i.e. a request for information. The request is regarded as an imposition and a face-threatening act (Trosborg 1994:188). Impositive speech acts are

those that impose on hearers and make them perform acts that are usually at their own cost. A request is a face-threatening act because the requester tries to control the intentional behaviour of the requestee, and this threatens the latter's negative face (his want to be unimpeded in his freedom of action); the requester also has the risk of losing his positive face (his want to be accepted) when the requestee refuses to comply with his wishes (Trosborg 1994; Blum-Kulka 1984).

Kong (1998:111) defined the routine business request letter as "an intercompany document requesting some kind of response, such as the supply of information or that some appropriate actions be taken". Drawing on Trosborg's definition of a 'request' and Kong's definition of the 'business request letter', I identify request emails in my data as those emails that direct recipients to provide information or perform an action. This type of email involves face-threatening acts on the part of both senders and recipients.

I will focus on the pragmatic competence of Chinese BE graduates from MEMC, examine what rhetorical strategies are used to mitigate these face-threatening acts in business request emails, and consider whether the request acts are realized successfully. My study is concerned with both intercultural pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics, because it examines not only how Chinese BE graduates perform request acts but also compares the way request acts are performed by Chinese BE graduates and by their clients from different cultures. This helps answer sub-question 2, 'What are the linguistic features and communicative functions of the texts most frequently produced by new BE graduates?' with specific reference to the request function produced by BE graduates.

In my analysis, I will draw on Kong's seven-move framework for business request letters (1998), outlined below. In Kong's framework, salutation and complementary close were not considered as moves. Kong found the order of the moves to be highly flexible; Move 5 was optional and Move 6 was not being necessary if there were no other related requests.

- Move 1: source of reference
  - 1a. state where and when you heard the information (if it is a first inquiry)
  - 1b. Refer to previous correspondence (if contact has been made previously)
- Move2: make the request (usually a simple statement or question)
- Move3: introduce background of the company or to the matter
- Move4: justify for the request
- Move5: state the conditions (optional for trade enquiry)
- Move6: inquire about other related items or matters
- Move7: cordial conclusions

Kong (1998) thought that move structure analysis should be undertaken in comparison with lower level microlinguistic analysis. The two levels of analysis are inter-related and usually a particular move is signalled by its semantic as well its linguistic components.

### 3.6 Inter-rater tests of communicative function

Inter-rater tests were carried out twice to ensure that functions had been reliably interpreted. For the first round, the rating was conducted by four colleagues, and for the second round it was conducted by myself and a professor of English language. Thirty emails (10% of my email corpus) were sent to four colleagues (A.B.C.D) along with detailed descriptions of the pragmatic functions I had identified. Research Randomizer (<http://www.randomizer.org/>) was used to generate the list of 30 emails. This program uses JavaScript to create a random number set, thus avoiding any possible bias during the selection process. The raters were given detailed descriptions of the functions I had used to code the data, and were asked to determine the overarching purpose of each email and the pragmatic functions of each clause. This procedure tested for 'inter-rater reliability', i.e. whether other people looking at the same data with the same theoretical framework would interpret them in the same way (Cohen et al. 2007:148). Inter-rater tests can help me to discover the disagreements between myself and other raters. Some terms that

cause major disagreement can then be redefined and modified to reduce confusion and increase the likelihood of agreement will be increased.

The percentage of agreement between each rater and myself in the first round of inter-rater testing is presented in Table 3.4. Rater C and I had the greatest percentage of agreement (62%).

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and researcher	59%
B and researcher	53%
C and researcher	62%
D and researcher	53%

Table 3.4 An overview of agreement rates

The extent of agreement between raters varied according to the function.

- The function of ‘greeting’ and ‘closing’

There was 100% agreement about the function of greetings, but none of the raters agreed with the way I had omitted the writer’s name as a part of the closing function. I had omitted names because some email writers did not include their names and others did. I failed to inform the raters properly about the function of the ‘name’. In fact, this lack of agreement seems to be a very minor problem and was not indicative of any real difference in interpretation; thus I did not count ‘name’ or ‘closing’ as a part of the disagreement rates.

‘Request’ was described as ‘asking for information’. I identified eight clauses as ‘requests’. The agreement rates between myself and each of the raters are quite high, as shown in Table 3.5.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and researcher	100%
B and researcher	75%
C and researcher	100%
D and researcher	88%

Table 3.5 Agreement rates for ‘request’

All the clauses that show the disagreements between myself and B and D are presented in Table 3.6.

Code	original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZL8(s)271	Request	request	phatic	Request	request	Right?
SZFT9(a) U129	Request	request	request	Request	complaint	Are these in your own stocks because we tried to order exactly these from another supplier who,s photos sent were exactly the same as yours but we were told they had been sold.
SZFT9(a)149	Request	request	directive	Request	request	May I know which part do you need?

**Table 3.6** Different interpretations of ‘request’

The clause ‘*right?*’ in SZL8(s)271 was similar to ‘yes or no’ i.e. a polar question. All the raters interpreted SZL8(s) 271 as a request except B, who interpreted it as ‘phatic’. All the raters interpreted the clause in SZFT9 (a) 149 as a request except B who interpreted it as ‘directive’. I intended the first of these to be classed as a request, and the second to be classed as a directive. My definitions of ‘directive’ and ‘request’ might have caused confusion, as both have something in common, i.e. asking for a response from the recipient.

‘Directive’ was defined as ‘asking for action’. I identified 21 clauses in the sample as ‘directive’. The agreement rate is presented in Table 3.7.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-searcher	62%
B and re-searcher	62%
C and re-searcher	67%
D and re-searcher	48%

**Table 3.7** Agreement rates for ‘directive’

Altogether 17 out of the 21 directive clauses I identified were realized as imperative clauses. Imperative clauses are more easily recognized as having a directive function; however nine of these imperative clauses were interpreted as other than ‘directive’ (see Table 3.8). Three of these nine imperative clauses signalled that there was an attachment (SZA189, SZA197 and SZA195). I had not suggested

to the raters that a clause might be open to interpretation, but Rater C marked five of these clauses as multi-functional.

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZEA197	Directive	metatext2	directive	directive/metatext2	metatext2	Please see attached.
SZEA195	Directive	metatext2	directive	directive/metatext2	metatext2	Please see attached.
SZEA189	Directive	metatext2	directive	inform/metatext2	metatext2	'Please find Liu Qing's letter attached'
SZE214	Directive	inform	inform	directive	inform	Please note that the contract was previously submitted with another agent.
SZEA248	Directive	directive	request	Request	Directive	Pls let us know what u were interested in
SZM3(a)J075	Directive	directive	directive	Request	Directive	Please sign "2 copies" and send NDA to our company by EMS.
SZM3(a)J075	Directive	request	request	request/directive	request	Then. Please give the following estimates.
SZE166	Directive	directive	Offer	Inform	suggest	If you want to know more info about us, pls visit our official website <a href="http://seetop.en.busytrade.com/about_us.html">http://seetop.en.busytrade.com/about_us.html</a> .
SZE253	Directive	Offer	directive	directive/inform	suggest	pls take it for your easy reference.

**Table 3.8 Ratings for 'directive'**

The six imperative clauses that did not indicate that the message contained an attachment were interpreted in different ways by different raters. Raters A, B and D interpreted the clause in SZE214 as 'inform', whereas Rater C and I interpreted it as 'directive'. Imperative clauses are likely to be perceived as directives because the directive function tends to map on to the mood structure of the imperative clause. However the clause beginning *please note that...* could be interpreted either as 'directive' (i.e. asking the recipient to notice that the contract was previously submitted with another agent) or as 'inform' because it provides this information. Three clauses (the clause in SZEA248 and two clauses in SZM3 (a) J075) were coded as 'directives' and 'requests' by different raters. As noted earlier the distinction between 'directive' and 'request' might have been unclear because clauses such as *please let me know...*, and *please give me the following estimates* are both intended as requests for information. The clause in SZE166 (*If you want to know more info about us, pls visit our official website*) was identified by Rater A as a 'directive', by Rater B as an 'offer', and by Rater D as 'suggest'. This clause could be interpreted to fit my descriptions of 'suggest' ('giving advice and bringing another idea to mind') and 'inform' ('giving information about the self, the third party, event etc.') (see page 238). It does not fit my description of 'offer', which was 'stating own action,

offering goods, price that could potentially benefit the recipients’, adapted from the description in Cutting (2012): ‘state own action “I’ll do this”, offer goods “would you like this?”’. The imperative clause ‘please click...’ refers to an action to be taken by the recipient rather than by the writer (‘I’ll do this’). The clause in SZE253 (*pls take it for your easy reference*) also fits better with the definition of ‘suggest’ than with the definitions for ‘offer’ or ‘inform’, because the clause advises the recipient to refer to the attachment. I interpreted it as ‘directive’ because I focused on the fact that it is an imperative clause; as noted earlier the directive function tends to map on to the mood structure of the imperative clause.

Table 3.9 shows ratings for four clauses that I identified as directives, but which were realised by interrogative rather than imperative clauses.

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZEA248	Directive	directive	request	Request	directive	Could you please send me a breakout for the wire you sent of \$27,820?
SZE166	Directive	directive	request	Request	request	Thus could you pls be so kindly to offer me the floor plan soon?
SZE198	Directive	request	request	Request	directive	So could u pls tell me whether booth 420 is still available ?
SZE219	Directive	directive	request	directive	directive	Could u pls confirm that info for us ?

Table 3.9 the function ‘directive’ realized in interrogative clauses

I originally interpreted these four clauses as having directive functions whereas raters A, C and D interpreted some of them as requests. This disagreement might be because I had not distinguished adequately between ‘request’ and ‘directive’, as explained previously. The interpretations of the other raters drew my attention to the fact that examples such as *Could u pls confirm that info for us?* (SZE219) and *Thus could you pls be so kindly to offer me the floor plan soon?* (SZE166) were likely to result in the provision of information.

- The ‘phatic’ function

‘Phatic’ was defined as an expression that is used to perform a social task, as opposed to conveying information. I identified 21 clauses as ‘phatic’. The percentage of agreement is presented in Table 3.10. The agreement rates are relatively low.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-	11%

searcher	
B and re-searcher	33%
C and re-searcher	37%
D and re-searcher	44%

Table 3.10 Agreement rates for 'phatic'

Some examples of different interpretations are listed in Table 3.11.

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZM3(a)026	phatic	Confirm	Inform	reassure	Expressive	Well noted your situation!
SZFT9(a)160	phatic	Promise	Inform	reassure	Expressive	We are aiming at building a stable business relationship with you.
SZL8(s)271	phatic	Reassure	Phatic	reassure	Expressive	Just have fun and forget all these annoying stuffs.
SZFT1(b)117	phatic	Closing	expressive	phatic	-phatic	Justin,i look forward to doing business with you again soon.

Table 3.11 Ratings for 'phatic'(1)

There were marked variations in the interpretation of the first clause of SZM3 (a)026 (*Well noted your situation!*). I interpreted it as 'phatic', because I did not take the immediately preceding email into account. In this email (SZM3 (a) 025) the recipient, SZM3 (a), was asked to contact another person: *Pls contact Lucie when you will be ready as I will risk to be outside office at this moment*. In this context the function of the first clause in SZM3 (a) 026 *well noted your situation* may be interpreted as 'confirm' (described as 'echo, short affirmative response "ok"'). A similar clause occurs in an email written by SZM3 (a) F, a French client of SZM3 (a). This client wrote *Well noted for your delivery schedule*, and it seems likely that SZM3 (a) borrowed this turn of phrase from the French client.

Different raters had different interpretations of the clause in SZFT (a) 160 (*We are aiming at building a stable business relationship with you*). I interpreted it as 'phatic', but Rater A interpreted it as 'promise', B interpreted it as 'inform', C interpreted it as 'reassuring' and D interpreted it as 'expressive'. 'Promise' was described as 'assuring the recipient of something or pledging to do something in the near future'. 'Reassure' was described as 'calming and being supportive of the recipient'. 'Expressive' was defined as 'expressing pleasure, appreciation'. According to these descriptions and also the context of the email, the clause could be interpreted as having the combined functions of 'promise, assuring the recipient of efforts to es-



establish a stable relationship, and also ‘phatic’, in that it performs a social task. I was the only rater to interpret it as ‘phatic’, and probably in this case it is impossible to determine without any doubt whether the message was a purely phatic communion, a genuine promise, or multifunctional.

Clauses signalling requests for replies are presented in Table 3.12, with the interpretations of different raters. The first three clauses in the table, for example *Awaiting for your kindly reply* in SZM3 (b) U104, seem to merge the directive and phatic functions, by requesting a reply and expressing a wish to maintain contact with the recipient. The last two clauses seem to merge the ‘directive’ and the ‘thank’ functions, by requesting a reply and expressing appreciation. Rater A interpreted most of these clauses as ‘closing’. ‘Closing’ was described as ‘complementary closes e.g. regards, best wishes etc.’ (see page 238), but these clauses do not fit my description of the ‘closing’ function. Rater B interpreted three of the clauses as ‘inform’. The ‘inform’ function was described as ‘giving information about the self, the third party, event etc.’, but these clauses request information from the recipient rather than giving information to the recipient. Rater B might have misread my description of ‘inform’. Rater D interpreted the clause in SZFT&M2 (a) 111 as ‘expressive’, which I described as ‘expressing pleasure, appreciation’, as noted earlier. Rater D might have misread my description of ‘expressive’.

Code	original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZM3(b)U104	phatic	Closing	Closing	Closing	Closing	Waiting for your kindly reply,
SZFT9(a)160	phatic	Closing	Inform	Directive	Phatic	Awaiting for your kindly reply,
SZFT&M2(a)111	phatic	Closing	Inform	di- rective/closing	Expres- sive	Awaiting your quick re- sponse.
SZE166	phatic	Closing	Inform	Directive	Phatic	Looking forward to your reply soon
SZFT9(a)I125	phatic	Directive	Directive	Directive	Request	Your fast response will be appreciated
SZM3(b)097	phatic	clos- ing/request	expres- sive	Phatic	Phatic	Any comments highly appreciated

**Table 3.12 Ratings for ‘phatic’(2)**

- The function of ‘confirm’

‘Confirm’ was described as ‘echo, short affirmative response “ok”’ (see page 238). I only identified one clause (*Please go ahead* from SZL8(S) B265) as realising the function of ‘confirm’. Only Rater A agreed with me, whereas Raters B. C and D in-

terpreted this clause as ‘directive’, probably because imperative clauses are easily associated with the directive function. Once again, this disagreement may have been due to the fact that the raters did not have access to previous emails in the chain. The previous email SZL8(s) 264 ends by saying *Now, please confirm if everything is OK to ask Maersk to arrange equipment reposition.* The response of SZL8(S) B265, *please go ahead*, can thus be interpreted as a confirmation.

Table 3.13 shows all the clauses interpreted as ‘confirm’ by Raters A and B. Raters C and D did not identify any clause as ‘confirm’, and interpreted ‘Not a problem’ in SZE222 as ‘reassure’. This was the first clause in the message, however, and is therefore likely to be a response to the previous email which started with *I’m sorry that there were some mistakes in last e-mail about ilounge space contract.* It would be more likely to interpret it as ‘reassure’. The disagreement between raters is likely to have been caused by the fact that they did not have access to other emails belonging to the same chain. The clauses SZFT9 (a) U129 and SZFT9 (a) Se150 were interpreted as ‘inform’ or ‘confirm’, and seem to merge the ‘confirm’ and the ‘inform’ functions by responding to the previous email and also giving new information. These low agreement rates and C and D’s failure to identify a ‘confirm’ function might also have been due to lack of clarity in the description of ‘confirm’, which comes from Cutting (2012) (‘echo, short affirmative response “OK”, “confirm”). The description might have led the raters to think that only a clause that has ‘ok’ or a short affirmative answer can be interpreted as ‘confirm’.

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZL8(S)B265	confirm	confirm	directive	directive	directive	Pls go ahead.
SZM3(a)026	phatic	confirm	inform	reassure?	expressive	Well noted your situation!
SZM3(a)F025	inform	confirm?	inform	?	inform	Well noted for your delivery schedule.
SZE222	inform	confirm	confirm	reassure	reassure	Not a problem.
SZFT9(a)U129	inform	confirm	confirm	inform	inform	These parts are the exact ones we need
SZFT9(a)Se150	confirm+inform	confirm	confirm	inform	metatext1	Yes, with bubbles please.

**Table 3.13 Ratings for ‘confirm’**

- The function of ‘expressive’

‘Expressive’ was described as ‘expressing pleasure or appreciation’. I interpreted three clauses as ‘expressive’. The agreement rate is presented in Table 3.14.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-searcher	67%
B and re-searcher	33%
C and re-searcher	0%
D and re-searcher	100%

Table 3.14 Agreement rates for 'expressive'

Table 3.15 shows interpretations of the four clauses that I identified as 'expressive'.

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZM3(b)097	expres-sive	offer	offer	inform/reassure	expres-sive	while we also are glad to give u a favor if there's something we can to do for u.
SZM3(b)097	expres-sive	expressive	expres-sive	reassure	expres-sive	and really glad that u have make desicion what u want.
SZM3(a)060	expres-sive	expressive	phatic	reassure	expres-sive	I'm so glad that you have finished the designs.

Table 3.15 Different ratings for 'expressive'

SZM3 (b) 097 ("while we also are glad to give u a favor if there's something we can to do for u") was interpreted by Raters A and B as an 'offer', whereas D and I interpreted it as 'expressive'. The disagreement might be due to the fact that SZM3 (b) 097 consists of a main clause and an if –adverbial clause. The if-clause ('if there's something we can to do for you,') suggests a benefit to the recipient, and thus implies an offer.

All the raters except C identified another clause in SZM3 (b) 097 (*and really glad that u have make decision what u want*) as 'expressive'. This clause does not fit the definition of 'reassure' (calming and supporting the recipient), because the main clause of the sentence seems to express the writer's pleasure at the recipient's decision, and there is no suggestion that the recipient needs reassurance.

Raters A, D and myself identified the clause in SZM3 (a) 060 (*I'm so glad that you have finished the designs*) as 'expressive'. B identified it as 'phatic' and C identified it as 'reassure'. This clause conveys information and therefore is not 'phatic'. It also does not have a reassuring function.

- The function of 'thank'

I originally identified 17 clauses as having a 'thank' function. The agreement rate is presented in Table 3.16. I did not provide the raters with a definition of this func-

tion, and Cutting (2012) only includes it in the larger category of ‘greeting/farewell and please/thanks’, which she treats as politeness markers.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-searcher	65%
B and re-searcher	47%
C and re-searcher	59%
D and re-searcher	94%

**Table 3.16 Agreement rates for ‘thanking’**

Examples of marked disagreement are presented in Table 3.17. ‘Thank’ was mostly confused with either closings or expressives except in one case where D interpreted the clause in SZM3 (a) F029 as Metatext1. ‘Metatext1’ was described as ‘the text referred to in the email’ and meant that the reader was directed to another part of the message, but this original wording might not have been clear to the raters.

Code	LL	A	B	C	D	Text
SZM3(b)097	thanking	Closing	thanking	closing/expressive	Thanking	Thanks.
SZM3(b)U104	thanking	Thanking	expressive	expressive	Thanking	Thanks for the response to our message
SZM3(a)F029	thanking	Thanking	expressive	expressive	metatext1	Many thanks for your detail,
SZE214	closing	Closing	thanking	closing/expressive	Thanking	Thanks,
SZEA222	closing	Closing	thanking	closing/expressive	Thanking	Thanks,

**Table 3.17: different rating on for ‘thanking’**

The ‘insert’ *Thanks* in SZM3 (b) 097 was interpreted in three different ways, as thanking, expressive and closing. In the email, ‘*Thanks*’ was immediately preceded by a request (*Pls let us know what u were interested in.*) and was followed by another clause that reiterates the request and expresses appreciation (*Any comments highly appreciated*). ‘*Thanks*’ seemed to be an anticipatory response to the action resulting from the request and if this is the case the interpretation of it as ‘closing’ is ruled out.

Pls let us know what u were interested in  
 Thanks.  
 Any comments highly appreciated.  
 SZM3 (b) 097

The clause in SZM3 (b) U104 was interpreted as either expressive or thanking. This was the first clause in the email, showing gratitude for a response from the recipient. The distinction between ‘expressive’ and ‘thanking’ was possibly not very clear in the guidelines I provided for raters(see page 238), as ‘expressive’ was described as expressing pleasure and gratitude and ‘thanking’ was not defined.

“Thanks” in SZE214 and SZE222 (see Table 4.25) should be interpreted as a closing rather than an offer of thanks for a particular thing, because it occurs at the end of both emails and previous clauses ‘inform’ by providing information to the recipients. Similarly *Thank (you/u) so much* appears to be a formulaic part of closing and does not necessarily refer to what immediately precedes it. SZE, for example, uses *Thank u so much!* at the end of emails which enclose documents, as well as when she requests an action. Whether *thanks* or *thank you/u very much* is interpreted as a part of a closing or a sincere expression of gratitude should be dealt with on a case by case basis.

- The function of ‘inform’

The category of ‘inform’ was described as ‘giving information about self, third party, interlocutor event etc.’ ‘Inform’ was a condensed version of three separate inform functions used by Cutting (2012): ‘inform1’ (inform about self ‘I/we do this’), inform2 (inform about interlocutor ‘you do this’) and inform3 (inform about third party, event, situation ‘they/she do(es) this’). I identified 73 clauses with this function. The agreement rate is presented in Table 3.18. Rater D had the lowest agreement rate with me.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and researcher	68%
B and researcher	61%
C and researcher	82%
D and researcher	44%

Table 3.18: Agreement rates for ‘inform’

The clauses that I identified as ‘inform’ were mainly interpreted as ‘promise’, ‘reassure’, ‘grounder’, ‘offer’ and ‘suggest’. Table 3.19 presents some examples of these interpretations. The clause in SZE222 has been discussed above in relation to the ‘confirm’ function.

