



Teaching Business English – are  
we doing it right?

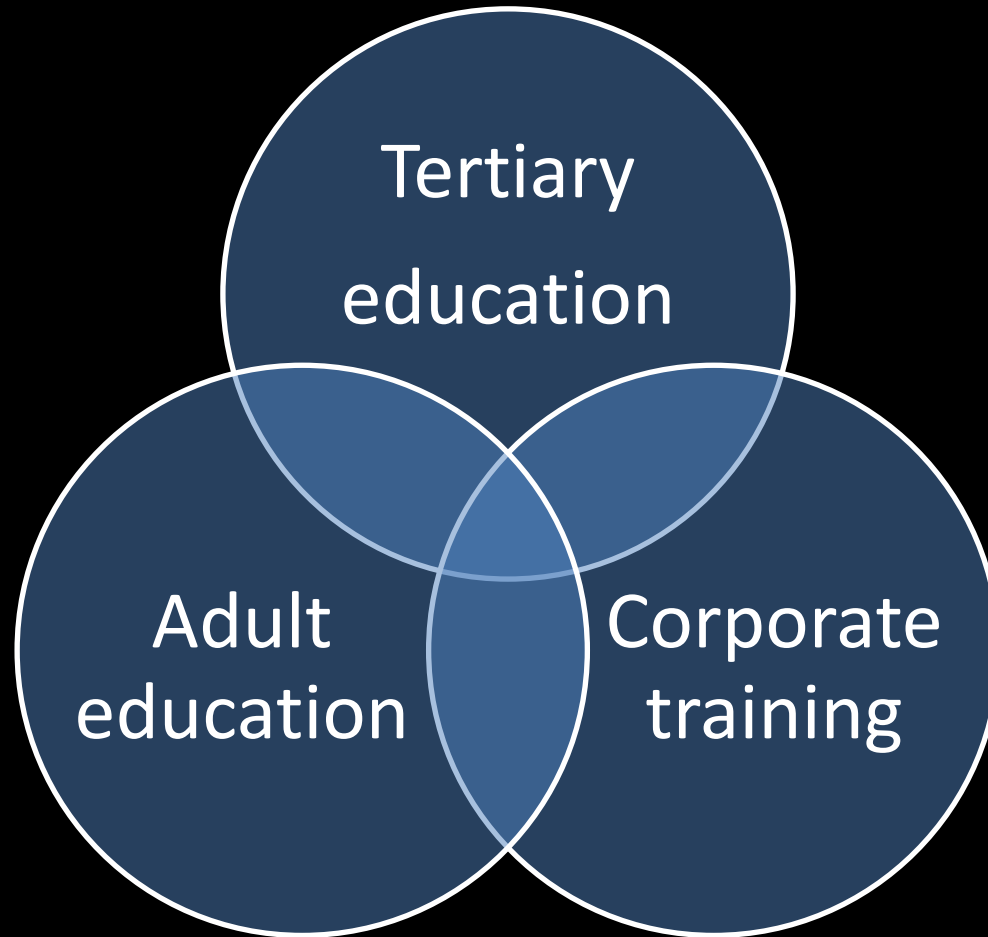
Evan Frendo

# Business discourse

“... all about how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organisations in order to get their work done.”

(Bargiela-Chiappini et al, 2007:3)

# Teaching contexts



# Characteristics of business discourse

- Corpus linguistics
- Genre analysis
- English as a lingua franca

Coursebooks and testing

# Quiz

1 Which of the following words are relatively rare in business English?

tired, family, house, night, must, thought, never

According to Mike Handford these words are all statistically highly unlikely to occur in business meetings (Handford, 2010: 103).

# Quiz

2 How common is the first conditional (If + present simple, will)?

- A Not common
- B Quite common
- C Very common

Many researchers have found that the first conditional is actually quite rare (Jones & Waller, 2011).

# Quiz

3 Lack of shared understanding in meetings is mostly caused by:

A grammar mistakes

B lexical mistakes

C something else

Marie-Louise Pitzl's research found that most misunderstandings in business meetings are caused by (C) something else (Pitzl, 2010).