Code	original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZL8(s)271	inform	Promise	promise	inform	Inform	She will revert later.
SZE222	inform	Confirm	confirm	reassure	reassure	Not a problem.
SZFT1(b)117	inform	Inform	offer	inform	Offer	it's 7" Ainol Novo7
SZFT&M2(a)111	inform	Suggest	Suggest	request	directive	If you can give us other express account number such as DHL,FedEX which can arrive at you directly, it must be better.
SZM3(b)097	inform	Suggest	grounder	inform	ground-er	while when we make them, if the quantity is too low, the cost of production will be much higher.

Table 3.19 Different ratings for ‘inform’

Two raters interpreted *She will revert later* as a promise whereas three other raters interpreted it as *inform*. The last clause in the previous email SZL(s) B270 was *Pls check with the shipper to bear this fee*. In reply to this request SL8(s) 271 wrote:

Regarding the amendment fee, shipper is checking with cnee about this COD.  
She will revert later.

According to the speech function pairs listed in Eggins and Slade (1997:183), a command that demands goods and services as an initiating speech function usually pairs with compliance to carry out the demand. The clause *she will revert later* is more of a promise to carry out the demand than a mere information announcement. The term used for asking for action is ‘request’; a pledge to do something is ‘promise’.

Raters B and D identified the clause in SZFT1 (b) 117( *it's 7" Ainol Novo7*) as an ‘offer’. Rater A and I interpreted it as ‘inform’. The meaning of the clause seems to be a better fit with the definition of the ‘inform’ function, because it give information to the recipient about the type of phone.

The clause in SZFT&M2(a)111 (*If you can give us other express account number such as DHL,FedEX which can arrive at you directly, it must be better*) was interpreted by Raters A and B as ‘suggest’, but Rater C interpreted it as a ‘request’, D inter-

preted it as a ‘directive’ and I interpreted it as ‘inform’. As before, the disagreement on ratings might be due to the use of an if-conditional adverbial clause with the main clause. According to the descriptions of these functions provided above, SZFT&M2 (a) 111 seems to merge the ‘suggest’ and ‘inform’ functions.

Rater C agreed with my interpretation of the clause in SZM3 (b) 097 (*While when we make them, if the quantity is too low, the cost of production will be much higher.*) as ‘inform’, B and D identified it as ‘grounder’ and A identified it as ‘suggest’. The different ratings might be because the clause is complex and grammatically incorrect. ‘Grounder’ (see page 238) was described as a ‘reason for a dispreferred response’. The beginning part of this sentence acts as a ‘grounder’ for the ‘dispreferred’ information in the later part of the clause. The clause seems to merge the functions of ‘grounder’ and ‘inform’.

- The function of ‘metatext1’

Metatext1 was described as ‘the text referred to in the email’. I identified two clauses as ‘metatext1’. The agreement rate is presented in Table 3.20. Both Rater A and C agreed with my interpretation, whereas Rater B and D have different interpretations on these two clauses.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-searcher	100%
B and re-searcher	0%
C and re-searcher	100%
D and re-searcher	0%

Table 3.20 Agreements for ‘metatext1’

The interpretations of the raters are shown in the Table 3.21.

Code	original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZFT1(b)117	metatext1	metatext1	Offer	metatext1	Inform	this is the link.
SZFT1(b)117	metatext1	metatext1	Offer	metatext1	Offer	here are the prices.

Table 3.21: Different ratings for ‘metatext1’

Both of these two clauses were interpreted as ‘offer’ by B. Rater D interpreted the first example as ‘inform’ and the second as ‘offer’. These two clauses have metadiscursive functions which help the writers to direct the reader to another part of the message in the email.

- The function of the ‘metatext2’

Metatext2 was defined as ‘text referring to an attachment’ (see page 238). I identified two clauses as ‘metatext2’. The agreement rate is presented in Table 3.22.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and researcher	100%
B and researcher	0%
C and researcher	100%
D and researcher	50%

Table 3.22: Agreement rates for ‘metatext2’

The other four raters’ interpretations of these two clauses are presented in Table 3.23.

code	original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZE253	metatext2	metatext2	inform	metatext2	Offer	here enclosed is the starter package from IGRS.
SZM3(a)060	metatext2	metatext2	inform	metatext2	metatext2	Rex, here attached the NDA we used to signed with our client,

Table 3.23: Different ratings for ‘metatext2’

Raters A and C agreed with my interpretation, but B interpreted both of these clauses as ‘inform’ and D interpreted the first one as ‘offer’. These two clauses also have metadiscursive functions and directed recipients to the attachments in the two emails.

The lack of agreement on the two metatext functions might have been due to lack of clarity in the wording of the original descriptions.

- The function of ‘grounder’

‘Grounder’ was defined as ‘the reason for dispreferred response’. I identified two clauses as ‘grounder’, both of which are declarative clauses. The rate of agreement is presented in Table 3.24; Raters B and C did not agree with me at all.

Raters	Percentage of
--------	---------------



	agreement
A and re-searcher	30%
B and re-searcher	0%
C and re-searcher	0%
D and re-searcher	67%

Table 3.24: Agreement rates for 'grounder'

The raters' interpretations of 'grounder' are presented in Table 3.25.

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZFT&M2(a)111	grounder	Inform	Inform	complain	ground-er	and the martini cup is easily fragile.
SZM3(b)A108	grounder	Ground-er	com-plain	complain	complain	Your price was either too high or you had incomplete information on the quote OR this order is dead

Table 3.25: Different ratings for 'grounder'

Raters A and B interpreted SZFT&M2 (a) 111 as 'inform' and C interpreted it as 'complain'. The complete email exchange is presented below. The email writer apologises for a broken martini glass and then provides reasons for the breakage, realized in three declarative clauses. The clause shown in SZFT&M2 (a) 111 (*and the martini cup is easily fragile*) is followed by another clause that informs the recipient of the dispreferred fact (*All of these reasons result in the broken martini.*). It can be interpreted as 'inform', but it seems to fit better with the description of 'grounder' if the context of the email exchange is taken into account. 'Complain' was described as 'criticizing that the price is high or the quality is bad, for instance'. It does not fit in with the definition of 'complain', because the fragility of the glass is not an indicator of poor quality.

Dear Cindy,  
 Sorry to you for the broken martini glass.  
 We send the martini sample to your courier company  
 and first they will open the box to check the sample. Then repack it to send to you.  
 but when they repack the sample, they are not the professional packer like us,  
 and the martini cup is easily fragile.  
 All of these reasons result in the broken martini.  
 Awaiting your quick response.  
 SZFT&M2(a)

SZFT&M2 (a) 111

The clause from SZM3 (b) A108 (*Your price was either too high or you had incomplete information on the quote OR this order is dead*) was also interpreted as a

‘grounder’ by A, and ‘complain’ by B, C and D. I classed it as a grounder because it was followed by information that the recipient would find unsatisfactory, i.e. *I haven’t gotten any feedback from customer*. I originally thought it had not yet reached the ‘complaining’ stage, because the writer was suggesting reasons why he had not received a reply from the customer. However the clause might also fit the description of ‘complain’.

Your price was either too high or you had incomplete information on the quote OR this order is dead  
and I haven’t gotten any feedback from customer...  
SZM3(b)A108

- The function of ‘offer’

‘Offer’ was described as ‘stating own action, offering goods, price that could potentially benefit the recipients’ (see page 238). I identified two clauses as ‘offer’. The rate of agreement is presented in Table 3.26. Different interpretations for these two clauses are presented in Table 3.27.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-searcher	50%
B and re-searcher	100%
C and re-searcher	0%
D and re-searcher	0%

Table 3.26: Agreement rates for ‘offer’

Code	original	A	B	C	D	Text
SZM3(a)060	Offer	Offer	offer	inform/reassure	directive	Rex, if you have any questions or requirements, pls feel free to contact me.
SZM3(a)060	Offer	Inform	offer	inform	directive	you can call me directly at 86-137 5101 6092

Table 3.27: Different ratings for ‘offer’

Raters A and B agreed with my interpretation of the first of these clauses as ‘offer’, whereas Rater C interpreted it as ‘informing/reassuring’ and Rater D interpreted it as ‘directive’. The main clause is imperative and therefore can be easily associated with a request for action. It might also be possible to interpret it as ‘inform’ because it gives information about when the recipient can contact the writer. Howev-

er, *Please feel free to contact me* seems best interpreted as an offer because it benefits the recipient to be told that the writer is available to deal with any questions and requirements.

The second clause, from the same email SZM3 (a) 060, was also interpreted as an ‘offer’ by B. It was interpreted as ‘inform’ by A and C, and as ‘directive’ by D. The clause seems to extend the previous offer *please feel free to contact me*, but can only be interpreted as such in the wider context of the email exchange.

- The function of ‘promise’

The definition of ‘promise’ was to ‘assure the recipient of something or pledge to something in the near future’. Four clauses were identified as having a ‘promise’ function. The rate of agreement is presented in Table 3.28.

Raters	Percentage of agreement
A and re-searcher	100%
B and re-searcher	25%
C and re-searcher	50%
D and re-searcher	50%

Table 3.28: Agreement rates for ‘promise’

The raters’ interpretations of these four clauses were divided among ‘offer’, ‘inform’ and ‘promise’ (see Table 3.29).

Code	Original	A	B	C	D	modified	Text
SZM3(a)026	Promise	Promise	promise	promise	Offer	promise	We’ll deliver the samples to you at 18th July.
SZM3(a)026	Promise	Promise	offer	promise	Offer	promise	I’ll contact Lucie if possible.
SZE223	Promise	Promise	offer	inform	promise	Promise	If there is any info about its website, we’ll inform u asap!
SZM3(b)A108	Promise	Promise	phatic	inform	promise	Promise	Anyway, I will keep all your contact details and may contact you for future projects;

Table 3.29: Different ratings for ‘promise’

All four clauses seemed to refer to future time (by using the modal *will*). D interpreted both clauses in SZM3 (a) 026 as ‘offer’ and B interpreted the clause in SZM3 (a) 026 and the clause in SZE223 as ‘offer’. The original descriptions of ‘offer’ and

'promise' might have overlapped to some extent, because a 'promise' might in the end provide something that can benefit the recipient.

### *3.6.1 Summary and adjustments to the coding system*

There are many difficulties associated with functional analysis. As Stadler (2011) has pointed out, authentic naturally-occurring data rarely fits neatly within the pre-formed speech act categories, and it is often difficult to draw a clear distinction between speech acts. Some clauses that contain performative verbs and other words that seem to signal specific speech acts do not necessarily realize the signalled functions. Gumperz (1982:130) noted that any utterance has the possibility of being interpreted in various ways, determined by what is happening at the time of the interaction. Previous studies of speech act functions have noted that the function of any utterance is dependent on its sequential placement in interactions, and have stressed the importance of avoiding analysing a speech act in isolation (Blum-Kulka 1987, Koester 2002). Holtgraves (2007:606) pointed out that 'speech acts, of course, never occur in a vacuum; there is always a context'. It is therefore impossible to hope for 100% agreement, because many utterances are ambiguous, for example as a politeness strategy. The disagreements in interpretations found through inter-rater testing might have been due to the following factors.

The distinctions between some functions such as 'offer' and 'promise', 'request' and 'directive', 'expressive' and 'thanking' were unclear. Some clauses were grammatically incorrect and/or contained unusual collocations, e.g. 'well noted...!' Complex clauses sometimes expressed more than one function, but the raters were not informed that this was possible. Some unexpected interpretations were due to the fact that the raters had no access to the previous email exchange in the chain. This was particularly true for the context-dependent functions 'phatic' and 'grounders'. After comparison of the four raters' interpretations and re-examination of those problematic clauses, the definitions of some terms were modified to avoid confusion and improve the likelihood of agreement between raters. Some functions were merged. The 'Expressive' function was modified to refer to the expression of both pleasure and gratitude. The scope of 'request' was broadened to include not only requests for information, but also requests for action. The category 'offer' was

then modified to include both the original description of ‘offer’ and that of ‘promise, i.e. offering a service that will benefit the recipient in the future. The ‘thanking’, ‘directive’ and ‘promise’ functions were then removed from my function list. Explicit examples were provided for each function to clarify their meaning. The modified descriptions of functions are presented in Table 3.30. (See page 13)

Terms	Original definition	Modified definition
Confirm	echo, short affirmative response “ok”	supporting or establishing the validity or certainty of something, sometimes short affirmative response e.g. ‘ok’
Metatext1	the text referred to in the email	text that directs the reader to another part of the message in the email’
Grounder	a reason for a dispreferred response	a reason for either dispreferred information or the request from the recipient side

**Table 3.30: Modified descriptions of functions**

Most of the speech acts in the corpus are not explicitly signalled and have different pragmatic functions in different contexts of situation. Thus randomized emails in chains sharing the same subject were selected for the second round of rating. They were rated by myself and a professor of English language with reference to the modified definitions of functions. The agreement rate from the second-round rating was very high, almost 98%.

This chapter has discussed the data, the research approaches and the methods of analysis used in this study.

The following chapter four will deal with the findings.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the questionnaires, interviews and email analysis will be presented and discussed.

#### 4.1 Questionnaire findings

##### 4.1.1 Questionnaires to company workers

The questionnaires returned from the workplace showed that the most frequent modes of using English (instrumentality) were writing emails (72) and reading emails (72). The frequency of other modes of using English was almost evenly distributed, as shown in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1. Reading documents (42) was the second most frequent mode.

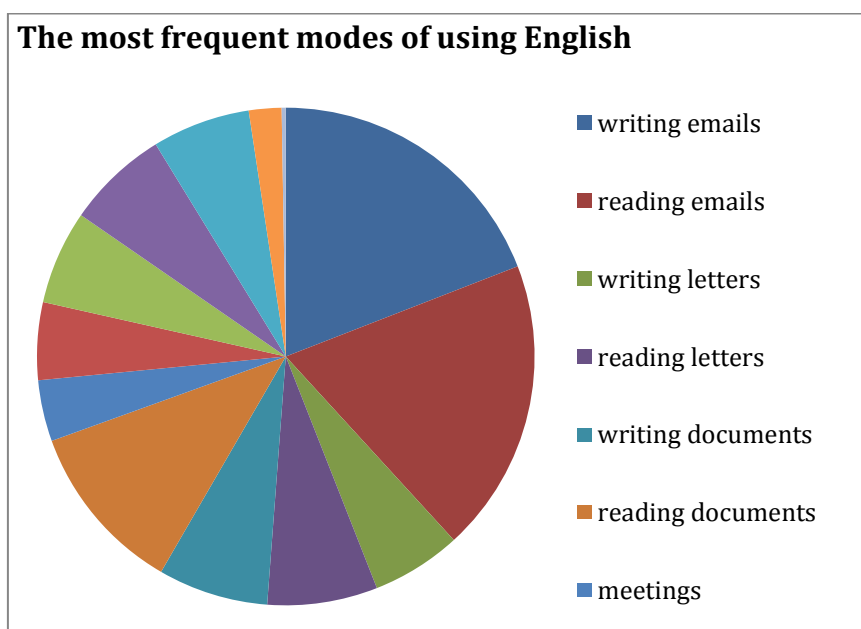


Figure 4.1: the most frequent modes of using English

modes of using English	quite often	rarely	not at all
writing emails	72	18	2
reading emails	72	15	1
writing letters	22	27	26
reading letters	27	28	24
writing documents	27	34	20
reading documents	42	31	8

meetings	15	45	21
making presentations	19	46	16
attending presentations	23	39	19
socializing	25	40	14
providing services	24	42	15
Other.	8	12	8
others(tele-meeting)	1		

Table 4.1: the most frequent modes of using English

The findings from the questionnaires to the company workers contrasted with those from Crossling and Ward (2002)'s survey of employers of Australian business graduates. Their findings revealed that oral communication skills, especially the skills required for meetings, were the most important contribution to the success of the graduates in the workplace. This difference may be because of the different company types (accounting companies, banking or insurance companies, manufacturing industry, service, retail and government) in their study, the fact that they were in an English-speaking country with more opportunities for face-to-face oral communication, and the fact that Australian business graduates and MEMC BE graduates have rather different roles in the workplace.

#### 4.1.2 Questionnaires to students

Altogether 252 business English majors returned the questionnaires, 66 out of 107 first year students, 80 out of 94 second year students, 76 out of 102 third year students, and 30 out of 81 fourth year students. The top three English test certificates that the respondents said they wanted to obtain before graduation were TEM 8 (test for English major band 8), TEM 4 (test for English major band 4) and BECs (Business English certificates) (see the Table 4.2). Although CETs (College English tests) are not meant for the English majors, a large number of respondents (70%) chose to have the CET6 certificate.

Tests	TEM8	TEM4	BECs	CET6	CET4	TOEFL or IELTS	PETs
number	221	192	178	176	157	64	48
Percentage	88%	76%	71%	70%	62%	25%	19%

Table 4.2: Respondents' choices of English test certificates to obtain before graduation

Among the major skills relevant to business English teaching, business English speaking skills (211) was selected as the most important skill to be stressed in

business English teaching. The second most frequently chosen item was ‘relevant business specialist knowledge’ (186) (see Table 4.3). Two respondents chose the item ‘others’, to include knowledge of Western culture and customs. English speaking and listening skills both in general and business contexts were very frequently selected. The least frequently chosen item was grammar (54).

Teaching contents	Generic English speaking skills	Generic English writing skills	Generic English Reading skills	Grammar	Generic English listening skills	Business English listening skills	Business English speaking skills	Business English writing skills	Specialist knowledge of business
number	167	72	79	54	126	180	211	124	186
Percentage	66%	29%	31%	21%	50%	71%	84%	49%	74%

Table 4.3: Skills requested in business English teaching

## 4.2 Interview findings

In ten of the twelve companies those interviewed were company owners or heads of departments. The senior workers who were always involved in the recruitment were interviewed in the other two companies. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews contained closed and open-ended questions that were the same ones asked in the questionnaires for the company workers (see Appendix 1). The differences in the questions asked in interviews were due to their exploratory nature. In interviews, subjects could explain complex or sensitive issues and answer ‘why’ questions, resulting in richer verbal accounts of the kind approved by Dornyei (2007). The answers to the closed questions are summarized in Table 4.4.

ID	Company type	Location	Company size	Involved in staff recruitment?	Job title <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Job titles are approximate translations from Mandarin. Job titles were obtained from company business cards, and in some cases did not indicate the precise role of the interviewee within the company.



SZF T1	E-business / foreign trade	SZ	70-80	Y	CEO
SZF T & M 2	Manufacturing and foreign trade	SZ	30	Y	CEO
SZM 3	Manufacturing	SZ	100	Y	Sales manager
SZF T4	E-business / foreign trade	SZ	5	Y	CEO
SZF T5	E-business / foreign trade	SZ	10	y	Manager
SZM & FT 6	Manufacturing and foreign trade	SZ	1500	Y	Senior member ,foreign sales department
SZM 7	Manufacturing	SZ	200	Y	Manager, foreign trade department
SZL 8	International logistics and export	SZ	30 staff in Shenzhen branch	Y	Assistant general manager
SZF T9	Foreign trade	SZ	10	Y	Sales supervisor
HZO S10	Online service provider	HZ	5000	Y	Supervisor proof reading
NBF T11	Foreign trade	NB	30-40	Y	CEO
JDZ M1 2	Manufacturing and foreign trade	JDZ	1000	N	Senior member, foreign sales department

Table 4.4: Company interviewee profiles

Interviews were conducted in six foreign trade companies, two manufacturing and foreign trade companies, two manufacturing companies, one logistics and one online service provider company. All of these companies required email writing and English speaking skills for good communication except the online service provider. Many clients of these companies were non-native English speakers (NNES), and English was used as a lingua franca. Table 4.5 summarizes responses from the company employers.

ID	Common uses of English	Foreign clients' countries of origin	Skills desired of graduates
SZFT1	Writing emails	USA (55%), EU (35%), Australia (10%), occasionally	Good oral and written English , relevant specialist business

		Southeast Asia and Russia	knowledge
SZFT&M2	Writing emails and attending exhibitions	EU such as Germany and France, US, Canada, and some Asian countries	Good oral and written English , relevant specialist business knowledge, good communicative ability
SZM3	Writing and reading emails	Japan, France, US, Spain	Good oral and written English, relevant specialist business knowledge , good communicative ability
SZFT4	Writing emails and sometimes telephoning	UK and US	Good oral and written English, large vocabulary, and relevant specialist business knowledge
SZFT5	Writing emails and writing English advertising descriptions of the products	UK, France and US	Good oral and written English , flexibility and relevant specialist business knowledge
SZM&FT6	Writing emails and sometimes meeting the foreign customers	all over the world	Good written and oral English in intercultural communication and relevant specialist business knowledge, good communicative ability
SZM7	Writing emails, meeting customers and telephoning	All over the world, but mainly EU and US.	Good oral English
SZL8	Writing emails and reading documents	mainly Europe, US, East Asia and India	Good written and oral English, relevant specialist business knowledge, good communicative ability
SZFT9	Writing and sometimes telephoning	Europe and America	Good written and oral English
HZOS10	Reading documents and online information	N/A	Reading skills, a large vocabulary

NBFT11	Writing emails and sometimes tele-phone making	Europe, North-America, Australia, Middle-East, Japan, Korea, India	Good written and oral English in intercultural communication; relevant specialist business knowledge, good communicative ability
JDZM12	Writing emails, sometimes meeting clients and telephoning	Middle East and Africa	Good written and oral English, and relevant specialist business knowledge, good communicative ability

Table 4.5: An overview of findings from interviews with company employers

The general information obtained from interviews with the six business English teachers is summarized in Table 4.6.