# Corpus linguistics

“a research approach to investigate the patterns of language use empirically, based on an analysis of large collections of natural texts”

“what speakers and writers actually do with the lexical and grammatical resources of a language”

(Biber & Reppen, 2012)



# Specificity

	<b>Auditing</b>	<b>Mergers and Acquisitions</b>	<b>Taxation</b>
1	THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE	THE FAIR VALUE OF	IN THE CASE OF
2	THE AUDITOR S REPORT	FAIR VALUE OF THE	THE END OF THE
3	OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	IN A BUSINESS COMBINATION	IS DISPLAYED AS SHOWN
4	RISKS OF MATERIAL MISSTATEMENT	OF THE ACQUISITION DATE	AT THE RATE OF
5	OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL	AS OF THE ACQUISITION	THE CORPORATE INCOME TAX
6	IN THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	THE VALUE OF THE	AT A RATE OF
7	IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE	FOR THE BUSINESS COMBINATION	IN THE UNITED STATES
8	OF THE AUDITOR S	ACCOUNTING FOR THE BUSINESS	DETERMINATION OF TAXABLE INCOME
9	APPLICABLE FINANCIAL REPORTING FRAMEWORK	AS A RESULT OF	FOR THE PURPOSE OF
10	ON THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	IN THE ACCOUNTING FOR	ARE NOT SUBJECT TO
11	INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON AUDITING	CROSS BORDER M A S	SALES AND USE TAX
12	THE APPLICABLE FINANCIAL REPORTING	AT THE ACQUISITION DATE	ARE SUBJECT TO A
13	SUFFICIENT APPROPRIATE AUDIT EVIDENCE	FOR A BUSINESS COMBINATION	E RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS
14	OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR	IN THE CASE OF	ON THE BASIS OF
15	OF THE ENTITY S	OF THE BUSINESS COMBINATION	TREATY AND NON TREATY
16	THE RISKS OF MATERIAL	ACQUISITION DATE FAIR VALUE	TREATY WITHHOLDING TAX RATES
17	THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND	OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS	VALUE ADDED TAX VAT
18	FINANCIAL AUDIT MANUAL PAGE	CROSS BORDER M A	AT THE END OF
19	TRUE AND FAIR VIEW	ACCOUNTING FOR A BUSINESS	IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE
20	THE NATURE OF THE	ON THE OTHER HAND	FROM THE SALE OF

# Specificity

KeyWords 17 Sep 2013							
Key word	KeyWords 17 Sep 2013						
#	Key word	#	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	RC. %
DOOR	KW	VEHICLE	64356.00	10.98	61.00	1604421.00	1.61
VEHICLE	LITER	SEAT	8499.00	1.45	58.00	5896.00	
WINDOW	CM	BELT	4248.00	0.72	37.00	2075.00	
CAR	MOTOR	VEHICLE	2059.00	0.35	52.00	4149.00	
REGULATOR	AUTOMOTIVE	RESTRAINT	1349.00	0.23	27.00	1109.00	
MOTOR	V	REAR	1252.00	0.21	41.00	2638.00	
FRAME	VOLTAGE	CRS	784.00	0.13	7.00	25.00	
SWITCH	SPEED	SEATING	930.00	0.16	42.00	458.00	
SYSTEM	TORQUE	REMINDER	983.00	0.17	5.00	1000.00	
WWW	VEHICLE	BELTS	894.00	0.15	31.00	539.00	
AUTOMOTIVE	COOLING	USE	2968.00	0.51	51.00	62273.00	0.06
MANUAL	SYSTEM	SEATS	1256.00	0.21	45.00	4612.00	
LIFTGATE	CONTROL	RESTRAINTS	784.00	0.13	23.00	350.00	
SENSOR	MOTORS	CUSHION	808.00	0.14	25.00	507.00	
REAR	ELECTRONICS	SYSTEM	2277.00	0.39	38.00	44076.00	0.04
LIN	COOLANT	LATCH	661.00	0.11	13.00	236.00	
COM	SENSOR	AUTOMOTIVE	607.00	0.10	32.00	145.00	
DOORS	CURRENT	TETHER	570.00	0.10	6.00	76.00	
CABLE	E	OCCUPANT	621.00	0.11	32.00	232.00	
KEY	RADIATOR	SAFETY	1174.00	0.20	44.00	8519.00	
LOCK	S	PASSENGER	795.00	0.14	37.00	1902.00	
PANEL		VEHICLES	841.00	0.14	39.00	3041.00	
		HEAD	1831.00	0.31	32.00	35777.00	0.04
		NHTSA	443.00	0.08	14.00	0.00	
		S	1531.00	0.26	52.00	23425.00	0.02
		OCCUPANTS	546.00	0.09	27.00	504.00	
		WARNINGS	500.00	0.08	0.00	510.00	