ID	BET 1	BET2	BET3	BET4	BET5	BET 6
Years of teaching experience	3+	10+	5+	6	13	33
Any work experience in a company?	N	N	N	N	N	N
Which English test do you think important?	TEM8 useful for job hunting, TOEFL/IELTS	English tests are symbolic	TEM 4 and TEM8, BEC	BEC,TEM8, CATTI	TEM8	TEM 4 and 8
Teaching content basis	Syllabus, course books, online material, intuition	Syllabus, course books, personal knowledge	Course-books, Online material	Course-books	Syllabus, Job needs, Course-books	Course books
Main teaching subject	Basic English course	Business English negotiation	Basic writing and practical writing	Business English reading	Introduction to culture of English speaking	

					countries, business oral English	
skill you emphasize in teaching	Speaking, reading, writing, listening, translating	Basic English skill especially speaking	Writing and speaking		Ability to communicate in intercultural community	
Skills you think important at work	Speaking listening, reading	Communicative Ability	Not-mentioned	Basic English skills and business specialist knowledge		
Do you consider students' need when teaching?	Yes, but Ss themselves don't know their needs	Yes, but Ss themselves not clear about their needs		Yes.	Yes	yes
Do you consider employers' need when teaching?	Yes, such as culture differences in intercultural communication in company.	No, not familiar		rarely	Yes	no

Table 4.6: An overview of findings from interviews with BETs

Interviewees frequently referred to 'basic English skills'. This was divided into six sub-nodes: speaking, listening, writing, reading, vocabulary and grammar competency. 'Speaking' was the most frequent of these and was mentioned by all five groups of interviewees. The second most frequent sub-node was 'writing' which was also found in all five sets of interview data. The findings from the interviews and the questionnaires were similar. The analysis of the interviews confirmed that the most frequent mode of using English in the companies was writing emails. Besides email writing, interviewees also prioritized speaking skills. Of the five sub-skills of speaking (telephoning, receiving foreign partners, face to face communication, attending exhibitions and meeting online), telephoning was regarded as the

most important mode of communication in English and was most frequently referred to by the company workers. The importance of oral communication skills (especially for meetings) is also stressed by Crossling and Ward (2002) and Maes and Weldy (2007), surveying company employers of business graduates in Australia. The extensive use of fax messages in the workplace in Hong Kong that was noted by Li and Mead (2000)'s study was not noted in my study.

#### 4.2.1 Business email writing in the workplace

Email is frequently used, often on a daily basis, in the international business community, especially in the sector of foreign trade where English is used as a lingua franca (ELF). To some extent email writing is more effective than face-to-face interaction, because when the speaker (S) and the hearer (H) are physically absent they have more time to think about polite forms of language, and the strategies to mitigate the face-threatening acts (FTAs); they also have time to look up vocabulary and grammatical constructions etc. When asked about what they would like to improve if they had the opportunity to return to university, one of the RGs in the focus group remarked:

‘练好写作，写作很重要。因为打电话少，写电子邮件多’  
[To improve writing, writing is very important. Because we don't have many chances to telephone, we write more emails.]

When asked about the most frequently used mode of English communication in the company, all the interviewees from the company worker group apart from HZOS 10 (a supervisor from an online service company whose main job was proofreading online documents), shared the same view that emailing (in English) was frequently used as a method of communicating with foreign customers both old and new. This contrasts with Gimenez's (2000:248) conclusion that email communication is preferred when the business relationship has already been established, but not for communications with new customers.

‘相对直接沟通的还是比较少，就是通过邮件’  
[it is relatively rare to have direct face-to-face communication, mostly just via emails.]

(SZFT1)

‘我觉得写邮件也同样重要，因为写邮件在办公室的话，每天都要写。’

[I think emailing is as important as speaking, because we have to write emails every day for office work.]

(SZFT2)

‘每天最多是读写电子邮件。’

[Reading and writing emails are most frequently used every day.]

(SZM3)

‘(日常工作)主要是写邮件这块。’

[My daily work is mainly writing emails.]

(SZFT 4)

‘平常主要是写(邮件)’

[Normally writing emails is my main job]

(SZFT5)

‘最多用的的是电子邮件。’

[The most frequently used is email]

(SZM&FT6)

‘平时工作是(邮件)写的多。’

[My most frequent job each day is writing emails.]

(SZM7)

‘每天都会写很多很多的英文电子邮件。’

[We write many, many English emails every day.]

(SZL8)

‘我目前以邮件聊为主。’

[At present, we mainly use emails to communicate.]

(SZFT9)

‘每天现在跟我们接触的国外客户，都是通过邮件沟通的。’

[Our daily communication with foreign clients is through emails.]

(NBFT11)

‘写（邮件）最多。’

[The thing we do most frequently is to write.]

(JDM12)

Business people may also prefer emailing to other modes of communication because it is more convenient and cost-saving, as the interviewee JDM 12 claimed:

现在电话沟通相对弱化，因为毕竟长途电话很贵。

[Nowadays communication via phone is less popular, because international calls are expensive.]

(JDM12)

According to Gimenez–Moreno (2011:16), ‘formality’ and ‘informality’ affect register variation (RV), but are relative to specific settings and discourse types, especially within professional communication. Email writing as a dynamic genre belongs to different registers, depending on the relationship between sender and recipient, context, individual characteristics and culture.

The level of formality of emails is reflected in the forms of language used, and also in the opening and closings. When discussing email writing at work, one RG remarked that

‘(新老客户)有差异，写 email 从开始的 dear 到 hi.’

[There is difference when writing emails to new customers and old customers, the salutation changes from ‘dear’ to ‘hi’]

Thus, in some circumstances the initiation of contact with a new customer might be quite formal, but the development of relationships with customers might result in a change in the form of address, shifting from ‘Dear Mr. or Ms. + recipient name’ to more informal greetings, for instance, ‘hi’, ‘hello’ or even no greetings.

Another RG has a different view about the greetings used in business emails, however.

12‘商务邮件就是商务邮件.除非你一开始他跟你说 hi 怎样.然后你回 hi 怎样.但是如果一开始他说 dear, 你就一定得回 dear.因为这个人就比较严谨,他就以比较商务的形势跟你交流,你就要以比较商务的形势跟他交流.’

[Business emails should have characteristics of business written formal correspondence. If the sender starts using 'hi', then you can reply with 'hi', otherwise you should reply using 'dear'. If the man you are communicating with is very strict and adopts a very formal style to write to you, you should also interact with him in the same way.]

This participant believes in the formality of business written correspondence, but thinks that workers should try to adapt their style to that of their customers.

In the busy business world hundreds of thousands of emails flood into mail boxes, which explains why business emails are often written as concisely as possible. As one RG claimed:

‘写电子邮件，用的词语要简单，而且要精简.’  
[The language used should be simple and concise.]

The following two statements are taken from a focus group interview with RGs. B initially contradicted A's statement and presented another reason why conciseness is one of the features of business emails.

A. 要简明扼要，老外不喜欢看英语这种书信的话太长  
B. 不是不喜欢看，是没时间看。像我老板一打开邮箱 1000, 2000 封叫他怎么看。

[A. It should be concise and to the point, foreigners don't like reading long business correspondence.

B: it is not a matter of liking or not liking, they just have no time to read, like my boss whenever he opens his email box, there are 1000, 2000 emails, and how can he manage to read them all?]

The need for conciseness in email correspondence and the need to enhance business relationships via 'small talk' are at odds. 'Small talk', i.e. talk about personal topics unrelated to business, is intended to enhance personal relationships. It is a type of 'safe topics' noted by Planken (2005) (see page 57).

Different views were expressed concerning the use of small talk in emails.

When the RGs were discussing the establishment of relationships with customers, they implied that 'small talk' was a lubricant, and was essential for maintaining and enhancing rapport. RGBs elaborated on the use of small talk, saying that this might



also be determined by individual customer characteristics, such as their perceived status or national culture.

跟客户多交流或促进你们的感情，交流就不会那么困难。老板一直很提倡不管你跟国外代理还是跟国内客户，都要保持很好的关系，都说没事要跟他们打招呼。

B.这个东西是因人而异，如果那个客人他坐的位置比较高。然后他注重时间，你跟他说很多，他就说你不要跟我说这么多，该谈这个就谈这个，但是有些人比如来自印度的，他们谈很多，他们不喜欢跟你一直谈 BUSINESS,要聊其他的。你聊聊其他的，再聊 BUSINESS, 然后他就更喜欢，所以不同的客人不一样。

(RG)

[A. Good relationships facilitate communication with your customers. My boss has kept suggesting that we chit-chat with our customers even in our spare time to maintain good relationships with them.

B. The use of 'chit-chat' or 'small talk' varies with each individual. If the status of that customer is quite high, or if he cares very much about time, he will prefer emails that are to the point and he won't want to talk about irrelevant topics, but some customers, for instance those from India like bringing in other non-business topics. Therefore, different customers are different.]

The employer NBFT 11 had different views about 'small talk' from the employers (RGs). He stressed the importance of efficiency in business communication where there were many emails to be dealt with and thought that 'small talk' is likely to be ignored when an instant and brief reply is needed. For this employer, 'small talk' is not usually included in business emails when the privacy of the customers is involved, or when there is more important business to be done. He accepts small talk in face-to-face communication, however, when there are fewer limitations in terms of time and space.

每个人每天都会接触几十甚至几百条这种邮件。他们不会去看你这些寒暄的话在这里面。一般都是回答他所需要问的问题。

(NBFT11)

[Everyone will receive tens even hundreds of emails every day. They won't look at 'small talk' in emails; normally they will just read the answers to questions they have asked.]

一旦你要说一些对方比较敏感的话题，太私人的东西我们都是建议发私人邮件。

[If personal private topics are to be mentioned, we suggest staff use their private email boxes.]

(NBFT11)

我们所说加这些寒暄话是在面对面的沟通中，不是在书面上。

['Small talk' should be used in face-to-face communication, but not in written communication.]

(NBFT11)

#### 4.2.2 The influence of culture on email writing

Hofstede (2001:98) defined the theory of 'power distance' (PD) as 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally'. According to Hofstede, countries with high PD tend to accept inequality of social status, whereas those with low PD uphold egalitarianism. BET 5 collected some emails from her friends' companies. She commented:

商务信函这块我就发现南美这些国家的商务信函是非常非常规范的，包括建立了商务关系的，我们现在很少用 paper letter, 大多数情况是用 email 但是即便是这种 email 形式，但是它的措辞，语言表述方式上都是很规范，反而东南亚好像反而在英语使用这方面还随意一些，我只能说是基于我手头上的资料。

(BET5)

[I found that business correspondence from South American countries is very formal, even from those who have established firm business relationships. Nowadays paper letters are rarely used, most of the time email is widely used, but even in emails they are very formal and standard in both style and language. However emails from Southeast Asian countries are comparatively casual and informal.]

BET 5's statement might indicate that email writers from different countries perceive power distance differently, and may exchange emails on a more equal or unequal basis. However it does not accord with Bjorge's (2007) findings that emails from high PD cultures tend to be more formal, at least according to Hof-

stede's view that Southeast Asian countries have high PD and stress hierarchical relationships. It seems, therefore, that national culture may not be the only factor affecting lingua franca English communication. English language proficiency also influences email writing style, and more advanced users have a wider range of language resources to employ when responding to different people under different circumstances. We also should consider that high PD does not mean that everyone is in an unequal position, for instance, writers from Southeast Asian countries might have high PD, but regard the MEMC RGs as equal or inferior in status as opposed to company bosses, who they might address much more formally. Although Hofstede regarded 'PD' as a single category, power and distance are two different things. The MEMC RGs might be very distant from the clients, but not be in an unequal power relationship with them.

#### 4.2.3 Views about grammar

The interviews with the company workers also revealed that most of their clients are non-native English speakers (NNES) who use English as a lingua franca in their communication. Different views concerning the importance of grammatical accuracy and native-like norms were noted. Two out of the ten company owners or heads of departments thought that grammatical accuracy was very important in writing while less so in oral communication. SZFT1 noted that:

口语的话，看他们的流畅性。但书面表达方面，语法的准确性是基本的考量。

[We judge their oral English in terms of fluency, whereas grammar accuracy is our basic standard to assess their written English.]

(SZFT1)

SZFT2 also had the same opinion and further explained that inappropriate use of grammar would make clients think that they were not professional:

语法这一块,我觉得在说的过程中,我不是很重视,但是在写的过程中,我个人认为语法还是要对的,在写邮件的时候,语法是错的话,就不好,让客人觉得你公司不专业

(SZFT2)

[I do not pay much attention to their grammar accuracy in the course of speaking. But I think grammar should be correct in writ-

ing emails. If grammar is incorrect, then it is not good, because it will make clients think that our company is not professional.]

One employer, SZFT 5, also stressed the importance of grammatical accuracy. He explained that he thought grammar competence reflected the professional competence of potential employees.

我肯定考虑语法，基本的专业能力，如果他的语法不过关，在国外相当于错别字。

[(When I recruit the staff), I definitely consider their grammar competence, which is the basic professional competence. If his grammar is not good, then it is like wrong spelling.]

(SZFT5)

However the majority of employers or heads of departments recognized that clients from different countries have different non-native-like accents, and that grammatical errors are frequently found in their writing as well. They attributed most importance to conveying meaning clearly. The head of foreign trade department- SZM&FT6 also noted the importance of the ability to communicate:

语法估计说实在的,其实我们原来最重点讲的是语法,现在实际上一个词知道他的意思就行了.

[What we used to stress is grammatical accuracy in schools, but actually the communication of meaning is what it needs.]

(SZM&FT6)

The employer NBFT11 also agreed that clear meaning conveyance was very important and implied that the clients would accept messages when the meaning was clear even though some grammatical errors occurred in the course of communication:

如果作为外贸业务员的,最先开始沟通,用英语沟通很重要,语法可能次要点,因为不是去比文学创作。很多时候只要把意思表达清楚,反而客户会觉得 ok。

(NBFT11)

[The most important thing at the beginning is communicative competence in English for someone who works in the foreign trade department. Grammar accuracy is not that important, because they are not meant to create literary works. The clients

would find it good enough as long as the meaning is conveyed clearly.]

The employer SZFT4 noted that potential employees should not only have a good grasp of grammar but also understand different accents of English and the different cultural backgrounds of clients:

只是看写,不看说...最主要的是词汇量,第二是语法,第三不同国家说的英语是不一样的。口音不同,你说的英语要贴切客户些吧.需要了解国外客户的文化

(SZFT4)

[(I) only stress (their) writing (skills) rather than speaking... the most important thing is vocabulary, the second is grammar, the third is that the English you use should be close to that of your clients. Different countries speak different Englishes and have different accents. (They) need to know the cultural backgrounds of clients.]

Even though these employers did not explicitly say what they meant by 'grammar', in China, in EFL contexts 'grammatical accuracy' is widely understood to mean the strict adherence to grammatical rules stipulated in grammar books and well-known dictionaries such as the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* or the *Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary*. The employers did not deny that grammar is also closely connected with meaning conveyance, and enhances communication.

Views from RGs revealed differences between what is stressed in schools and what is needed in the workplace. Their views also confirmed that in the environment of BELF, accuracy in terms of both grammar and pronunciation is secondary to general communicative competence. One RG (SZFT9 (a)) even noted that the requirement for grammatical accuracy made them feel less confident:

我们自己说也是语法要正确,语音标准,但是我们跟客户交流的话,他们就不管这些,只要说出来了,语法错误,或者语音不标准我们都听得懂。就是我们要求不一样,一定要标准才敢说。

[We always think we need to be grammatically correct and have correct pronunciation when communicating with other people, we are afraid of making mistakes, however when we communicate with clients, even though they make grammatical mistakes and have strange accents, we can understand them because they have

conveyed their meaning. For us it is a different situation, only when we are sure we make no mistakes, we are bold to speak. ]

This view from SZFT9(a) showed that the strategies such as ‘let it pass’ or ‘lack of other repair’ found in Rogerson-Revell’s study (2010, see page 60) were commonly used to accommodate linguistic differences and difficulties in real-life communication which focused on meaning conveyance rather than form.

Considering the environment of BELF, RGs suggested that BE teaching in the university should not place so much emphasis on native-like English norms, and that British or American English should not be taught as the norm for BE communication.

不要一味追求纯正的英语。教学时，拿个背景来教学不一定是欧美式。无论是那个国家开发都行，很多象外贸企业都是些小国家客户。可以弄些不纯正的英语给他们听。

[BE teaching/ learning should not blindly pursue pure native-like English. BE teaching should not treat British English or American English as the only model to learn. Most of the clients of foreign trade companies in China are from non-native English speaking countries. It can be suggested that some non-native Englishes can be introduced into the classroom, e.g. English listening classes. ]

(RGs)

On the whole, most of the employers agreed that grammatical accuracy might not be so important as long as meaning is successfully understood in the BELF environment. This is similar to Holliday (1995) who found that grammatical accuracy was not stressed by the company workers in his study. It also coincides with Kubota’s findings (2013) that ‘ability to communicate’ was more important for workers than linguistic competence.

#### 4.2.4 Views about speaking

The five groups of interviewees discussed speaking in English most frequently. Speaking is one of the sub-nodes of ‘basic English skills’, and was further subdivided into four modes of English communication: telephoning, receiving foreign partners, attending exhibitions, and online meetings. Telephoning was talked about most frequently by the interviewees especially by company employers and recent graduates of MEMC.

Speaking skills were given great importance by potential employers. Some of the fourth year students had attended job interviews and thought English speaking was important because they had been required to make oral presentations in English during their interviews. The fourth-year student group (S4) agreed that:

注重口语， 特别注重， 面试全口语，  
[[Interviewers] attached importance to English speaking;  
the whole interview was all about English speaking]  
(S4)

This point of view was corroborated by SZL 8 (an interviewee involved in staff recruitment). He claimed that:

‘面试的时间很短， 在这个阶段没有办法判断一个人英语水平怎么样， 只能通过证书， 第二通过她的口语， 基本这两方面。’  
[The interview time is short; it is difficult to judge English proficiency. Two basic ways are used, one is from their English certificates, and the other is from their oral English.  
(SZL8)

Some interviewees from the company worker group thought that speaking was very important at work and that good English speaking skills enhanced communication with foreign clients. Speaking was required mainly for telephoning and face-to-face communication with foreign clients.

在工作中用到我认为说比较重要。他们有很多机会跟客户进行面对面的交流。  
[I think speaking is very important at work. They have many opportunities to have face-to-face communication with their customers.]  
(SZFT 2)

我很看重他们的口语沟通能力  
[I paid great attention to their spoken English communication skills.]  
其实简单就是一个沟通能力， 其实起码开始你就会要说， 学会跟客户沟通。  
[Simply what matters is communicative ability; actually at the very least you should be able to speak and know how to communicate with customers in English.]  
(SZM&FT6)

我看重口语方面，流利的口语

[I attach great importance to speaking ability, fluent oral English]

Some employers also gave reasons for the importance of good English speaking skills at work.

象做外贸这块，口语固然很重要，跟客人交流也好，国外的客人是否听得懂你说的意思，那么这个跟你的口语有很大的关系。

[English speaking skills are naturally important for foreign trade. Whether foreign clients can understand you is closely related to your spoken English.]

(SZM3)

我们的公司，在海外展会很多，客户也会直接到工厂看展会，所以口语这方面还是蛮重要的。

[Our company has a lot of overseas exhibitions. Some customers also come to visit our factory, thus English is quite important.]

(SZM7)

也会考虑他们的口语水平，因为我们也有时候接到客户电话，如果你口语水平不够的话就无法跟客户进行交流。

[We also take their English speaking skill into account when interviewing them, because we sometimes have calls from our foreign customers, if your spoken English is not good enough, you can't manage to communicate with these customers.]

(SZFT9)

The student groups felt that not enough attention was given to English speaking and writing skills. For example the third- year student group (S3) wished that teachers would train them better in this respect.

口语也没有重视，写作更没有了。期望老师提高我们得口语和听力和写作

[Importance was not given to English speaking skills, even less to writing skills. We expect teachers to help improve our speaking, listening and writing in the future.]

(S3)



Interviewees from the company worker group most frequently discussed the speaking skills required for telephoning in the international business community.

经常在电话里面跟客人进行沟通

[Always communicating with customers over the phone]

(SZFT2)

The interviewees suggested that telephoning customers was very common at work, but it is costly, as noted by JDM 12, and it makes higher demands on the English speaking skills of the staff than face-to-face communication where more means can be used to aid understanding, for instance body language or contextual elements. Some staff reported that they were frightened about making calls to foreign customers.

说的话主要是打电话,目前是偶尔有,他们不敢打.

[Speaking is mainly used for telephoning, at present telephoning happens occasionally, the staff fear to make calls]

(SZFT4)

There was some suggestion from employees that business communication by phone might increase work efficiency, because the success of negotiations can be judged more accurately and problems can be solved immediately..

去沟通的话 (打电话)更能达成定单的成功率.

[Communicating via phone can increase the success rate when making deals.]

(SZFT4)

Perhaps even when emails are replied to immediately, the interaction is not as flexible as spoken interaction over the phone, because the latter allows for instant clarification. Business communication over the phone reduces decision-making time. As NBFT11 argued:

在电话里面是要当机立断。行就行，不行就不行，如果有方案提方案

[You have instant feedback when communicating over the phone - 'deal' or 'not a deal' just takes a second to decide. Sometimes the offer has to be given spontaneously.]

(NBFT11)

When asked about skills deficits one RG said,

象书写的话比较简单一点,但是如果是面对面这样,从电话之类的口语表达出来,我这方面是有欠缺的.以前就是没有好好练.

(RG)

[Writing emails seems to be relatively easy compared to face to face communication and speaking English over the phone. I am not good in this respect, and did not get good practice previously.]

SZFT4 indicated that his staff had difficulties telephoning foreign customers, and one of the RGs who was fresh from university and had worked in the company for only a few months implied that her business English teachers had neglected to teach speaking English on the telephone. Speaking on the telephone seemed to be more difficult for NNES than face-to-face communication or writing emails, because it requires instant response from the interlocutors who cannot pause the conversation or create practice drafts (see page 148 reasons of difficulty of face-to-face communication). This may explain why emailing was the most frequent mode of communication in English in the workplace, though telephoning was deemed more efficient with instant feedback and fewer constraints of time and space.