# Genre analysis

Language use in a **conventionalised communicative setting**

in order to give expression to a **specific set of communicative goals** of a disciplinary or social institution,

which gives rise to **stable structural forms** by imposing constraints on the use of lexicogrammatical as well as discoursal resources.

(Bhatia, 2014)



With the person next to you brainstorm what “stuff” you might include in a “language of meetings” course.

# Typical written texts?



- emails (easily the most common)
- technical reports / test results
- progress reports / updates
- technical specifications  
agendas / minutes / action notes
- checklists
- schedules
- contracts
- handbooks / manuals / software guidelines
- briefing notes

# Challenges

"ever-changing and may be manipulated by their participants"

"typical verbalisation patterns"

(Flowerdew, 2011)

# Challenges

" Someone participating in a genre who does not have a command of these specific patterns and the limits to their possible variability is quickly recognized as either incompetent or an outsider"

(Flowerdew, 2011:124)



# English as a lingua franca





# BELF

"a field that investigates and celebrates the use of English for communication in a global context"

(Cogo, Archibald & Jenkins, 2011: 5)

"BELF communication is seen as content-oriented (rather than focusing on form) and requiring domain specific knowledge."

(Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011: 298)

Isabel: Portugese; Nana: Japanese; Anna: Italian

Isabel: I mean we don't have problems ... we all get on  
yeah

Nana: yeah I think we are all on the same ... on in ... ah:  
what is it ... on the same boat?

Isabel: yeah?

Nana: yeah? ... how do you say? On the same boat?

Isabel: I don't know yeah .... on the same boat I think ...  
on the bus on the train

Anna: anyway we understand you

Isabel: yeah ... we are all foreigners

Nana: all foreigners (laughing)

(Cogo, 2012: 101)

# ELF

“conformity with standard English is seen as a fairly irrelevant concept”

“I don’t actually care whether something is correct or incorrect. As long as the meaning is not distorted”

(Ehrenreich, 2010: 418)