The reasons why some fear to call foreign customers were tentatively summarized by NBFT11. As the manager of a company, he enjoyed the convenience of telephoning and his English was very good. He had been an English teacher in a university for two years before becoming involved in foreign trade in 2006.

基本上 80% 的员工在电话沟通上还是有一定的欠缺。因为可能是有两方面, 一是英语水平还没有那么好, 第二可能对自己的一些专业知识没有充分的信心.

[Generally 80% of my staff is not good at communicating over the phone. This might be for two reasons, first, their level of English is not good enough, and second, they don't have full confidence in some specialist business areas.]

(NBFT11)

Interestingly, NBFT11 used a simile to describe the difference between the foreign and domestic trade offices. The office of domestic trade is very loud and lively, hence the comparison to the 'zoo', while the foreign trade office is quiet, with only the sound of typing. This was a creative way for the interviewee to highlight the importance of the medium of email in the foreign trade sector.

国内的业务都喜欢电话打个一下不停，那个办公室里面跟动物园一样，反而国外的呢，出口这方面很安静，只听见敲键盘的声音

[Telephoning is non-stop in the office of domestic trade, the noise from telephone-ringing sounds like a zoo. On the other hand, it is very quiet in the office of foreign trade, what you can hear is the sound of keyboard typing.]

(NBFT11)

NBFT11 comes to the conclusion that the two settings, the offices of domestic and foreign trade, differ in their medium of communication. English language competence is not required in the domestic trade offices, and so the merits of telephoning, efficiency, convenience and flexibility, can be brought into full play.

Both email writing and telephoning are efficient means of communication in the international business community, but different modes are preferred by company workers in different contexts of situation, depending on how urgent the matter is. According to the respondent (NBFT11), the choice of one mode of English communication over another is dependent on the specific task/topic, communicative goal/purpose. For instance, in cases where the message has legal implications, emails are preferred. Emails constitute a permanent record, which participants can refer to as evidence if necessary.

每天现在跟我们接触的国外客户，都是通过邮件沟通的。为什么要用邮件呢？这是我们所有签合同以及后续的客户服务一个书面的承诺。

[We communicate with our foreign customers through emails every day. Why do we use emails? Because an email

is like a written promise for the contract we sign with our customer and our promise for our after-service to the customer.]

(NBFT11)

#### 4.2.5 Views about standardized tests

As mentioned earlier, besides speaking skills, the employers also relied on English certificates to judge interviewees' English proficiency in the job interviews (SZL8). When RGs discussed the importance of English tests, some stated that they were not useful, and thought employers cared more about their practical ability at work. Others thought that English certificates functioned as 'keys' to finding work, and that without them they would have no chance of being interviewed.

A. 目前我我没发现英语证书有帮助。因为我没拿。对我来说它们的敲门砖意义不大。

B. 这个对我也没什么用，因为我老板根本不看什么证书，看学历，他觉得能力各方面信任得过就 OK

E. 我觉得证书也是相当于敲门砖的作用。像我们在网上找工作投简历上面都会要求本科以上，学历，有六级，专八优先考虑，首先如果你没有这个的话投了简历都没有用。在实际工作中就没有什么作用。

(RG)

[A. At present I have not found English certificates useful, because I have not passed any test, their function as 'keys' is not so meaningful.

B. They are not meaningful for me either, my boss did not care about these certificates either; he thinks practical ability at work counts for more.

E. I think these English certificates gained from passing the tests are like 'keys' to job-hunting. When we submitted CVs online for job applications, degrees and English certificates were prerequisites. Priority was given to those having CET 6 and TEM8. But these English certificates have no real use at work.]

When asked what tests were helpful for job-hunting, most teachers also thought certain English certificates helped students in finding good jobs. BET1 thought that TEM8 was favoured by most of the employers, because TEM8 is the most difficult to pass.

专八, 托福或雅思, BEC 对学生找工作有帮助, 因为专八含金量更高, 对于公司来说对英语专业的来说他肯定首选专八.

(BET1)

[TEM8, TOEFL or IELTS, BEC are helpful to students for job-seeking, but TEM8 has greater value, the company employers prefer to hire those who have passed TEM8.]

Besides TEM4 and TEM8, BET2 claimed that:

对于英语专业的学生我认为专四专八 (对他们找工作比较重要)。专四专八可以体现他们英语的水平吧, 在这些证书的前提之下如果能够再有商务英语证书的话能够给他们增加一些机会。因为在我个人来说, 商务英语证书毕竟是靠自学的的能力, 能够自己在大学里面能动的去考这个证书, 也体现了学生额外的能力和水平, 实际工作中, 商务英语证书也是有用的啊, 如果他们是从从事国贸方面的还有跟商务相关的工作都是有用的.

(BET2)

[For English majors I think TEM4 and TEM8 are quite important for finding jobs. TEM4 or TEM 8 can reflect their English level. In addition to these two tests, BEC would give them more opportunities. BEC is normally taken by the students themselves after self-study; students act on their own initiative to take this test, which shows their additional ability. BEC is helpful in real work practice if they are involved in business-related work such as foreign trade. ]

Besides these standardized tests that are thought to be helpful for job-seeking, both BET1 and BET2 stated that international public tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and BEC are widely recognized by Chinese employers.

When asked what potential employers in interviews emphasized, one of the S4 claimed that,

他要要求有 BEC, 外企, 他要问你有没有考过 BEC.

(SG4)

[BEC was requested by one of the foreign companies, the interviewer asked whether I had BEC.]

The interviewees from companies had comparable views about English test certificates. These certificates may not help at work, but they may help in job-hunting and serve as a reference for the interviewers during job interviews.

这些英语证书提供参考. 第一帮助是肯定有的, 至少是参考的标杆.

(SZFT1)

[These English certificates provide references for us. They are helpful at least like a benchmark.]

毕业的学生还没出来工作之前认为自己过了六级，八级挺不错了，但是其实你做到工作中，这些都不是最重要了。这些英语证书只是基础

(SZM3)

[These recent graduates thought that they were good enough because they had passed CET6 and TEM8. Actually after work, these English certificates are not important any more, they are just the foundation.]

这些英语证书是敲门砖。

(SZFT4)

[These English certificates are 'keys' to job-seeking.]

英语证书在工作中重要也不是很重要。但是证书有他的作用。证书可以促使学生打更坚实的基础。这是基础的东西。为了考这些证书，他可能要去复习那些英语基础的知识。招聘的时候会考虑这方面(证书)，但是面试的时候，如果他的实际能力有很好的话，没有证书我们也接受。

(SZM7)

[English certificates are not that important at work, but they have their role. These certificates can motivate students to build a more solid English foundation. They are a foundation. In order to pass these English tests, they need to practise Basic English skills. We would consider these certificates in the interview, but we would also accept someone if he performs well in the interview even without the certificates.]

我想我还是比较看重这些证书，面试的时间很短，在这个阶段没有办法判断一个人英语水平怎么样，只能通过证书

(SZL8)

[I think I give great attention to these English certificates, because the time of the interview is short, we cannot judge a person's English level within a few minutes, English certificates provide evidence.]

These comments confirm the function of these certificates as the ‘keys’ or ‘stepping stones’ (敲门砖) towards finding a job. The tests assess some Basic English skills, but speaking skills are not part of the TEM 4 and TEM8 versions used in most of the provinces in China, as BET1 points out, although speaking skills are highly required at work. Hence, it is doubtful whether these tests fully prepare students for the requirements of the business English job market.

这些英语证书（对找工作）有一定的作用，但是听说方面作用不大，在考证考试里面比较弱，听说方面没有过多考核，没有得到重视，特别是说。

(BET1)

[These English certificates for the English tests the students passed help them in job-seeking, but these English tests have examined very little speaking and listening skills, especially speaking which is not given importance.]

The findings from the questionnaires and interviews serve to answer the first sub-question, that is, ‘How do different stakeholders perceive the English language needs of BE graduates at MEMC?’ They covered a wide range of topics such as frequent modes of communication in the workplace (email writing and speaking), grammatical accuracy and the role of standardized tests.

### 4.3 Findings from text analysis

This section describes and discusses the findings from the email analysis.

Business emails are a type of socially recognized communicative action in business discourse communities and can thus be regarded as a genre (Swales 1991, Martin 1997, Yates and Orlikowski 2002:14). A chain of emails on the same topic can be seen as a genre system as defined by Yates and Orlikowski (2002:14), in that it comprises an interconnected set of communicative actions (individual business emails) that together accomplish an interaction, for example the sealing of a business deal. Individual business emails within this system often include an initial request email from the buyer side, to enquire about the product, an informing email from the seller side to describe the product, and a request email from the interested buyer to send the sample. The following structural analysis of the email

data endeavours to uncover typical features of this genre system (genre norms) which members of a business community can draw on to facilitate communication.

#### 4.3.1 The email structure

The structure of each email seems to be relatively fixed throughout the corpus, and consisted of five stages:

1. Greeting
2. The initiator: at the beginning of the emails is “safe talk” (small talk / phatic communion).
3. The development: a move back to work-related professional topics.
4. The end: more interpersonal language and sometimes emoticons 😊/ or an expression of the wish for further contact
5. Closing

However this move structure is not absolutely fixed, and some moves are obligatory (such as move 1, 3 and 5) and some are not (move 2 and move 4), perhaps due to factors such as the purpose of the communication, the relationship between the interlocutors (NRNs or ORNs), and the level of urgency. In email 1.1 below, the quite formal greeting (Dear xx) is followed by the initiator where the writer introduces herself and indulges in small talk, a type of ‘safe talk’ defined by Planken (2005). Then comes the development, the main point of the email where the writer asks for the design to be sent to her and proposes to talk about the design via Skype. At the end of the email the writer expresses her wish for future contact (*I’m looking forward to your reply*), which is also a category of ‘safe talk’, i.e. invitation for future cooperation (Planken 2005:385). This email closes in quite a formal way (*best regards*).

Dear SZ3 (a) F,  
This is SZ3 (a).  
I felt so glad to talk with you at Skype.  
How's your journey to India?  
I was on my vocation too, for 7 days....  
Hehe...  
And i'll come back to work on 8th May.  
Last week you said that your design will be ok this week .  
you can send it to me through Email,  
and then i'll give you an answer on 8th  
Also, we can talk about it at Skype this Sunday.



How do you think about it?  
 I'm looking forward to your reply.  
 Best regards,  
 SZM3 (a)

Email 1.1 (SZM3 (a) 001)

The frequent occurrence of 'small talk' contrasts with Cui's findings (2015) that Chinese immigrants in Australia have difficulty making small talk in the workplace. Cui (2015:18) claimed that 'Chinese workers 'were not experienced with small talk as it is not particularly needed for regulating interpersonal relationships in Chinese society'. I think this claim should be treated with caution, however. Small talk (hanxuan) is very common in China not only among people who know each other very well, but also among those who are at the acquaintance level, and it is more evident in interactions where there are requests for any form of help, as is the case in my data.

#### 4.3.2 The linguistic features of emails

About 26% of the clause units are elliptical. Most of the elliptical clauses are non-clausal units or 'fragmentary units' that lack finite clause structure, because some of the clausal elements such as the subject or the finite verb have been dropped, for example as in 'bad network' (SZM3 (a) 003). Biber et al. (1999) noted that ellipsis is typical of spontaneous speech, because it is essential to simplify the syntactic structure due to real-time pressures. Speakers also want to avoid unnecessary repetition in order to speed up communication.

Table 4.7 shows the greetings that occurred in the corpus, and their frequency.

Greeting	Number
No greeting	49 (16%)
Dear	157 (50%)
Hi	66 (21%)
Hello	37 (12%)

Table 4.7: Frequency of greetings

The most frequent greeting is *dear* (50%), followed by *hi* (21%), *no opening* (16%) and *hello* (12%). This confirms the findings of Li and MacGregor (2010:16) that identified similar percentages for the greetings of Hong Kong business emails. Ta-

ble 4.8 shows the closings that occurred in the corpus, and their frequency. Most emails (77%) employed closings, but a number of different forms were identified. ‘Best regards’ was the most frequent, as it was in Li and MacGregor’s study (2010). Varieties of abbreviations of ‘Best regards’ were also found in the corpus. They are listed in Table 4.8.

Closing	Number
No closing	72 (23%)
B/R	1
B/Rgds	15 (4%)
Best and kindest regards	2
Best regards	102 (34%)
Best and warmest regards	1
Best	12 (3%)
Best Rgds	8
Brgds	7
Thanks & best regards	6
Kindest Regards	45 (14%)
Regards	11
warmest regards	1
Best wishes	0
Thanks	28(8%)
many thanks	2
Total	100%

**Table 4.8: Frequency of closings**

The majority of emails employed greetings (84%) and closings (77%). Even though email is a form of fast communication in the information age, the business emails in this study still preserved greetings and closings, characteristic of conventional business letters.

A quantitative overview of clause types found in the email data is presented in Table 4.9. Each column in these tables represents a clause type that can be realized by an elliptical clauses or one that is structurally complete. Exclamative clauses, discussed by Eggins and Slade (1997), were not found in the data. The term ‘Insert’ refers to polite formulas, greetings and closings, abbreviations such as hehe and lol, and non-lexical items such as the emoticons ☺ ☹ and ^\_^.

Clause type	Declarative	insert	imperative	interrogative
Number	1239	746	223	200

Percentage	51%	30%	9%	8%
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Table 4.9: A quantitative overview of clause types (2361)

Declarative clauses (51%) are the most commonly used in the data. Biber et al. (1999:209) noted that declarative clauses ‘typically express statements and convey information’ especially in writing, and are characterised by SV (subject-verb) structure.

Imperative clauses were the second most frequent clause type that appeared in the data. According to Biber et al. (1999:221), imperatives are more frequently used in conversation than in fiction, news and academic writing. This is due to the fact that conversation is interactive, thus speakers direct the action of addressees or suggest activities involving the action of both the addressee and the speaker. Business emails are a kind of informative writing but at the same time are similar to conversation in this respect.

The word ‘Please’ and its contracted form ‘pls’ occurred very frequently. Business email communication typically demands favours from the recipient to whom it is directed, and the use of ‘please’ helps mitigate the face-threatening act. Biber et al. (1999:222) noted that ‘registers also differ with respect to the specification of the addressee and the use of softening devices.’ In Biber et al.’s data conversation had the lowest proportion of softening devices, probably due to the informal situations and intimate relationship between the interlocutors (cf. *ibid*).

The use of interrogatives (13%) is almost as frequent as that of imperatives (14%) in the data. Biber et al. (1999:211) point out that questions (both *wh*- and *yes/no* question) occur far more frequently in conversations than in writing, which shows the interactive feature of conversation, ‘with the constant give-and-take among participants’. As a form of online communication, email writing is interactive and expects responses from recipients.

Table 4.10 shows the distribution of verb forms in the corpus.

Verb form	Modal	-ed	-ing	imp	future	PASTP (Past perfect)	PP (Present perfect)	PS	PASTC (past progressive)	ZERO	PC (present progressive)
Number	220	18	49	213	147	3	76	704	1	177	55
percentage	8%	1%	2%	8%	6%	0.1%	3%	26%	0.04%	7%	2%

**Table 4.10: a quantitative overview of verb forms**

Non-modal present tense simple aspect verbs (ps) are the most frequent type in the data whereas there are only 18 occurrences of verbs in the past tense (-ed), and relatively few constructions using other aspects of the verb. (Mod) refers to modal plus finite verb constructions used to express the addresser's stance in terms of their degree of certainty, permission, obligation etc. Modals are the second most frequent verb form in the data, followed by imperatives (imp) and future aspect (future) marked by the modal and semi-modal verbs *will* and *be going to*. Biber et al. (1999:456) found that present tense verbs are more common than past tense verbs in all registers, and particularly in conversation and academic prose; the business emails in my data also show a strong preference for present tense forms.

The present simple predominated in my data, as in Cutting's study of airport ground staff dialogues (2012). According to Biber et al. the present tense is preferred in conversations because the "general focus is on the immediate context" (1999:456), and the present simple usage in the emails reflects the fact that interactions all refer to situational contexts, the 'here and now' of informing, expressing pleasure, requesting, and performing social tasks (phatic communion). Suppliers often used the present simple when informing addressees about their companies' capacity, as in 'We have all the machines in our factory', offering something to their clients, as in 'if you need an invitation card, please let me know', reassuring their clients, as in 'It is ok', and performing social tasks, as in 'Hope you well and smiling', which is an elliptical construction as the verb is missing. The present simple tense was also used frequently by clients when talking about prices, as in 'your mould cost is exceptionally high.', requesting a response, as in 'Do you have a standard version of NDA?', informing, as in 'but what we look for is something similar to your second model.', and sometimes when complaining, as in 'You want from me to order the Items and pay even you have the Items neither the photo of labels'.

Conversational features such as elliptical clauses, abbreviations, contracted forms, decapitalization, limited punctuation and non-verbal attitude markers such as emoticons and symbols such as '~', '...' were frequently observed. The informal conversational features further demonstrate that business emails share many of

the characteristics of spoken conversations, as claimed by Gimenez (2000) and Gimenez-Moreno (2010). The non-verbal attitude markers reflect the influence of internet-based communication generally. The following extracts from the email data exemplify the similarity between business emails and everyday conversation, and also the differences. They show that email interlocutors use visual resources not available in speech.

Nov.2 is National day in Brazil, right? Just have fun and forget all these annoying stuffs. :) (SZL8(s) 271)  
lol... thanks Daniel.It was a great Holiday, unfortunately it's over:( (SZL8(S) B270)  
You rock!:) (SZL8(S) B269)  
NOw I understoooooooooooood! (SZL8(S) B260)  
cuz Kenny is out of office now. I will send u the complete one be4 u get off work. (SZE211)

However, the omnipresence of greetings and closings and the relatively fixed discursive pattern suggest that business emails also embody the characteristics of conventional business letters. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that business email combines the features of conversation and conventional business letters.

Most of the emails are characterized as friendly, informal and conversational, which is a 'balanced style' according to Liu (2011). Liu's balanced style features commonly present in the corpus include phonetic spellings ('u' 'be4'), internet acronyms ("FYI""THX"), contractions, subject drop or verb 'be' deletion in questions ("everything ok?"), paralinguistic symbols (upper case, multiple vowels ("sooo")), multiple punctuation marks (!!!),and emoticons. These are illustrated in the email extracts above.

#### 4.3.3 Analysis of an email example from the textbook

I briefly described the Business English Writing Course at MEMC in Chapter 1. There are noticeable differences between the single email example in the course textbook (see below) and authentic emails from my corpus. The email example from the textbook has no greeting, and the textbook says that 'usually people do not start an email message with a salutation, for they think the message is only

intended as an internal memo' (Su 2007:168, see Appendix 9). This does not match my email data or my findings from the interviews and questionnaire surveys, which suggest that business English emails are used very frequently for external communication with foreign clients. Most of the emails in my corpus contained an opening salutation. The textbook email is a request for payment, and has a very unconventional closing (regretfully). The email does not contain the informal and non-verbal features which are frequently found in my corpus, although the textbook does mention the influence of internet-based communication, leading to conversational features in business emails. The professional formal register (Gimenez-Moreno (2011) predominates in the textbook example, and it has a clear paragraph structure. The consistent use of the institutional first person plural pronoun 'we' indicates professionalism (Planken 2005). The final part is similar to the emails in my corpus in some respects, as the tone becomes more relaxed (we all liked working with you and are proud of the results you have been getting). The last sentence expresses the writer's wish for further cooperation, using the first person singular (I will be pleased to see our paths cross again under better circumstances), and the textbook points out that 'the tone can be varied, depending on different situations' (Su 2007:167). However there is no mention of any pragmatic strategies to build rapport with clients, and a single example is not sufficient to illustrate the many different characteristics of business emails.

We have not received a satisfactory response to the issue raised in our email of 17<sup>th</sup> May regarding bills. We are therefore obliged to resign your account, effective on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Your payment are due for all unpaid invoices and for all work in progress as of this date. Upon receipt of your payment in full we will transfer all artwork, materials, and copy files. We are doing this with much regret. We all liked working with you and are proud of the results you have been getting.  
I am pleased to see our paths cross again under better circumstances.  
Regretfully  
Qiao Ni  
Senior Vice-President

An email sample from the textbook

#### 4.3.4 Functional analysis of emails

The following part presents the findings of functional analysis of clauses in the corpus.

Table 4.11 lists the most frequent clause functions. The most frequent function was ‘inform’, occurring in 28% of all clauses in the corpus used in this study. This was followed by request (13%), greeting (12%), closing (11%), and phatic (10.8%).

Functions	Number	percentage
Greeting	290	12%
closing	282	11%
inform	671	28%
request	363	13%
Offer	36	1.5%
promise	65	2.8%
reassure	13	0.5%
confirm	11	0.4%
complain	19	0.8%
Thank	159	6.7%
Metatext1	24	1%
phatic	256	10.8%
Metatext2	26	1.1%
suggest	25	1.1%
expressive	21	1.0%
grounder	63	2.6%

**Table 4.11: Overview of clause functions**

It has been established that the mood structures of emails did not automatically have one-to-one mapping with their functions. Several different clause types could realize the same function. This also confirms an important feature of speech acts, namely that there can be differences between the locutionary and illocutionary force of an utterance.

Although declaratives usually ‘convey information’, they can also have other speech act functions in conversation and fictional dialogue, such as asking for information, usually signalled by rising intonation in conversation or in writing by a question mark (Biber et al.2002:249).

Twenty-four types of speech act identified in my data were typically realised by declarative structures (see below). The declarative clauses in my corpus (1239) include full clauses and elliptical clauses.

- Apologize (18/1239), e.g. *I apologize for my late reply* (SZM3(b)A108)
- Complain (14/1239), e.g. *I have a problem with quality of Items* (SZFT9 (a) Se144).
- Confirm (9/1239), e.g. *Tomorrow morning arround 11:30 is ok with us* (SZM3 (a) 048).

- Confirm + inform (9/1239), e.g. *Yes. However, your group has to meet 100sqm as min. requirement (SZEHK170)*
- Expressive (18/1239), e.g. *I'm so glad that you've amended your designs (SZM3(a)048).*
- Grounder (41/1239), e.g. *Today i was very busy(SZM3(a)016),*
- Grounder + inform (7/1239), e.g. *as we were unable to reach you earlier today I would like to give you detailed information about the IFA Virtual Market Place– the official IFA online directory 2011(SZEG252).*
- Inform (661/1239) e.g. *Abe, the price i offered you last time is only an estimate price (SZM3(a)082),*
- Inform+ thank (2/1239) e.g. *All well noted with many thanks Sophia ! (SZM3(a)F015)*
- Metatext1(24/1239) e.g. *Here I'd like to give you an introduction about our company. (SZM3(a)044)*
- Metatext2 (26/1239) e.g. *Here attached the quote (SZM3(a)055),*
- Phatic (164/1239) e.g. *I hope you well and smiling (SZM3 (a) 082).*
- Offer(87/1239) including two clauses that combine the function of a grounder and an offer, e.g. *About the design, i'll send you later, cause i just took over this and have to get a clue about this case(SZM3(a)076).*
- Reassure (6/1239) e.g. *If there are any samples in my request which are not available at the moment, it is ok (SZM3(a)R036),*
- Request (28/1239) e.g. *I would like to confirm that whether the booth #338 and 339 are still available(SZE171),*
- Suggest (23/1239) e.g. *But if you have time you can have a visit here (SZM3(a)044),*
- Thank (59/1239) e.g. *Thank you very much for your kind explanation(SZM3(a)HK045)*

(NB: the clauses that are underlined function as grounders)

The most noticeable functions of declaratives found in the data are inform (55%), phatic expressions (which build rapport) (14%), and offer (5%).



Imperatives were used fairly frequently to ask for action from the recipients or make suggestions for action from both the writer and the recipients. Table 4.12 presents an overview of the way imperative clauses functioned in my data

Functions	request / metatext <sup>3</sup>	grounder	inform	offer	phatic	reassure	request
Number	19	1	7	26	24	5	131
Percentage	8	0.4	3	12	11	2	61

**Table 4.12: Overview of functions of imperative clauses**

Quantitatively, it is very obvious that most imperatives function as requests functions predominate (131 occurrences, which equal 61 %). After a big gap, this is followed by phatic functions (24 occurrences, which equal 11 %). All the six other functions shown in Table 4.40 occur very infrequently and have percentages of fewer than 10 %. Below are some examples of realisations of the two most frequent functions, request and phatic:

- Request: e.g. *pls check it.* (SZM3 (a) 055); *so give us some more time* (SZM3 (a) HK073).
- Phatic: e.g. *Have a nice day!* (SZM3 (a) 011); *keep in touch and many thx for your email.* (SZM3 (b) HK106).

Table 4.13 gives an overview of the different functions realised by interrogative clauses.

Function	complaining	phatic	request	suggest
Number	5	27	167	2
Percentage	2.5	13.4	83	1

**Table 4.13: Overview of functions of interrogative clauses**

Below are some examples of realisations of the three most frequent functions:

- Request: e.g. *so can we pick the diamond case out this time?* (SZM3 (a) 035); *Would u pls let us know what's your idea about what we suggested?* (SZM3(b)086);
- Phatic: e.g. *How are you?* (SZM3 (a) 082); *Is everything going well?* (SZM3 (b) 085).

<sup>3</sup> These two categories have been merged together, and are marked with a forward slash (/).

The clause “Please go ahead” from SZL8(S) B265 might easily have been interpreted as a ‘request’ if read in isolation, because imperative clauses are often associated with requests for action. However the previous email SZL8(s) 264 ends by saying *Now, please confirm if everything is OK to ask Maersk to arrange equipment reposition.* The response of SZL8(S) B265, *please go ahead* should thus be interpreted as a confirmation.

According Gumperz (1982) the meanings of contextual cues are implicit, and contextualizing cues, i.e. any extra-linguistic or linguistic features, provide an indication of contextual presuppositions. Extra-linguistic signals can be found in the setting and the participants’ previous knowledge before the interaction. Linguistic signals include the semantic content, the syntactic paradigm. In business email communication; readers can refer to previous email exchanges, emoticons, punctuation, and their previous knowledge of the business conventions in their trade for contextual support. Nevertheless with computer-mediated communication such as emailing, the meaning constructed by the writer is more difficult to interpret than it is with face-to-face communication, where it is possible to receive immediate clarification.

Grice’s co-operative principle (1975) attempted to explain how an addressee might interpret speech act functions, given that both the addresser and the addressee refer to a set of broad shared conventions about what to expect from conversation. In email exchanges both sides have good intentions to be understood and to understand, and in business communication it is necessary to be explicit concerning transactions, product information, shipping, payment etc.

Rich contextual information offered in email chains and interlocutors’ following the co-operative principle help avoid miscommunication. No evidence of miscommunication was found in my corpus, even though the emails contained some grammatical mistakes, (for example in terms of subject-verb agreement, punctuation and misspelling) and the use of English was often unconventional (as in *Hope you are well and smiling; Here attached ...* etc.). Correspondents seem to have understood each other’s communicative intentions, although it is possible that I may have missed some instances of miscommunication in cases where the email chain was not complete.

Although one of the RGs (SZFT9 (a)) claimed that she was cautious about making mistakes, some non-standard usages such as lack of subject-verb agreement and objects after the transitive verbs were also found in her emails, for example, 'We have taken due note of your requirements for the part RG2T-12V & CF050P2S-003-00DS but regret being unable to supply at present.' in the email SZFT9 (a) 122. The grammar rules the students learnt from MEMC and at school state that transitive verbs must be followed by an object, and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* indicates that 'supply' is a transitive verb and is always followed by an object (as in 'supply somebody with something' or 'supply something to somebody'). Meanings were generally conveyed quite directly in emails, except in the case of requests, which were often foregrounded with a statement of the reason(s) for the request. Readers, however, could always refer to the whole text and locate the main head act, whereas in spoken negotiation listeners have to first process any statements that do not seem to be directly to the point. Especially in cultures where the listeners themselves favour a direct-self-explanatory way of making points (as they have been claimed to do in the USA), this can lead to difficulties interpreting points made in an indirect way (as they have been claimed to be made in Brazil) (Garcez 1993).

An email exchange (see Table 4.14) between a Chinese donor (TZM (a)) and her German client (TZM (a) G) illuminates different communication styles. Germany is reportedly a low-context culture where people explicitly and directly express their point and the message carries most of the meaning, whereas China is reportedly a high-context culture where people communicate indirectly, stress rapport and rely more heavily on contextual cues such as tone, facial expressions and body language to convey meaning (Hall 1976). The German writer (TZM (a) G) was very direct (*we have no time to play; Why playing such a long time?*) and this might have caused offense if the interlocutor was not aware of the effect of cultural differences. The Chinese writer (TZM(a)) seemed to avoid confronting the questions that were proposed by her German client. She apologized first and without explaining the issue she simply replied *it is a pity*. Probably she took it for granted that her German writer would intuitively understand what had happened previously.

TZM(a) G295	Functions TZM(a) G295	TZM(a)296	Functions TZM(a)296
Dear TZM(a),	Greeting	Dear TZM(a)G,	greeting
You know time is very expensive in our side	Grounder	Hi	greeting
and we have no time to play.	Complaining	I am sorry to waste your time.	apologizing
The order is still in producing now from another factory who has provide us the pre production samples very quickly and very nice	Inform	But we also payed more attention and energy to it.	inform
Half of the order is still shipped now to the same price we offered to you.	Inform	It is a pity.	inform
To be frankly with you, my first idea when you accepted the price was to give you the order.	Inform	Best regards, TZM(a)	closing
But with the time going, your unstable management decisions and also you could not provide the good samples	Complaining		
we splited the order and gave to another much more stable factory half of the order.	Inform		
As you once more changed your mind when we visited you,	Complaining		
we confirmed the second half to the other factory	Inform		
The second part is still in production now.	Inform		
We very clearly and honestly have give you our target price and you accepted it.	Inform		
Why not refuse immediatly if you cannot or don't want to do ?	Complaining		
Why playing such a long time ?	Complaining		
I hope you can understand.	Phatic		
Cordiales salutations Best Regards	Closing		

**Table 4.14: An email exchange between a Chinese donor (TZM(a)) and her Germain client**

My email corpus includes 33 native speaker emails written by an American client (SZEa). A change in his use of greeting was found from 'dear +first name' at the beginning of the correspondence to first name terms later on. He was the only one that used the recipient's first name without greeting in the corpus. Most request emails written by him were direct without grounders. The Chinese donor (SZE) he

was corresponding with made little use of 'small talk' and her emails were written in the 'professional' style as characterised by Gimenez-Moreno (2011). America is also regarded as a low-context culture (Hall 1976), and this may explain the direct writing style of this American client. However the Chinese donor he corresponded with also seemed to be rather direct and did not indulge in small talk. Therefore the communication style did not seem to be solely influenced by high or low context culture.

#### 4.3.5 Analysis of an email chain

Most emails were embedded within a chain of messages, usually under the same subject header. Altogether 86 chains of emails were identified. The longest chain had 22 emails. Though some emails within certain chains had different subjects, all messages in emails chains were written in direct response to the previous email in the chain.

This section will examine one chain of emails to see whether there is register variation in these email exchanges. As noted earlier register variation (RV) (Gimenez-Moreno 2011:16), is affected by 'formality' and 'informality' which are relative to specific settings and discourse types. This chain was chosen at random, and happens to be the first email chain coded in the corpus. It contains eight emails exchanged between the email donor SZM3 (a) who works in a foreign trade company in Shenzhen and her French client. The average length of emails in this chain is about eight lines.

The first email (1.1) (see Table 4.15) of this chain has features of a professional formal register as characterised by Gimenez-Moreno (2011). According to Gimenez-Moreno the noticeable features of the professional formal register are a formal greeting and closing, primary functions of request and inform, accurate grammar and spelling a clear paragraph structure, frequent modal verbs to show politeness and professionalism, formal vocabulary, traditional formats and the tendency to use a more relaxed tone towards the end of the email (Gimenez-Moreno 2011:24 see page 65). In email 1.1 the opening (i.e. *Dear xx*) and ending (i.e. *Best regards*) are formal and polite. It has a clear paragraph structure with a statement of purpose, and phatic communion appears at the beginning of the email

with the purpose of building rapport (*How's your journey to India?; I was on my vacation too, for 7 days...; hehe... And i'll come back to work on 8th May.*). The request (*you can send it to me through email*) is preceded by a grounder (*Last week you said that your design will be ok this week.*). The writer uses a conventional phatic expression to express their wish to receive a reply from the recipient (i.e. *I'm looking forward to your reply.*). However the email also contains some characteristics of the professional casual register (Gimenez-Moreno 2011), such as the use of a dotted line '...' to imply additional meaning, and the use of colloquial vocabulary. The use of '...' occurs at the end of the clause *I was on my vocation [vacation] too, for 7 days...* implying that this was a relatively long break. This is followed by *hehe*, suggesting laughter, and probably intended to have a mitigating effect to soften the tone of the email, laying the ground for the request, because request-making might impose on the addressee's negative face, i.e. freedom of action (Brown and Levinson 1978). Alternatively it might also help mitigate the threat to the writer's own face as she has to admit that she has been on holiday rather than working. The next part of the email is business-related, requesting the recipient to send the design.

Text	Function
Dear Isabelle,	Greeting
This is Sophia	Inform
I felt so glad to talk with you at Skype.	Expressive
How's your journey to India?	Phatic
I was on my vocation too, for 7 days....	Inform
Hehe...	Mitigating
And i'll come back to work on 8th May.	Inform
Last week you said that your design will be ok this week .	Grounder
you can send it to me through Email,	Request
and then i'll give you an answer on 8 <sup>th</sup>	Offer
Also, we can talk about it at Skype this Sunday.	Suggest

How do you think about it?	Request
I'm looking forward to your reply.	Phatic
Best regards, SZM3(a)	Closing

**Table 4.15 Email 1.1**

Email 1.2 (see Table 4.16) is a reply from the French client of SZM3 (a). This email begins with a greeting in the professional formal register. However the closing is an abbreviated form of 'best regards', i.e. B/Rgds, and abbreviated language belongs to the professional casual register (Gimenez-Moreno 2011). The professional neutral register predominates in this email. The direct request *can you help me in this way?* is preceded by the grounder *I don't know which material to use or which proposal is more convenient for you to quote*. The addresser wants to get a confirmation from the addressee. Without directly asking for confirmation, she states the reason for the request and also considers the addressee's negative face by turning the request for information into a request for help. It can boost the face of the addressee to ask for his help, because it makes the addressee assume some kind of power; whether the addressor's positive face (wants) can be satisfied thus seems to be something that the addressee can determine.

Text	Function
Dear SZM3(a)	greeting
I come back to you with different proposals of covers for I phone 3 and 4.	inform
I don't know which material to use or which proposal is more convenient for you to quote,	inform
can you help me in this way ?	request
Thank you very much	expressive
B/Rgds SZM3(a)F	closing

**Table 4.16 Email 1.2**

Email 1.3 (see Table 4.17) was written by SZM3(a) and is in the professional casual register, with the casual greeting 'Hello xx', ellipses such as *bad network* to imply the reason for the late reply, and deletion of subject and finite verb (*sorry for*

*sending it a little late* rather than *I am sorry...*). *Hehe* is used to mitigate the FTA concerning the delay, which might damage the recipient's positive face. 'Hehe' also seems to save the writer's negative face when admitting she was late.

Text	Function
Hello SZM3(a)F,	Greeting
Sorry for sending it a little late.	Apologizing
Hehe....	mitigating
bad network	Inform
Best regards, SZM3(a)	Closing

**Table 4.17 Email 1.3**

Email 1.4 (Table 4.18) was written by SZM3 (a)'s French client SZM3(a)F . Both the greeting and closing are casual. The writer uses elliptic declaratives rather than interrogatives to realise the questions, e.g. *based on a black or white cover material? Just print our logo?*

Text	Function
SZM3(a)	greeting
I checked your different proposals with many thanks !	inform
Indeed, mold cost is too expensive compared to our budget , even if we do quantities all a long the year.	complaining
SO, could you propose me an existing mold ? based on a black or white cover material ? Just print our logo ?	request
Thanks	expressive
B/Rgds SZM3(a)F	closing

**Table 4.18 Email 1.4**

Email 1.5 (see Table 4.19) was written by SZM3(a) to her French client. The greeting 'hello xx' is casual, and *please* is abbreviated to its shortest form *pls*. The sentences are short and concise. In this email, casual forms predominate, providing evidence of a more casual register.

Text	Function



Hello SZM3(a)F,	greeting
Here enclosed your designs that have existing mould.	metatext2
Pls check it .	Request
If there's any problem, pls contact me soon.	Offer
Best regards, SZM3(a)	Closing

**Table 4.19 Email 1.5**

Email 1.6 (see Table 4.20) was a reply from the French client. It resumes the professional formal greeting (i.e. Dear xx) but the closing is casual. The email mixes the professional formal register with a casual register, (e.g. in the third clause *Again many thanks for your interest.* and the third clause *One more question. Pls find the attached design.*) with quite relaxed syntax (elliptic clauses) and highly abbreviated language.

Text	Function
Dear SZM3(a)	Greeting
We will come back to you tomorrow after finalizing our selection .	Offer
Again many thanks for your interest.	Expressive
We will try to give you also quantities,	Offer
don't worry but we have to discuss about this tomorrow	Reassuring
One more question . Pls find the attached design.	Request
Is this one workable too on your opinion ?	Request
Pls tell me	Request
Thanks	Expressive
B/Rgds SZM3(a)F	Closing

**Table 4.20 Email 1.6**

In Email 1.7 (see Table 4.21), SZM3 (a) follows the example of her French client and resumes the use of a professional formal greeting. She also uses a relatively

formal closing i.e. a full form of *Best regards*. The email is in a professional formal register although there is occasional use of contracted forms (e.g. I'll) and towards the end the register changes towards a casual social register (i.e. *have a nice day!*).

Text	Function
Dear SZM3(a)F,	Greeting
I'm checking your new designed case.	Inform
And I'll give you my answer about it when we talk today.	Offer
I'm looking forward to talking with you later.	Phatic
Best regards, SZM3(a)	Closing

**Table 4.21 Email 1.7**

The last email of the chain (1.8) (see Table 4.22) was from the French client and is characteristic of the professional casual register. It has no greetings and a casual closing (an abbreviated form of *best regards*). It also uses highly abbreviated language such as *pls*.

Text	Function
Thanks SZM3(a)	expressive
My husband is also discussing with the Manager of the brand to decide today	inform
Pls keep me informed	request
B/Rgds SZM3(a)F	closing

**Table 4.22 Email 1.8**

None of these emails conform to one specific register from beginning to end. The oscillations between different registers within the same email accord with the findings of Gimenez-Moreno (2010). Chains of email exchanges mix professional formal and professional casual and sometimes purely casual registers. This variation shows that registers vary not only according to the particular communicative setting but also according to the particular communicative purpose. The more professional formal register is used for business-related topics, but when giving more

personal information relating to holidays, sports and other activities a more casual register is used to mitigate the tone, with the introduction of discourse strategies such as non-verbal cues (e.g. '...', *hehe* and emoticons) to mitigate face-threatening acts. It is also noteworthy that in this chain the interlocutors seem to copy each other's writing style. When one uses a more formal greeting, the other often responds similarly. This imitation of register helps to reduce power differentials and indicates the writer's wish to be regarded as a peer of the interlocutor. Gimenez-Moreno (2010) noted that register variation might help to facilitate communication and improve relationships. The emails in my corpus also suggest that the writers were aware of the need to mix professional formal, casual and sometimes neutral registers to make a good impression and promote warm feelings.

#### 4.3.6 The Move structure of request emails

In this section I will analyse and discuss the move structure of the request emails written by the Chinese donors.

Kong's (1998) seven-move structure framework for business request letters was used to analyse my corpus of business request emails (see section 3.3.4).

Altogether 154 emails were identified as having the overarching purpose of either directing the recipients to perform some actions, or requesting information. These were classed as request emails. Altogether 80 request emails were written by email donors, and 74 request emails were written by clients of email donors. The countries of origins of these clients are Thailand, Dubai, Singapore, Brazil, France, Hong Kong, Japan, Russia, Vietnam, and America.

Table 4.23 shows the move structures of all the request emails written by one mainland Chinese email donor SZM3 (a). Nine out of the eleven emails have either phatic expressions or Move 3 (providing background information) before Move 2 (the request). Additionally, the request moves in these nine emails are followed by either justification moves concerning the background situation or mitigating moves that help mitigate potential face-threatening acts. Only one email, SZM3 (a) 042, contains neither a justification of the situation move nor a mitigating move before or after the request. Table 4.24 shows that it is a reply to a concise email

(SZM3 (a) HK041) from a Hong Kong client concerning a change to an appointment. The first move of SZM3 (a) 042 (Move 1) refers to the previous email contact and reassures the client that the proposed change to the visit date is acceptable.

SZM3(a)082	SZM3(a)035	SZM3(a)055	SZM3(a)052	SZM3(a)042	SZM3(a)072	SZM3(a)068	SZM3(a)062	SZM3(a)001	SZM3(a)021	SZM3(a)076
Phatic Move6 Move2 Move5 Move4 move2 Move7 phatic	Move3 Move2 Move6 Move3 Move2 Phatic Move3 Phatic Move7 Move3 Phatic	phatic move1 move2 move4 move6 move7 phatic	Phatic Move2 Move4 Move6 phatic	Move1 Move2	Phatic Move2 Phatic Move7	Move2 Move 4 Move7	Move1 Phatic Move2 Phatic Move7	Move1 Phatic Move4 Move2 Move5 Move6 Move7	Move3 Move2 Phatic	move3 move2 move3 phatic move6 move4 move7

Table 4.23: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZM3 (a)

Code	In/out	line	function	Overarching purpose	Text
SZM3(a)HK042	IN	10.5.1	greeting	Apologize	Hi SZM3(a)
SZM3(a)HK042	IN	10.5.2	apolo-gize	Apologize	I am sorry,
SZM3(a)HK042	IN	10.5.3	inform	Apologize	due to our sudden change of schedule, we cannot visit your factory on this coming Saturday.
SZM3(a)HK042	IN	10.5.4	apolo-gize	Apologize	Sorry about this.
SZM3(a)HK042	IN	10.5.5	closing	Apologize	Thanks
SZM3(a)HK042	IN	10.5.6	Name	Apologize	SZM3(a)HK
SZM3(a)042	OU T	10.6.1	greeting	Request	Hello SZM3(a)HK,
SZM3(a)042	OU T	10.6.2	Confirm	Request	It's ok.
SZM3(a)042	OU T	10.6.3	Request	Request	When will you come ?
SZM3(a)042	OU T	10.6.4	Request	Request	Would you pls inform me a date?
SZM3(a)042	OU T	10.6.5	Closing	Request	Kindest regards,
SZM3(a)042	out	10.6.6	Name	Request	SZM3(a)

Table 4.24: email exchange between SZM3 (a) &SZM3 (a) HK

Table 4.25 gives an overview of move structures of request emails written by the email donor SZM3 (b). The request move in most of her request emails (four out of five emails) comes after informing about the situation, justifying the request for response, or some sort of phatic communion. Move 1, referring to a previous enquiry, appears in two emails and is realized with the same sentence: 'Thanks for your inquiry'. This clause has the pragmatic function of thanking; however in terms of move structure analysis it can also be interpreted as a reference or re-

response to the previous email exchange. SZM3 (b) 086 is reproduced below. It was written to elicit feedback from the potential client after there had been no response to an earlier email introducing the SZM3 (b) company product. Before the real request is made the writer of SZM3 (b) 086 asks two seemingly irrelevant questions that are not business-related based on the preceding correspondence. The two questions have a phatic pragmatic function, equivalent to ‘how are you?’, and the writer would not expect answers from the recipient. Asking vague questions or making general statements before an intended request can be regarded as a mitigating discourse strategy.