**Business English** not everyone is a competent user

**goal-oriented**

**often asymmetric**

**requires expertise**

**genres**

**sometimes conventionalized**

**work-related as well as social-personal**

**shared repertoire**

**context specific**

**multilingual / multicultural**

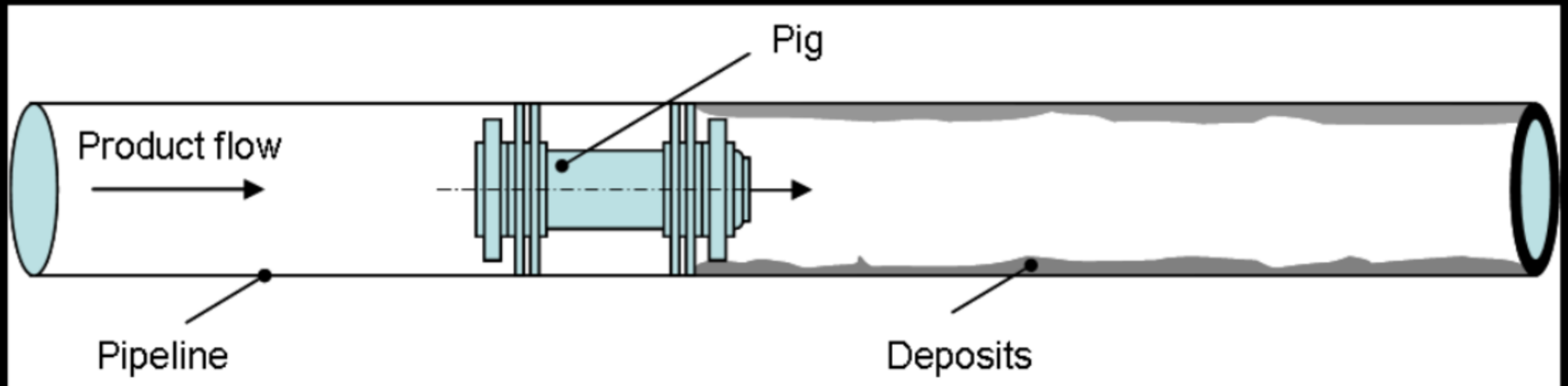
**specific lexis**

# Coursebooks



- Global market?
- Tertiary +language schools +corporate
- Traditional (safe?) approach? Eg conditionals
- Talking “about” not “doing”

# Politically correct



# Testing

Lexis

Grammar

Dealing with “general” tasks &  
situations

Language skills



Not testing!

Soft skills

BELF

Intercultural competence

Ability to do the job

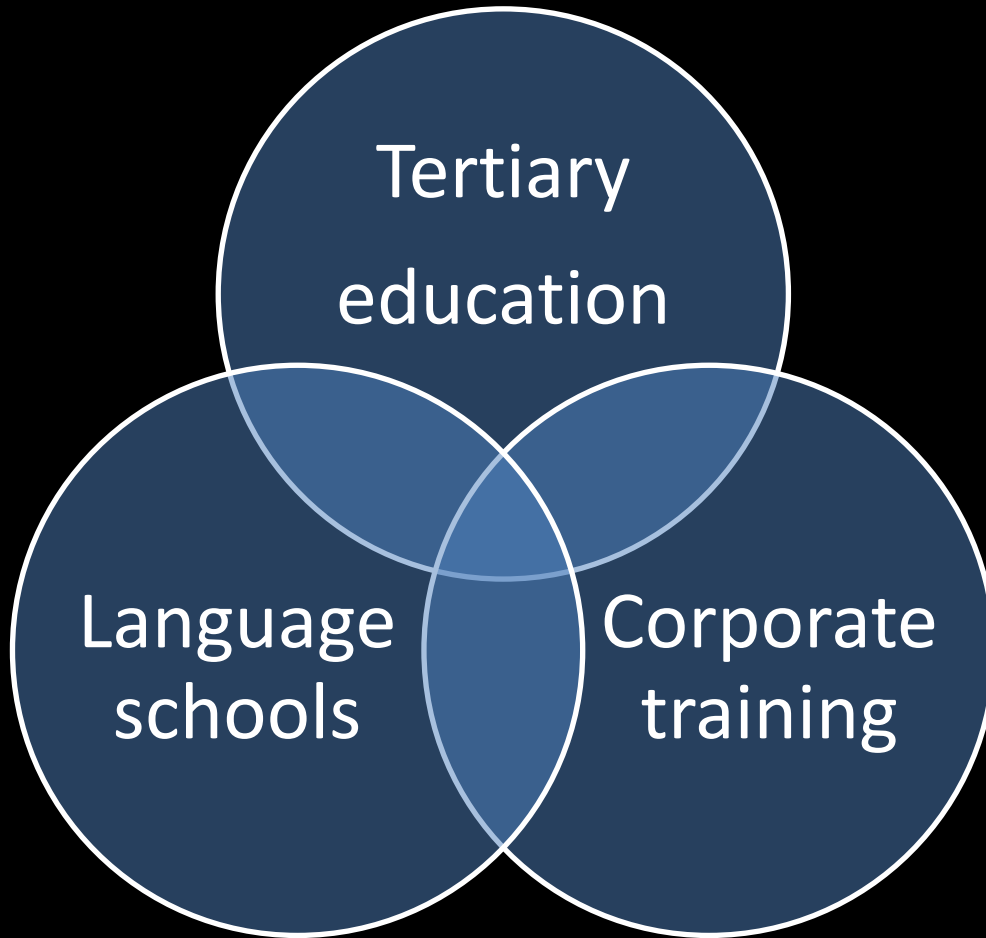
# So what?

Business English has certain characteristics. We as a profession need to become much more aware about the "real" language of business English and the specific needs of our learners.

So what?

We need to transfer much more of what we know from research into materials and testing.

# So what?



These contexts are not the same!

So what?

The classroom may not be  
the best place to learn  
business English.

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