This is SZM3 (b)  
 Chris, how about your programme of the case based on your unique design with name card?  
 Is it going well?  
 Would u pls let us know what's your idea about what we suggest  
 Chris, Pls feel free to contact me.

SZM3(b)086

SZM3(b)086	SZM3(b)091	SZM3(b)092	SZM3(b)096	SZM3(b)098	SZM3(b)100
Move3 Move6 Move2 Move7 Phatic	phatic move3 move1 move3 move2 move7 phatic	Move5 Move3 Move4 Move2 Move5 Move6 Move7	Move1 Move2 Move4 Move3 Move2 Move4 M0ve7	Move3 Move1 Move3 Move4 Move2 Move3 Move2 Move4 Move7	Move1 Move4 Move2 Move7 Phatic

Table 4.25: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZM3 (b)

The request email SZFT&M2 (a) 111 was written by the email donor SZFT&M2 (a). It is reproduced below. Its move structure is shown in Table 4.53, it can be seen that the request move was delayed to the very end of the email before the cordial conclusion. Move 1 in SZFT&M2 (a) 111 was a reference to the previous email and had the function of apologizing. Before the request Move 2, background information was given (Move 3) about the reasons for the broken Martini glasses. The move structure of SZFT&M2 (a) 113 is also shown in Table 4.26. It has only two moves, to direct the recipient to an attachment containing information requested by the recipient in the previous email.

Sorry to you for the broken martini glass.  
 We send the martini sample to your courier company and first they will open the box to check the sample. Then repack it to send to you.but when they repack the sample, they are not the professional packer like us,and the martini cup is easily fragile.All of these reasons result in the broken martini.  
 If you can give us other express account number such as DHL,FedEX which can arrive at you directly, it must be better.  
 Cindy,could you tell me why you just need samples and where are your clients from.

Awaiting your quick response.

SZFT&M2(a)111	SZFT&M2(a)113
Move1 Move3 Move2 Move7	Move3 Move2

**Table 4.26: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZFT&M2 (a)**

Table 4.27 shows the move structures of three request emails written by the email donor SZFT1 (a). SZFT1 (a) 115 starts with a request move. This was an urgent request to the client to check his address and was followed a justification (Move 4). This email contains more than one request move.

SZFT1(a)115	SZFT1(a)118	SZFT1(a)119
Move2 Move4 Move2 Move4 Move2	Move3 Move1 Move2 Move7	Move3 Move2

**Table 4.27: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZFT1 (a)**

Table 4.28 shows the move structures of the request emails from the email donor SZFT9 (a). Six request emails out of the nine started with the request move, five of which were followed by a commitment (promise or reassurance), e.g. ‘we will try our best to help you.’ or ‘We are aiming at building a stable business relationship with you.’ The moves in the request emails written by SZFT9(a) follow a relatively more fixed order in that the request move (Move 2) is always followed by a cordial move (Move 7), expressing commitment or the wish to have further contact with the recipient.

SZFT9(a)128	SZFT9(a)147	SZFT9(a)149	SZFT9(a)143	SZFT9(a)142	SZFT9(a)134	SZFT9(a)131	SZFT9(a)156	SZFT9(a)153
Phatic Move2 Move7 phatic	Move2 Move7	Move3 Move2	Phatic Move2 Move7	Move2	Move2 Move7	Phatic Move3 Move2 Move7	Move1 Move2 Move7	phatic move2 move7

**Table 4.28: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZFT9 (a)**

Of the 30 request emails written by the SZE email donors, five started with a request move (see Table 4.29) and in all the rest the request move was delayed. Eleven emails started with a reference to the previous email. Seven started by thanking the recipient for the email; I think this can be regarded as a phatic func-

tion rather than a genuine expression of thanks. Two started by apologizing for the delay in replying (e.g. *I am sorry for the late reply*), and the others started by informing the recipient about the attachment.

SZE182	SZE23 2	SZE23 4	SZE236	SZE23 8	SZE24 0	SZE22 5	SZE22 7	SZE22 9	SZE24 2	SZE21 9
Move1 Move2 Move3 Move6 Move3 Move2 Move7	Phatic Move4 Move2 Phatic	Move1 Move4 Move2 Move7	Move1 Move4 Move2 Move7	Move2 Move7	Phatic Move3 Move2 Move7	Move2 Move7	Move1 Move2 Move7	Move1 Phatic Move2 Move7	Move3 Move2 Move6 Move7	Move2 Move7
SZE206	SZE20 9	SZE21 3	SZE194	SZE19 6	SZE19 8	SZE20 2	SZE20 4	SZE17 9	SZE25 0	SZE17 3
Move3 Move4 Move2 Move7	Move4 Move2 Move7	Move1 Move3 Move2 Move7	Phatic Move1 Move4 Move2 Move7	Move1 Move4 Move2 Move7	Phatic Move4 Move2 Move6 Move4 Move7	Move1 Move4 Move2 Move4 move2 Move7	Move2 Move7	Move6 Move2 Move4 Move2 Move6 Move7	Move1 Move2	Move2 Move6 Move7
SZE169	SZE17 1	SZE16 4	SZE166	SZE18 4	SZE18 6	SZE19 0	SZE25 5			
Move1 Move4 Move2	Phatic Move4 Move2 Move7	Move3 Phatic Move4 Move2 Move7	Move3 Move2 Move4 Move7	Move3 Phatic Move4 Move2 Move7	Move3 Move1 Move5 Move2 Move7	Move1 Move3 Move2 Move6	Move3 Move6 Move4 Move2 Move7			

**Table 4.29: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZE**

In Table 4.30 it can be seen that the request move was delayed in all three request emails written by SZL8(s). It was preceded by several moves containing background information. In SZL8(s) 264 and SZL8(s) 257 a cordial move (Move 7) occurred after the request, expressing the wish for further contact e.g. *looking forward to your reply*.

SZL8(s) 264	SZL8(s)25 7	SZL8(s) 256
Move3 Move2 Move7	move3 move4 move2 move7 move3 move7	Move3 Move2 Move3

**Table 4.30: An overview of move structures of request emails from SZL8(s)**

In Table 4.31 it can be seen that the request move was also delayed in NBFT11's request emails. In these emails the request moves were preceded by moves con-

taining background information, and were followed by either a justification or further background information.

NBFT11(a)283	NBFT11(a)281	NBFT11(a)277	NBFT11(a)275	NBFT11(a)273
Phatic Move3 Move2 Move4 Move6	Move1 Move3 Move2 Move4	Phatic Move2 Move7	Phatic Move2 Move3 Move6	Move1 Move3 Move2 Move3 Move6

Table 4.31: An overview of move structures of request emails from NBFT11 (a)

Table 4.32 shows the move structure of TZM (a) 2's request emails. This writer seems to have a relatively direct strategy, as she poses her requests at an early stage. The email TZM (a) 300 has only one request move, to check whether the recipient had received the product. In this case the client already has an established trade relationship with TZM (a).

TZM(a)298	TZM(a)300	TZM(a)306	TZM(a)292
Phatic Move4 Move2	Move2 Move3 Move2 Move7	Move2	Move2 Move7

Table 4.32: An overview of move structures of request emails from NBFT11 (a)

About 24% of these request emails, written by eight different Chinese donors, started directly with a request move. Out of the eight request emails from the only American writer to feature in the corpus, only two (SZA230 and SZA246) began with a grounder for the request head act. For example in the email SZA230, the request act (71.6.2) is foregrounded by an explanation (71.6.1) for the request. Most request emails written by this client are direct (see the email SZA216 below).

We are unable to hold booth spaces, as our policy is to offer all space on a first-come, first-served basis  
Please submit a space contract at your earliest convenience to ensure its availability

SZA230

Vivian  
I would need a letter from Wewin stating this change  
Bobby Bauml

SZA216

The Chinese language is known to be an indirect language whose users are inclined to postpone the topic introduction (Kong 1998), and in Kong (1998)'s study, most



emails written by mainland Chinese writers followed the pattern CAUSE before EFFECT, CIRCUMSTANCE before EVENT. Indirect face-saving strategies are involved the use of the ‘because... therefore...’ sequence rather than the ‘therefore...because...’ one. The majority of the request emails from Chinese donors were also relatively indirect. Scollon and Scollon (1995) have argued that Chinese writers use both inductive and deductive strategies, however, as do writers in the West. Although the majority of the request emails from my Chinese donors were relatively indirect, my findings from analysis of my corpus suggest that there are no fixed rules for the structuring of business request emails. The tendency to justify the request first, not only by the Chinese writers but also sometimes by L1 English writers indicates that differences between cultures were much less pronounced in my data than in Kong’s. The influence of idiosyncratic differences might override that of the cultural differences when constructing request emails. This could happen when English is used as a lingua franca- a cultureless language in business contexts. However the influence of Chinese culture and its language was also evident in the data, corroborating the claim by Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005:404) that BELF communicators bring into business interactions some of their own discourse practices and culture-bound views about how to communicate. The Chinese requests tended to be grounded or justified by providing background information or in some cases a brief introduction to the company that might help the writer to assume power in the course of negotiation. Many of the mainland Chinese email donors used phatic moves, and some demonstrated a preference for specific strategies, for example giving a promise after the request move as a means of showing their commitment and reassuring the recipients of their desire to establish long-term business relationships with them. This behaviour suggests the influence of Chinese culture and language that is reflected at the level of discourse, delaying the main subject.

Table 4.33 shows the frequency of all seven moves realised in all the request emails written by all the Mainland Chinese email donors.

Moves	Move1	Move2	Move3	Move 4	Move5	Move6	Move7
Percentage	43%	100%	61%	43%	23%	27%	73%

**Table 4.33: overview of seven-move realisation of all the request emails by the mainland Chinese donors**

The moves in most of these emails do not follow the typical order found in the English business letters written by Chinese writers for Kong's study (1998)). In my data some moves occur more than once, particularly the request move (Move 2) and the phatic move (Phatic). Some emails contain more than one request, because more than one issue is discussed. This might be due to time differences and time constraints which add to the urgency with which issues have to be resolved. In some emails phatic moves always occur at the beginning of some emails and then reoccur at the end; this double use might help build interpersonal relationships with clients.

All of Kong's (1998) seven moves were found in my data. Some moves occurred frequently such as Move 2 and Move 7, some were less common for example Move 5, stating the conditions, was very not common. Phatic communion, expressives ('thanks/ thank you, happy/ glad etc.) and mitigating strategies (such as emotions, hehe, and contextualizing cues '...' '~' etc.) frequently occurred in the emails written by Mainland Chinese email donors, functioning to manage rapport and establish the friendly image of the writer. Kong (1998: 111) noted that one of functions of business request letters is to build rapport with readers and encourage further communication. Phatic and mitigating strategies were not mentioned in his framework, however, as it was derived from an analysis of business letters rather than emails.

The linguistic realisations of moves in email writing might be copied or adjusted by either party in the course of their negotiations, in the same way that correspondents may accommodate to the same register, or copy greetings or closing expressions from each other. Choices of move structure can clearly be affected by many things, including the relationship between the clients (old or new), the origins and culture of the writers, and individual writing styles.

#### **4.3.7 Request strategy types**

Kong (1998:112) said that move structure analysis should be accompanied by lower-level microlinguistic analysis, because a particular move is usually signalled by its linguistic components. In this section request strategies in emails written by Mainland Chinese donors will be discussed in terms of their syntactic patterns and

lexical items. Eighty-one emails from Mainland Chinese donors were examined, containing a total of 281 request moves (move 2).

Drawing on Blum-Kulka et al.'s analysis framework for request acts, the request emails were examined in terms of their request strategies and microlinguistic realizations. Three main request strategies were identified in relation to the level of directness. They are the direct strategy, the conventional indirect strategy and the non-conventional indirect strategy. The direct strategy is subdivided into explicit performative, locution derivable, mood derivable, hedged performative and 'want' statements. The conventional indirect strategy includes suggestory formula and query preparatory. The non-conventional indirect strategy includes strong hints and mild hints. The definitions of each of these request strategies are provided in Chapter 2 (see page 82) with reference to the work of Blum-Kulka et al.

The results of my analysis are presented in Table 4.34, which provides an overview of the subcategories of request strategies in relation to their level of directness, their corresponding microlinguistic realisations and their frequency.

Main categories of request strategies	Subcategories of request strategies	Microlinguistic realizations	number	Total
<b>Direct</b>	Explicit performative	I'm writing for asking that...	3	121
		We need to know...	2	
	Locution derivable	You need to ...	2	
	Mood derivable	Please/pls do...	70	
		If..., please/pls do	24	
		Do...	10	
	Hedged performative/want statement	I would like to ...	9	
		I would need...	1	
<b>Conventional indirect</b>	Query preparatory	Can you...(please)?	21	128
		could you... (please)?	28	
		Shall I...?	1	
		Yes/no questions e.g. do you/ is it.../ok?/right?	54	
		Would you ... (please)?	15	
		May I ...?	5	
		I'm wondering whether...	3	
		I think it may bother you again to offer me...	1	
		Will you...?	2	
	Suggestory formula	You can ...	2	

Non-conventional indirect	Strong hint	Wh- questions? (such as how, what, when etc.)	26	29
	Mild hint	Any comments are highly appreciated	3	

Table 4.34: Request strategies

Table 4.34 shows that conventional indirect strategies were most frequently used, but that mood derivable (i.e. an imperative structure) was the most frequently used sub-strategy for direct requests. Altogether 104 out of 281 requests were realized by mood derivable strategies. This is contrast to the finding of Li and MacGregor (2010:20) that requests for action using modal verbs and phrases with ‘please’ were more typical than imperatives in their emails. In my data the politeness marker ‘please’ or its contracted form ‘pls’ (67%) was very frequently used to mitigate potential FTAs. Also about 23% of mood derivable request strategies were realized by conditional *if*-clauses that acted as external modifications to the ‘head act’ (the request act). According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1984), *if*-clauses can be ‘cost-minimizers’ that can help support the request act.

The second most frequently used request sub-strategy was query preparatory, one of the conventional indirect request strategies. The query preparatory strategy was realized most frequently by *yes/no* questions, which accounted for 42% of all linguistic forms for query preparatory. This syntactic pattern usually checks availability or looks for confirmation. The second most frequently used linguistic form was ‘can (could) you (pls)...?’ which asks about the recipient’s ability to perform the request act. Sometimes in my data impositive *yes/no* questions for confirmation were followed by main request acts (see examples below).

50.1.4 Are these in your own stocks because we tried to order exactly these from another supplier whose photos sent were exactly the same as yours but we were told they had been sold.

50.1.5 Please reply & confirm you really really have these parts as shown in picture.

SZFT9(a)U129

72.8.2 Is booth 420 in north hall still available?

72.8.3 If so, please confirm that for us and offer me the floor plan.

SZE238

In email SZFT9 (a) U129, the writer uses the strategy of query preparatory in clause 50.1.4, to check the availability of the stock. This is realized by a *yes/no* question and is followed by the grounder 'because we tried to ...'. Clause 50.1.5 functions as the main request act that asks for a reply and a confirmation. Here the writer uses a more direct request strategy, mood derivable, realized by an imperative clause. The politeness marker 'please' is used to soften the FTA. Clause 50.1.4 functions as an external modification to the head request act and also has the effect of mitigating the potential imposition on the recipient.

In email SZE238, clause 72.8.2 also uses the strategy of query preparatory to check the availability of a specific booth, realized by a *yes/no* question. It is followed by the imperative clause 72.8.3 which is also preconditioned by 'if so', a cost minimizer according to Blum-Kulka et al. (1984).

These two examples have shown that the head request acts in both emails used external or internal modifications such as the cost minimizer 'if-clause' or *yes/no* questions to create preconditions for the compliance of the request act and mitigate the possible imposition of the request. A specific lexical item, the politeness marker 'please', is used for internal modification to soften the directive tone of the imperative clauses.

Besides the embedded 'if' clause, other internal modifications to the request act are also found in the data. Interrogative clauses are frequently used to realize the request act, as in the following examples.

Would you pls inform a date? (10.6.3)

Can it be less, say, 500 pcs ? (9.2.9)

May I know what kind of payment terms you would like to do? (51.4.3)

Interrogatives are one of the syntactic downgraders noted by Blum-Kulka et al. (1984). Compared with imperative clauses, they are less direct and achieve a softening effect by posing questions. They attempt to get permission from the recipient and consider the face of the recipient, though these clauses perform directive acts. Interrogative clauses to some extent suggest the writer's uncertainty with regard to the outcome of the request, and their pessimism about the outcome.

Embedded 'if' clauses are also frequently used by the Chinese writers. As hedging devices 'if' clauses provide the grounds for the recipient's compliance with the re-

quest. Both interrogative clauses and embedded 'if' clauses are internal modifications to the request acts, achieved by syntactic means. The other two syntactic downgraders noted by Blum-Kulka et al.(1984), negation and the past tense, were not found in the data.

Other internal modifications realized by lexical items were also found in the data. For example in clause 12.1.5 in the example below, 'would like to' indicates the writer's wish to sign an agreement with the recipient. 'Would like to' is more polite than 'want to', because it takes the negative face of the recipient (the wish not to be constrained) into account to a certain extent.

So we *would like to* sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with you.(12.1.5)

The word 'maybe' in the example below, clause 72.6.5, was used to tone down the impact of the utterance on the recipients by signalling the possibility of non-compliance. According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1984), 'maybe' is regarded as a down-toner that decreases the impact of a request. In clause 72.6.5, 'it will bother you again to...' indicates that the writer admits the impingement and also indirectly shows again that the writer is hesitant and afraid that the recipient will refuse to perform the act. The writer seems to be prepared to lose face.

I think *maybe* it will bother you again to offer me the latest floor plan in LVCC. (72.6.5)

Some coinages such as *hehe* and emoticons (☺ ☹) are also found in these emails and function as downgraders to mitigate the FTAs.

I know u busy, (63.1.6)  
but could u pls spare some time to send the copies to me? (63.1.7)  
hehe.. (63.1.8)

SZE194

In the example above from email SZE194, the head request act is the clause 63.1.7. The writer admits that she impinges on the recipient's negative face 'I know u busy' (63.1.6). Clause 63.1.7, the use of the lexical item 'some' suggests the writer's intention to minimize the imposition. Then the request act concludes with the onomatopoeic 'hehe' to further mitigate the potential imposition on both the recipient

in having to respond to the request and also on the writer in having to make the request

As is shown in email SZE 194, in addition to the internal modifications, external modifications to the head act are also used. In clause 63.1.6 an external modification helps mitigate the FTA brought about by the head act. Disarmers, grounders, checks on availability and cost minimizers can also be identified in the data.

In the example below, the writer (SZM3 (a)) indicates a reason to justify the suggestory request. Clause 1.1.8 acts as a grounder for clause 1.1.9.

Last week you said that your design will be ok this week. 1.1.8  
you can send it to me through Email. 1.1.9

Clause 8.1.7 in the following example checks the process (availability) of a project. The writer prefaces her main request (clause 8.1.8) with a question which is intended to check if the precondition necessary for compliance holds true. In clause 8.1.8 the embedded 'if' clause further preconditions the request act.

How's your project of iphone cases going? 8.1.7  
Isabelle, if you have any questions or if there's any updated new about your project would you pls let me know? 8.1.8

Clause 26.1.7 in email SZM3 (b) 096 also acts as the grounder for the previous clause 26.1.6, which is the request act (26.1.6).

Would you pls tell us what u are interested in? 26.1.6  
Cause we can recommend the right product to u if realize what u requirement.  
26.1.7

Clause 71.5.3 acts as a disarmer that indicates the writer's awareness of the potentially offensive or inconvenient nature of the request in clause 71.5.4.

sorry to bother again 71.5.3  
but could u please tell me that how long you can keep the 2 booths (NO.25630and NO. 25631) for us?  
71.5.4

SZE229

The italicized part in clause 66.3.11 in email SZE202 acts as a cost minimiser that indicates the trouble or 'cost' to the recipient involved in performing the request act. As the previous clauses indicate that the booths are in short supply, it might be difficult for the recipient to spare a booth for the writer.

I also know that the booths in center hall have been sold out, 66.3.9  
and Roadover is also waiting for other new booth options. 66.3.10  
but *if there is any booth cancellation or updated booth info there*, pls let me know. 66.3.11

According to Brown and Levinson (1987:170), 'if' clauses are clauses that modify the speech act by giving reasons, thus making an implicit request more persuasive. Sweeteners and attempts to obtain a precommitment, external modifications identified in Blum-Kulka et al. (1984), are not found in my data. A sweetener is an exaggerated complement to the recipient that helps convince the recipient to comply with the request. Perhaps the time constraints of business communication and the characteristic mutual reciprocity of business transactions make it unnecessary to use sweeteners and seek a precommitment. However the other modifications such as grounders seem to be indispensable. They give reasons, disarm and minimise cost in order to reduce the imposition, and they check availability to ensure the preconditions for compliance with the request.

In term of 'point of view orientation' (Lin 2007), only 22 out of the 282 request clauses from emails written by mainland Chinese donors were identified as addresser-oriented requests where writers chose the pronouns 'I' or 'we'. Only one of these (SZM3 (a) 035) uses the pronoun 'we' to refer to the company she represents (i.e. so can we pick the diamond case out this time?). The majority of requests are addressee-oriented in this study, Altogether 174 request clauses were found to be addressee-oriented, where the addressee 'you' is clearly identified as the principal participant in the request act. As is shown above in Table 4.54, 104 out of 174 addressee-oriented requests were realized in mood derivable, i.e. by imperative clauses where subjects are omitted (please do/do...). The choice of perspective is recipient-oriented/ addressee-oriented for these imperative clauses. The remaining 86 request clauses neither clearly name the addressee nor the addresser as participants in the requests. They are all requests for information or feedback from the addressee. The Chinese writers in my study might not know that the addresser-oriented perspective has the effect of reducing the degree of imposition from the request. This corroborates Lin's findings (2007 see page 87) that her EFL learners were inclined to be hearer-oriented and they were not good at making use



of linguistic devices to switch the perspective and reduce request imposition (p1651).

On the whole, most of the Mainland Chinese requests are mitigated. Though the most frequently used sub-strategy is mood derivable (direct), realized by an imperative clause, the head request act is usually softened/mitigated with either internal modifications (e.g. the frequent use of 'pls', hedges 'embedded 'if' clauses, 'hehe') or external modifications (e.g. grounders or cost-minimizers).

Yeung's study of business correspondence from Hong Kong writers (1995) found that the least polite request expression (please respond quickly) was realized by a mood derivable strategy. Yeung (1995) also argued that direct (on-record) strategies were used because the principle of reciprocity helps reduce the burden in Chinese culture; the wish not to impose on others may be more important in a western individualistic culture than in a more group-oriented culture such as in China. According to Yeung, the principle of reciprocity is one of the characteristics of Chinese culture. When the writer asks for the performance of certain requests, he simultaneously offers potential ground for the addressee to impose on the writer in future, so the benefit is mutual. In other words if the writer can return the favour next time, then the potential imposition on the addressee is reduced. In my study, all the interlocutors were practically equal in terms of power (P). They were either buyers or product providers who enjoyed an equal share of business transactions.

Another possible reason for the frequent use of imperatives is that it is an easy and simple structure for non-native writers to acquire, and for non-native readers to understand. The English level of most of the non-native interlocutors is about intermediate or upper-intermediate, and they would probably prefer to learn and use simple structures for making requests. In BELF email writing where efficiency is valued, the use of simple structures that meet the demands of effective communication brings certain benefits.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The findings from questionnaires and interviews show that email writing is the most frequent mode of external communication in the workplace. Speaking skills were also emphasized by the company workers and students, who suggested that BE teaching in the university should give more attention to training in email writing, and telephoning skills. All groups of subjects thought national English tests such as TEM4, TEM8, and CET6 were important and it was confirmed from the interviews with employers that English certificates were regarded as one of the important benchmarks when recruiting future employees. Although BETs also perceived the importance of speaking and writing, it seems that their claims might not correspond to what is actually practised in university BE teaching. This might be constrained by the need to help students pass national English tests, bearing in mind that the student pass rate is one of factors used to evaluate teaching. It was found that most of the company employers and recent graduates believed that the concept of adhering to native-like norms were not important in the environment of BELF where most of their clients were non-native English speakers without a very high level of English. They thought that in the course of intercultural business communication it was more important to have the competence to convey meaning clearly. The RGs suggested that BE teaching should not place so much emphasis on native-like norms of English. In the interviews, the importance of communication skills that help build good relationships with clients was also stressed by BE graduates and their employers.

RGs were found to use emails mainly to communicate with their clients. In this thesis their emails have been examined from different perspectives (functional analysis; macro-structural move analysis and microlinguistic analysis of request moves) to discover how they actually communicated in the environment of BELF, regardless of their formal training. The findings pointed towards the fact that RGs used various discursive strategies that help manage their rapport with their clients such as phatic communion, expressives ('thanks/ thank you, happy/ glad etc.), and mitigating strategies (such as emotions, hehe and contextualizing cues '...' '~' etc.). Request moves were always mitigated with the use of internal modifications (e.g. the frequent use of 'pls', hedges 'embedded 'if'clauses, 'hehe' etc.) and external modifications (e.g. grounders and/or cost-minimizers). The mixing of professional

formal and professional casual registers in the same email suggests that the RGs were aware of the need to make a good impression and promote warm feelings. The omnipresence of greetings and closings and the relatively fixed discursive written pattern (with the five moves summarized in section 4.4.4) also suggest that the RGs have preserved some of the characteristics of conventional business letters.

Cross-cultural variables play an important part in enacting speech acts (St John 1996, Bhatia 1993, Garcez 1993, Liu 2011, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Kong 1998). RGs were generally found to be indirect when making requests in emails; the request acts were usually delayed, and were either preceded or followed by grounders or phatic moves. Delaying the request move and hedging request acts may be strategies borrowed from the first language and culture where requests tend to be grounded to protect the requester's positive face and the requestee's negative face. The observed rhetorical patterns and pragmatic realisation strategies in the Chinese emails also reflect the RGs' great sensitivity to face in intercultural interactions.

No evidence of miscommunication or misunderstanding was found in my corpus, even though the use of English was often unconventional, and the emails contained elements in breach of grammar rules presented in grammar books and English language textbooks, for example concerning subject-verb agreement, punctuation and spelling, the 3rd person 's' in the singular present tense, and definite and indefinite articles. This confirmed the view of most of the company employers and recent graduates that the importance of meaning conveyance overrides that of grammatical accuracy in the course of international business communication, especially in the BELF environment. Focusing on meaning rather than form, or 'lack of repair' as a 'let-it-pass' pragmatic strategy is also found Rogerson-Revell's study (2010).

The fact that the writers were able to communicate successfully might also be due to the fact that they shared common business purposes that facilitated the interpretation of each other's emails, as noted by Planken (2005) (see page 57). In business communication strategies to help build relationship with clients may be more useful than native-like correctness, in accordance with Jenkin's (2012:928)

claim that ELF communicators place more importance on communicative effectiveness than on the 'correctness' of form.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

This study has provided a Language Needs analysis (LNA) of business English (BE) in Mainland China, and is one of the few empirical studies carried out in this area. As part of the LNA it has also analysed the discourse of business emails, as emailing was found to be the most frequently used form of intercultural business communication in the industries I examined in Mainland China. My email data constitutes one of the few corpora of authentic business emails in the environment of BELF, mostly written by non-native English speakers. The findings from the analysis of this naturally-occurring discourse can help correct 'textbook views' of what happens in business email writing and sensitise business people to the different pragmatic strategies adopted in the BELF context. These strategies involve taking a 'let-it-pass' approach that focuses on meaning, delaying work-related business topics (e.g. requests) by grounding them or preceding them with phatic communion and/or safe topics, and using politeness formula such as *hehe* and emoticons to mitigate face-threatening acts.

The majority of the Chinese email donors (recent graduates from MEMC) were found to be adept communicators in email exchanges, with the communicative competence to write and respond to business emails appropriately, building rapport with clients and mitigating FTAs. They tended not to use English in the way that they had been taught, however. The MEMC BE syllabus stresses native speaker correctness, and the MEMC BE teaching is test-oriented. The MEMC graduates, on the other hand, adopted various communication strategies that had not been specified in the current MEMC BE syllabus to compensate for their use of imperfect English forms.

The RGs seemed to be aware that one of the main priorities of business communication is the establishment of good relationships, and both they and their clients seemed to be highly motivated to communicate effectively with one another. Attitude and motivation are important drivers of intercultural communicative competence (Friedrich 2012). Their emails had the ultimate goal of securing business deals and establishing long-term business relationships with their interlocutors,

and it could be that six months or more of practical work experience had enriched their knowledge of business email exchanges in the environment of BELF. They had also probably acquired the more informal features of email through their experience with other forms of internet-based communication such as online-chats, blogs, and text messages, which are highly abbreviated.

As the actual findings of my study are not same as those I predicted in Chapter 1, the pedagogical implications are not entirely clear. The findings can, however, have important implications for ESP course content and the teaching of BE as a lingua franca, for example by contributing to our understanding of email move structures, and how these moves are realised.

In this chapter, I summarize the main findings presented in previous chapters, and discuss the implications of these findings for BE teaching, offering some suggestions for future research.

## 5.2 Summary and discussion of findings

The data collected by different methods turned out to reflect rather different language needs priorities. These are summarized as follows:

1. Employers and MEMC business teachers and students thought spoken English was particularly important.
2. New MEMC graduates were primarily required to write emails, with far greater emphasis placed on pragmatic appropriacy than on grammatical accuracy.
3. Business English teachers at MEMC stress native-like correctness, and treat the formal grammatically correct emails in textbooks as good models of business correspondence.

These findings regarding learner needs are discussed in more detail below.

The results from the questionnaires indicated that although most current MEMC BE students regard speaking skills as the most important component of the BE teaching syllabus, the main activity of company workers is 'writing emails' (a fact confirmed in interviews with the company workers). Although this might suggest that the students were unaware of workplace priorities, in interviews the company workers and their employers stated that English speaking skills were important

for face-to-face communication with foreign clients, exhibitions and telephoning. The RGs interviewed also noted that they had difficulties and fears concerning telephoning foreign clients. This might be because their business English teachers had neglected English telephoning skills, and because RGs had little chance to practice their speaking, even though their employers thought telephoning increased work efficiency. Telephoning might also have been a stressful activity for the RGs because it is more demanding than email writing in that it requires instant feedback.

It can be speculated that the company workers' rare use of English speaking skills at work might lead to a deterioration in their standard of spoken English, adding to the problem that they had not received enough training in speaking at university, as they claimed in interviews. The curriculum content (Chapter 1) also indicated that English speaking skills were neglected at MEMC. Even though students expressed their wish to have more speaking practice at university, their ideals of acquiring excellence in every skill must be tempered by reality, as only limited time can be made available for teaching and learning these skills at MEMC. Inevitably, some skills must be prioritised over others in BE teaching. However, BE teachers at MEMC did not mention the importance of email writing in the workplace, and it seems likely that they themselves did not know much about authentic business email writing.

Li (2000) claimed that there was a correlation between EFL learners' speaking ability and their email writing competence. The findings from my study challenge this claim, however, and also the position of earlier studies by Gimenez-Moreno (2010) and Gimenez (2000) who argued that emails are akin to telephone conversations. Although the MEMC RGs in my study seemed to communicate effectively through emails, both they and their employers felt that their speaking skills, and especially their telephoning skills, were quite restricted.

Gimenez-Moreno (2010) views email as a multimodal medium (written, oral, and pictorial), just like other forms of internet-based communication such as instant messaging, social networking and text messaging. It can incorporate more informal features such as contracted forms, conventional or unconventional abbreviations, elliptical clauses, cleft structures and short sentences, and in these respects can be

compared to instant messaging. On the other hand it can be very formal, with rigid patterns and full clauses, and when it is concerned with business issues it might have legal status. As in conversations (Biber et al 1999), in my business email data imperatives and interrogatives were relatively frequent, and present simple verb forms predominated. Besides these, informal features of the kind mentioned above and paralinguistic features (e.g. emoticons) also frequently occurred. These informal features indicate that internet-based communication has influenced business correspondence, as suggested by Gimenez (2000). Compared with formal letters, business emails are more casual and conversation-like (Gimenez 2000, Gimenez-Moreno 2010). However, emails are written rather than spoken, and contain features that conversations do not have. This is true even though some professional business emails follow business letter writing conventions, for example greetings, closings and a relatively fixed discursive pattern.

The email style that MEMC graduates were taught was more formal and rigid than the style they actually used in the workplace, with fewer phatic elements, and fewer of the features associated with conversation. BE teachers at MEMC seemed to have neglected the conversation-like features of email and overemphasized its formal business features. A clear-cut boundary between speaking and business email writing seemed to be created in classroom teaching.

Both managers and employees indicated in the interviews that they were aware of the importance of small talk as a relational skill for maintaining good rapport with customers, and the company workers' ability to establish and maintain small talk was evident from their emails, which paid great attention to managing rapport with clients.

In their emails, various means were used to mitigate potential face-threatening acts (FTAs). Phatic communion ('small talk') and expressives (*thanks/ thank you, happy/ glad* etc.) frequently occurred in the email data. Non-verbal attitude markers such as emoticons, *hehe* and contextualizing cues '...' '~' etc. were also frequently used to mitigate FTAs. Register variation was observed within emails and in the chains of email exchanges, and this mix of professional formal, casual and sometimes purely casual registers probably helped to promote warm feelings between the interlocutors, and facilitate communication and improve relationships.



MEMC graduates were also found to copy their interlocutors' writing style, for example the style of greetings and closings. This accommodation strategy can be interpreted as a collaborative attempt to create a harmonious relationship. The use of various strategies to facilitate communication in international business settings confirmed what has been noted by other researchers of ELF, i.e. the importance of communicative strategies in ELF communications involving people from the Expanding Circle when their linguistic competence is not perfect (Cogo 2012, McKay 2002, Seidlhofer 2004, Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta 2005).

According to all the subjects interviewed (BE teachers, MEMC students and company workers), different standardised English tests that currently exist in China were regarded as an important prerequisite for securing a job, but at the same time, they were not seen as the final stage in the long-term process of learning English. Tests to some extent drive teaching and learning, as indicated by both BE teachers and students at MEMC. Even though these tests stress accuracy, mistakes were found frequently in the emails written by the recent graduates (RGs) in the form of misspellings, punctuation errors, subject-verb disagreements, omission of the 3rd person singular present tense and omission of definite and indefinite articles. This indicates that test-oriented teaching at MEMC does not guarantee students' later performance at work in terms of grammatical accuracy. This type of teaching is bound to be limited in terms of its transferability to real-world contexts. The deficiency is made much more serious when the content of these standardized tests is itself limited. Speaking skills are neglected in these tests and the listening component only uses recordings of native speakers, rather than ELF speakers.

These standardized tests have different orientations from the requirements of successful business communication. The tests do not in fact assess skills in language 'use' (communicative meaning) but are entirely focused on 'usage' (the rules for making language). The tests essentially emphasize language competence and knowledge of grammar; whereas business communication in the ELF environment places greater priority on the ability to use different communicative strategies that help interlocutors build rapport and facilitate communication. The standardized English tests that are used to assess English majors without reference to the business context are not an appropriate means to assess business English majors

As suggested by McKay (2012), assessment of English in the ELF environment must focus more on pragmatic and discourse features of English and emphasize students' ability to negotiate different varieties and ultimately achieve certain communicative purposes. If the assessment focus and teaching orientation were to be overhauled in the way suggested by McKay (2012) in the BELF environment, it should be possible to re-orientate BE teachers and even examiners to accept the relevance of a partly functional basis for language assessment. The email writers in my data were found to have performed communicative tasks successfully even though much of their English was non-standard.

My interviewees' opinions about grammatical accuracy were divided. Most of the company employers and the recent graduates believed that grammatical accuracy and adherence to native-like norms were not very important in the environment of BELF. What both the employers and the recent graduates considered more important in the course of intercultural business communication was the communicative competence that enabled clear conveyance of meaning. A recent graduate even said that too much emphasis by both teachers and themselves on grammatical accuracy made them feel less confident about communicating.

RGs noted that Chinese students are generally regarded as shy and afraid of 'losing face' when they speak with many errors, and some employers said that inappropriate use of grammar, especially in writing, would make clients think they were not professional. Those who favoured grammar accuracy stressed its importance in writing but thought fluency was more important in speaking (see section 4.2 in Chapter 4). It seems undeniable that good grammar helps interlocutors get meaning across, especially in written messages that cannot resort to visual or aural cues to aid understanding.

The present study does, however, suggest that an overemphasis on standard grammar in BE courses may be misplaced, at least in the Chinese context. It needs to be acknowledged that some of the email utterances that seem ungrammatical according to the norms of standard written English are in fact appropriate in email exchanges. The RGs frequently made errors and used unconventional English expressions, yet seemed to communicate well in their emails. I cannot find any cases where correspondents seem to have misunderstood each other's communicative

intentions, although this is not something that can be proved or disproved scientifically. As Jenkins (2012:928) contends, non-native speakers are absolutely not 'failed native speakers' of EFL. From an ELF perspective they are skilled communicators who can create their own preferred forms and strategies to promote solidarity with their interlocutors and to ensure understanding. This idea is also supported by Bjorkman (2011:961), who argues that communicators in ELF settings intend to make up for the non-standard nature of their grammar by employing different pragmatic strategies that do not depend on grammar proficiency.

The English level of RGs seemed to be acceptable for their employment roles, given that they worked for small Chinese-owned companies, most of their clients were from non-native speaking countries, and their main activity was emailing. However if RGs were to work in multinational corporations they would be forced to communicate more with native and/or near-native English speakers, and these situations might make higher demands on their English language knowledge. In my email corpus, no grammatical errors were found in any of the 33 native speaker emails written by an American client (SZE). Fewer grammatical mistakes were found in the emails of the Chinese donor (SZE) he was corresponding with, and it is possible that the American client positively influenced the Chinese graduate and made her strive for greater accuracy.

Interpretation of functions is dependent on the context, especially when multilingual cultural factors are involved, in a BELF environment. For example, expressions such as *Well noted your situation!* (SZM3 (a) 026) and *Well noted for your delivery schedule* (SZM3 (a) F025) from both the Chinese donor (SZM3 (a)) and her French client are unconventional, and out of context may possibly be open to alternative interpretation. The Chinese donor has copied this sentence pattern from her interlocutor, with whom she had a certain rapport.

Students, however, do not need to learn and are probably not able to learn unconventional speech act realizations in the classroom, because speech acts can be realized in many different ways in real inter-cultural communication, and are subject to individual idiosyncrasies and L1 influences. The students might learn some alternative ways of realising speech acts in real-life communication, but it also needs to be acknowledged that in inter-cultural communication, misunderstanding that

would not be predicted on the basis of participants' linguistic proficiency alone might sometimes occur because of a lack of pragmalinguistic competence. Preparedness for possible misunderstandings and the desire for mutual intelligibility can minimise the difficulties this might cause, and some ELF linguists such as Mauranen (2006) and Cogo and Dewey (2012) have shown how communicative strategies spontaneously adopted in ELF communication can help limit misunderstanding.

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### 5.3 Implications for BE teaching in Mainland China

According to Holliday (1995: 116), 'contextual factors, from institutional to methodological, should be seen as factors in curriculum design, not as constraints on a purer curriculum based on language needs alone'. The views of different stakeholders concerning BE, i.e. company employers, BE students, BE graduates, and BE teachers, reported in this LNA study should thus be taken into account in designing the curriculum. Close cooperation with employers, as suggested by Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008), could be a good way of improving the BE programme in MEMC. In addition, other micropolitical issues at stake in MEMC that influence language needs and curriculum design also need to be taken into consideration, for example the Chinese test-oriented English education system and top-down education policies (e.g. Teaching Requirements for Business English Majors at University level (Trial 2009)).

The spread of English as a lingua franca makes BE teaching more complicated given the wide diversity of contexts. McKay (2002) pointed out that English language teaching and learning needs to take multilingual cultural diversity into account. The UIBE guidelines (2009) suggest that the objective of BE is to develop native-like grammatical standards, phonological patterns and discourse competence, but the goal of acquiring native-like English often seems unrealistic for learners from NNS countries where there is more exposure to English as a lingua franca. English varies across NS countries (Inner-circle countries) and to an even greater extent in the broader context of outer-circle countries where English is learnt as a second

language (Cogo and Dewey 2012). As ELF learners have wide exposure to different varieties of English, adhering to so-called native-like norms might seem out of place in non-native communities. Moreover, English as a lingua franca belongs to its users, rather than to native English speakers (McKay 2002). The findings of the study suggest that less emphasis should be placed on native-like English norms, although native-like varieties can be used as models, offering orientation rather than exemplars of 'correct' usage. More Inner-Circle varieties (for example from Australia and New Zealand) could also be introduced, as argued in Chapter 2. Simultaneously teachers could introduce models of the learners' own variety of English (China English) into classroom teaching, as suggested by He and Li (2009). This can enable Chinese learners to express culture-specific ideas, for example the policy of *one country, two systems*.

China as an Outer-Circle country is encouraging use of the English language because of its economic growth (The Economist 2011; Indianapolis Business Journal 2011). As reported by IBJ (2011), the number of English-speaking Chinese is likely to be more than the number of native English speakers by 2025. It can be speculated that in the near future when English is used more and more by Chinese people, English nativized by Chinese people with its own typical features in terms of syntax, lexis and discourse will be increasingly recognized and accepted as an established variety of English. As Seidlhofer argues, non-native users do not simply adopt native-like English but adapt or alter it to fit their communicative purposes (2011:64). Rightly or wrongly, however, in some contexts non-native speakers might want to write or sound like a native because they might think that this helps them to create a positive professional image in front of their interlocutors,

How BE should be taught in China is an open question. There is no definitive or straightforward answer to this question at this moment. The contradictory findings from my study might have mixed implications for the BE curriculum. However it is clear for now that dogmatic insistence on 'native-like' correctness is not a feasible approach for BE teachers in China, who are preparing graduates for communicative roles in the BELF environment. According to Holliday (1995) the best possible outcome of a needs analysis is that it results in a form of training or changes to pre-existing training. My findings could exert some influence on current

BE teaching and staff training in terms of raising awareness of BELF usage in email writing in the workplace.

The predicted conclusion mentioned at the end of Chapter 1, that BE courses in China ought to focus less on native-like 'correct' language use and more on the strategies needed to communicate on business topics in a BELF environment, is rejected in the light of my actual findings. In the light of this, the following courses of action are worthy of consideration. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages:

- Given that BE graduates do not demonstrate a very high level of formal language proficiency, but do demonstrate a high level of pragmatic competence, it might be a good idea to reduce the amount of teaching about intercultural communication and pay even more attention to grammar and vocabulary on the BE course. In this scenario, teachers could continue teaching formal business email writing with an even greater emphasis on standard English usage, to help writers create a positive professional image in front of their interlocutors (whether their supervisors, colleagues or customers) who might believe them to be more capable, logical, credible and persuasive if they make fewer grammatical errors. A possible downside of this approach might be the neglect of pragmatic strategies that help build rapport and enhance successful communication.
- Given that BE graduates do not seem to need a very high level of formal language proficiency when they start their careers, but do need pragmatic competence, it might be a good idea to increase the amount of teaching about intercultural communication generally, and pay less attention to grammar and vocabulary on the BE course. A possible downside of this approach might be potential damage to their professional image in the long run, and restrictions on their later professional careers because their English might be deemed non-standard.
- Some of the authentic emails I have collected might be used on the BE course as examples of the kind of writing that BE graduates will eventually produce. This would be in accordance with the social theory of language learning proposed by Mican (2013). The focus on authentic business

emails might direct learners' attention to the ways language is used to realize different social purposes in BELF communication. This approach would accept as inevitable a certain amount of non-standard usage, but a possible downside might be that graduates might make even more mistakes, and as a result might appear less professionally competent. Moreover the introduction of authentic non-native speakers' emails into the classroom might meet with resistance from BE teachers.

- Invented or 'doctored' emails might be used as models on the BE course, rather than the authentic emails I have collected. These models would illustrate standard lexicogrammatical features, although they would not be true to the real workplace context.
- It might be a good idea to place greater emphasis on the teaching of spoken English. This would help to meet the wants of all stakeholders, and if graduates' speaking skills improved they would be more confident about telephoning customers when necessary. However, my findings show that spoken English is not very frequently used in the workplace, and as time is limited in BE teaching it needs to be allocated efficiently. If more time was allocated for teaching and practicing speaking skills, then some other elements would have to be removed from the curriculum.

Whether to teach China English expressions in the classroom remains an open question. On the one hand they reflect local culture and allow local users to express indigenous values; on the other hand, they are often extremely idiosyncratic and might sound strange to English users from other parts of the world. BE teaching in the ELF context should take realistic measures to help students become aware of typical linguistic and pragmatic features of China English which may create problems when communicating with other groups of English language users.

The emails written by BE graduates from MEMC seemed to be effective in achieving business aims, and showed sensitivity in terms of face management strategies. It is possible that the BE graduates from MEMC would have been even better communicators if they had been given more practical advice during their time as students. It is also possible that business email writing is better learnt from practi-

cal work experience in the workplace than from lessons in the classroom. Whichever approach, or combination of approaches, is followed, it might be better to teach productive skills (speaking and writing) in conjunction with receptive skills (reading and listening). Problem-solving tasks could be adopted that integrate these skills, for example integrating telephoning and email writing by asking students to write emails to confirm what has been discussed and agreed in a telephone conversation.

Appropriately designed instructional materials would help students to note the differences and similarities between email writing and telephoning and also become aware that the skills are not disconnected from each other. A corpus of naturally-occurring authentic business emails in the environment of BELF might prove a good resource for the creation of these materials, replacing current BE teaching materials in Chinese universities which are either based on NS-NS communication or the intuition of national linguists in China. The need for greater attention to ELF does not mean that corpora of native speaker English texts are of no value, however. It might be best to design BE materials by referring to both types of corpora, and to raise students' awareness of differences between native speaker usage and ELF usage.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research**

As the USA is the number one trading partner of the Chinese mainland, it would be useful to collect more emails from the USA and examine how American native English speakers interact with non-native speakers from Mainland China. It would also be interesting to see whether the language used in Sino-American interactions would be 'centripetal' (becoming more like native speakers' language) or whether the language used by native-speakers would become centrifugal (moving towards the English used by non-native speakers). The American native English speaker emails in my corpus, although limited in number, suggest that to some extent native speaker writing has a positive influence on the language of Chinese interlocutors. However accommodation from both sides might be mutual. Either case might affect the way BE is taught in China, given that in the UIBE syllabus native-like correctness is stressed in teaching.



The data I have collected cannot substantiate whether graduate employees have met the requirements of the workplace in every respect, as without a more complete database of their workplace interactions in English (containing, for example, recordings of their telephone conversations as well as their emails) I cannot prove whether they are adept in all workplace situations where English is required. This is one limitation of the study.

Job shadowing would have allowed me to look closely at how subjects perform their jobs on a daily basis, and would have provided me with more language data from a wider variety of interactions.

Unfortunately it is never possible to gather enough data for language needs analysis, because every individual is different and circumstances are constantly changing. Language Needs Analysis is interpretive and subjective, and is subject to external influences (see section 3.1.2, Chapter 3).

In the email analysis I have conducted, email communication among participants seemed to be effective. For a follow-up study, post-interviews with interlocutors could be conducted to find out what they thought about the emails and what features they regarded as acceptable and unacceptable. In addition, a focus group experienced in international business communication, particularly in the field of foreign trade, could be invited to evaluate the emails for their acceptability, and a focus group interview involving this group could be invited to discuss the obligatory, optional and inappropriate features of business email writing.

More studies are needed in this area to find out which variety or varieties of English are most appropriate for a specific country such as China and to what extent central lexico-grammatical, phonological and pragmatic features of China English can be accepted by either native speakers or other non-native speakers in international business communication.

My study has striven to address the research question *What are the English language needs of BE graduates starting working in Chinese companies with an international clientele?* The English language needs of BE graduates perceived by four groups of stakeholders (BE students, teachers, graduates from MEMC and their employers) were examined through questionnaires and interviews to address the sub-question one: *How do different stakeholders perceive the English language*

*needs of BE graduates at MEMC?*, Textual analysis of emails -the most frequently used genre by participants in their places of work was conducted to address sub-question two: *What are the linguistic features and communicative functions of the texts most frequently produced by new BE graduates?* The findings from the two subquestions complement one another.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Questionnaire for company workers

1. Gender: female ( ) male ( )
2. Are you a graduate of MEMC (Modern Economics and Management College of Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics)? Yes/No
3. The size of your company:  
A. 1-20 B. 20-100 C. 100+
4. What type of company do you work with? Please specify if your answer is 'other'  
A. pharmaceutical B. IT C. leisure D. manufacturing E. finance  
F. consultancy G. trading G. other\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which department in the company are you from? Please specify if your answer is 'other'.  
A. purchasing B. sales & marketing C. administration D. manufacturing  
E. logistics F. trade
6. What is your job?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you need English in your work?  
A. Yes, I use it everyday.  
B. Yes, I use it quite often  
C. Yes, but I rarely use it  
D. No. I don't use it at all.
8. Whom do you need to communicate with in English?  
A. With my foreign employers  
B. With my foreign colleagues  
C. With the foreign clients  
D. Other. Please specify\_\_\_\_\_
9. What nationalities do you communicate with in the medium of English?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. In which situations do you need to use English?  
A. writing emails ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
B. reading emails ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
C. writing letters ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
D. reading letters ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
E. writing documents ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
F. reading documents ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
G. meetings ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
H. making presentations ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
I. attending presentations ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
J. socializing ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
K. providing services ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all  
L. Other. Please specify\_\_\_\_\_ ( ) quite often ( ) rarely ( ) not at all

**PART B – for MEMC graduates only – if you recruit graduates go to part C**

1. How well do you think the English language skills you learnt at MEMC prepared you for the real workplace?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think the English needed in the workplace is the same as the English taught in University? If not, what would be the difference?

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3. Are there any areas of English language you feel should have been included in your MEMC course that would be useful for you in your work?

\_\_\_\_\_

**PART C – for those responsible for recruiting graduates**

1. What are the English language skills you specifically required of the new graduates?

- A. Fluent spoken English
- B. Accurate business English writing
- C. Having good specialist knowledge of business
- D. Good English grammar
- E. Good English communication skills
- F. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

2. What are the English language certificates you would prefer new graduates to have?

- A. Business English certificates ( preliminary/ vantage/ higher)
- B. TOFEL or ILETS score
- C. CET 4 (College English Test-band 4)
- D. CET 6 ( College English Test-band 6)
- E. TEM 4 ( Test for English Major-band 4)
- F. TEM 8 (Test for English major –band 8)
- G. PETS
- H. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your opinion of tests such as CETs for non-English majors and TEMs for English majors? Are they useful in the real workplace?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. In which aspect of English language do you feel your employees need to improve?

- A. Generic English speaking skills
- B. Generic English writing skills
- C. Business English speaking skills
- D. Business English writing skills
- E. Specialist knowledge of business
- F. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you think the English needed in the workplace is the same as the English taught in University? If not, what would be the difference?

\_\_\_\_\_

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6. Have you any suggestions for the content of university English courses for Business majors?

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## Appendix 2 Questionnaire for Business English teachers at MEMC

1. How long have you been teaching Business English majors in MEMC? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Did you have any experience of working in companies before teaching? If yes, please specify what kind of company, and what your job was.  
\_\_\_\_\_
  3. Which of the following English language certificates do you think important for students to obtain to help them seek employment?
    - A. Business English certificates (preliminary/ vantage/ higher)
    - B. TOEFL or IELTS score
    - C. CET 4 (College English Test-band 4)
    - D. CET 6 (College English Test-band 6)
    - E. TEM 4 (Test for English Major-band 4)
    - F. TEM 8 (Test for English major –band 8)
    - G. PETS
    - H. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Which of the following qualifications do you think will help student in their work performance?
    - A. Business English certificates (preliminary/ vantage/ higher)
    - B. TOEFL or ILETS score
    - C. CET 4 (College English Test-band 4)
    - D. CET 6 (College English Test-band 6)
    - E. TEM 4 (Test for English Major-band 4)
    - F. TEM 8 (Test for English major –band 8)
    - G. PETS
    - H. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  5. What do you base you teaching content on? Tick all that apply
    - A. syllabus
    - B. coursebook
    - C. intuition
    - D. other please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Which of the following do you think it should be given more emphasis in business English teaching at university?
    - A. Generic English speaking skills
    - B. Generic English writing skills
    - C. Generic English Reading skills
    - D. grammar
    - E. Generic English listening skills
    - F. Business English listening skills
    - E. Business English speaking skills
    - F. Business English writing skills
    - G. Specialist knowledge of business
    - H. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Do you think the English needed in the workplace is the same as the English taught in University? If not, what would be the difference?  
\_\_\_\_\_
-

### Appendix 3 Questionnaire for the Business English majors in MEMC

1. Gender : female ( )      male ( )
2. What year are you in?
3. What do you plan to do after graduation?
  - A. Further study to gain higher degree
  - B. Work in a company
  - C. Teach English
  - D. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_
4. What English language certificates are you going to obtain before graduation ?
  - A. Business English certificates (preliminary/ vantage/ higher)
  - B. TOFEL or ILETS score
  - C. CET 4 (College English Test-band 4)
  - D. CET 6 (College English Test-band 6)
  - E. TEM 4 (Test for English Major-band 4)
  - F. TEM 8 (Test for English major –band 8)
  - G. PETs
  - H. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which of the following do you think should be given emphasis in business English teaching at university?
  - A.      A. Generic English speaking skills
  - B.      B. Generic English writing skills
  - C.      C. Generic English Reading skills
  - D.      D. Grammar
  - E.      E. Generic English listening skills
  - F.      F. Business English listening skills
  - G.      D. Business English speaking skills
  - H.      E. Business English writing skills
  - I. Specialist knowledge of business
  - J. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Which of the following do you think is important but it is ignored in business English teaching at University?
  - A. Generic English speaking skills
  - B. Generic English writing skills
  - C. Generic English Reading skills
  - D. Grammar
  - E. Generic English listening skills
  - F. Business English listening skills
  - G. Business English speaking skills
  - H. Business English writing skills
  - I. Specialist knowledge of business
  - J. Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

7. From your opinion, which skills you used most often in the workplace?
  - A. Speaking skills
  - B. Listening
  - C. Writing
  - D. Reading
  - E. Business specialist knowledge \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. Others please specify
8. Do you think the English needed in the workplace is the same as the English taught in University? If not, what would be the difference?



#### Appendix 4 Chinese version of questionnaire for company workers

1. 性别：女 ( ) 男 ( )
2. 是否从 MEMC (江西财经大学现代经济管理学院) 毕业？是 / 否
3. 公司规模：  
A.1-20 人 B.20-100 人 C.100 人以上
4. 您所在公司的类型？  
A. 制药业 B. IT C. 服务业 D. 制造业 E. 金融业  
F. 咨询行业 G. 贸易类 G. 其他\_\_\_\_\_
5. 您在公司的哪个部门？  
A. 采购部 B. 营销部门 C. 行政部门 D. 生产部门  
E. 后勤部门 F. 业务部门
6. 您的具体工作是？  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. 您的工作中是否需要使用到英语？  
A. 天都有使用  
B. 每天都频繁使用  
C. 有使用，但是机会不多  
D. 从不使用
8. 您需要使用英语交流的对象是？  
E. 外国籍雇主  
F. 外国籍同事  
G. 外国客户  
H. 其他\_\_\_\_\_
9. 请问您通常使用英语这一媒介和哪国人士交流？  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. 在哪些情况下您需要使用英语？  
A. 写电子邮件 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
B. 读电子邮件 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
C. 写信件 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
D. 读信件 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
E. 撰写文件 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
F. 读文件 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
G. 会议 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
H. 做业务展示 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
I. 参加业务展示 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
J. 交际活动 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
K. 提供服务 ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用  
L. 其他\_\_\_\_\_ ( ) 频繁使用 ( ) 较少使用 ( ) 从不使用

第二部分，仅供从 MEMC 毕业的问卷参与者。（如果您欲招聘新参加工作的毕业生，请参与问卷第三部分。）

1. 您在 MEMC 学习到的英语技能对您在真正的职场上何种准备作用？

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2. 您是否认为职场中所需要的英语技能，就是大学所教授的英语知识？如果您认为不是，请说明原因。

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3. 您认为哪些在工作中可能用得着的知识领域应该加入到 MEMC 的英语教学课程中去？

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第三部分，适用于负责招聘新毕业生的参与者。

1. 您对新毕业生在英语技能方面有哪些要求？

- A. 流利的口语
- B. 准确的商务英语写作能力
- C. 具有良好的商务英语专业知识
- D. 良好的掌握英语语法
- E. 良好的掌握英语交际技能
- F. 其他\_\_\_\_\_

2. 您希望新毕业生具有哪些英语方面的证书？

- A. 商务英语证书 (初级/ 中级/ 高级)
- B. 托福或者雅思
- C. CET 4 (大学英语四级)
- D. CET 6 (大学英语六级)
- E. TEM 4 (英语专业四级)
- F. TEM 8 (英语专业八级)
- G. PETS (全国英语等级考试)
- H. 其他: \_\_\_\_\_

3. 您是怎样看待针对普通大学生的大学英语等级考试 (CET4, CET6)，以及针对英语专业学生的专业英语等级考试 (TEM4, TEM8)？这些证书在职场中是否有用？

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4. 您认为您心目中的员工需要提升哪一块的英语技能？

- A. 一般的英语口语技能
- B. 一般的英语写作技能
- C. 一般的英语阅读技能
- D. 语法
- E. 一般的英语听力技能
- F. 商务英语听力技能
- G. 商务英语口语技能

E.商务英语写作技能

F.专业的商务英语知识

G.其他\_\_\_\_\_

5. 您是否认为职场中所需要的英语技能，就是大学所教授的英语知识？如果您认为不是，那么您认为其差别是？

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. 您对于大学中商务英语教学课程的内容有何建议？

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5 Chinese version of questionnaire for BE students at MEMC

1. 性别：女 ( ) 男 ( )
2. 入学年份：\_\_\_\_\_
3. 毕业之后的计划是？
  - A. 继续学习深造。
  - B. 进公司工作
  - C. 从事英语教学工作
  - D. 其他。\_\_\_\_\_
4. 你打算获得哪些英语证书？
  - A. 商务英语证书 (初级/ 中级/ 高级)
  - B. 托福或者雅思
  - C. CET 4 (大学英语四级)
  - D. CET 6 (大学英语六级)
  - E. TEM 4 (英语专业四级)
  - F. TEM 8 (英语专业八级)
  - G. 其他：\_\_\_\_\_
5. 以下哪些方面， 您认为应在大学商务英语教学中给予更多的重视？
  - A. 一般的英语口语技能
  - B. 一般的英语写作技能
  - C. 一般的英语阅读技能
  - D. 语法
  - E. 一般的英语听力技能
  - F. 商务英语听力技能
  - G. 商务英语口语技能
  - H. 商务英语写作技能
  - I. 专业的商务英语知识
  - J. 其他\_\_\_\_\_
6. 以下哪些方面， 您认为应在大学商务英语教学中是重要的， 但是却被忽视了？
  - A. 一般的英语口语技能
  - B. 一般的英语写作技能
  - C. 一般的英语阅读技能
  - D. 语法
  - E. 一般的英语听力技能
  - F. 商务英语听力技能
  - G. 商务英语口语技能
  - H. 商务英语写作技能
  - I. 专业的商务英语知识
  - J. 其他\_\_\_\_\_
7. 从你的角度看， 您觉得在公司里面用到最多的是以下哪个技能？
  - A. 口语交际
  - B. 听力
  - C. 写作
  - D. 阅读

E. 专业商务英语知识

F. 其他

8. 请问你认为职场英语和大学里所教授的英语课程是否相同？如有不同，你认为不同之处是？

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## Appendix 6 Chinese version of Questionnaire for BE teacher at MEMC

1. 您从事商务英语专业的教学工作有多长时间了?
  2. 您在从事教学工作之前, 是否有过在公司工作的经验? 如果有, 请您概述一下您所在公司的性质, 以及您所负责的工作。
  3. 您认为获得以下哪种英语证书对学生找工作最有帮助?
    - A. 商务英语证书 (初级/ 中级/ 高级)
    - B. 托福或者雅思
    - C. CET 4 (大学英语四级)
    - D. CET 6 (大学英语六级)
    - E. TEM 4 (英语专业四级)
    - F. TEM 8 (英语专业八级)
    - G. PETS (全国英语等级考试)
    - H. 其他: \_\_\_\_\_
  4. 您认为以下哪种证书对于学生在职场工作最有帮助?
    - A. 商务英语证书 (初级/ 中级/ 高级)
    - B. 托福或者雅思
    - C. CET 4 (大学英语四级)
    - D. CET 6 (大学英语六级)
    - E. TEM 4 (英语专业四级)
    - F. TEM 8 (英语专业八级)
    - G. PETS (全国英语等级考试)
    - H. 其他: \_\_\_\_\_
  5. 您教学内容的依据是? 可多选。
    - A. 教学大纲
    - B. 教科书
    - C. 个人直觉
    - D. 其他: \_\_\_\_\_
  6. 以下哪些方面, 您认为应在大学商务英语教学中给予更多的重视?
    - A. 一般的英语口语技能
    - B. 一般的英语写作技能
    - C. 一般的英语阅读技能
    - D. 语法
    - E. 一般的英语听力技能
    - F. 商务英语听力技能
    - D. 商务英语口语技能
    - E. 商务英语写作技能
    - F. 专业的商务英语知识
    - G. 其他: \_\_\_\_\_
  7. 您觉得在教学的过程学生的需要重要么? 如果会, 为什么? 那么社会对学生的需要呢? 具体体现在哪里?
  8. 您在教学中所倡导的原则是什么? 总的教学目标是什么?
  9. 请问您认为职场英语和大学里所教授的英语课程是否相同? 如果不同, 您认为这两者的最大差异是?
  10. 您觉得我们学校的课程设置是否考虑到了学生需要或者社会的需要? 您是怎样看我们学校的商务英语专业的课程设置的? 有何建议?
-

## Appendix 7 Definitions of functions before adjustment

- Greeting (forms of address e.g. hello xx, Dear xx, etc.) in email writing
- closing (complementary closes e.g. regards, best wishes, etc.) in email writing
- Inform (giving information about the self, the third party, event etc)
- Request (asking for information),
- Directive (asking for action),
- Offer (stating own action, offer goods, price that could potentially benefit the recipients),
- Promise (to assure the recipient of something or pledge to something in the near future),
- Reassuring (to calm and be supportive to the recipients)
- Confirming (echo, short affirmative response “ok”)
- Complain (criticizing that price is high or quality is bad for instance),
- Thanking
- Mitigating (using non-verbal attitude markers such as ‘hehe, xixi’ or emoticons to reduce the face-threatening acts)
- Phatic (phatic expression is used to perform a social task, as opposed to conveying information)
- Suggest (giving advice and bring the other idea to mind)
- Expressive (expressing pleasure, appreciation)
- Grounder (reason for dispreferred response)
- Metatext1: text referred to in the email
- Metatext2: text referring to an attachment

## Appendix 8 Definitions of functions of after adjustment

- **-Greet** (forms of address e.g. hello xx, Dear xx, etc.)
- **-Closing** (complementary closes e.g. regards, best wishes etc./ name)
- **-Inform** (give information about self/ interlocutor/ third party/event etc)
- **-Request** (asking for information/ performance of an action),
- **-Offer** (state own action “I’ll do this”, offer goods, price or service that could potentially benefit the recipients in the future)
- **-Reassure** (calm the recipient / be supportive to the recipient)
- **-Confirm** (support or establish the validity or certainty of something / echo/ give short affirmative response “ok” Or confirm that goods/information has been received e.g. ‘Thanks for your kindly feedback’ ? Or confirm that request has been received e.g. ‘Thanks for your inquiry for your plastic tool case’?)
- **-Complain** (express dissatisfaction about something / protest price is high or quality is bad for instance),
- apologise (“I’m sorry”)
- **-Mitigate** (non-verbal attitude markers such as ‘hehe, xixi’ or emoticons to reduce the face-threatening acts)
- **-Phatic** (phatic expression is used to perform a social task, as opposed to conveying information)e.g. Awaiting your quick response.
- **-Suggest** (give advice / offer ideas e.g. ‘you could do this’)
- **-Expressive** (expressing pleasure / expressing appreciation)
- **-Grounder** (reason for dispreferred response / initiator for the following sentence that gives suggestions or asks for action)
- **-Metatext1**: text that directs the reader to another part of the message in the email
- **-Metatext2**: text that directs the reader to an attachment



**Appendix 9 Text book extracts from BE writing course edited by Su, G.H.**

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