

# The Big Question: What is Business English? And do we all mean the same thing?

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BESIG 2013



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# Business English?



- BESIG
- Business? English?
- BE vs. EBP (and others)
- Contexts
- Approaches
- Past, present and future
- Examples
- Expectations

It may be impossible to agree on a definition of Business English. This does not mean that we should not try and identify what we mean.

Think back to the sessions you have attended so far here (or at the last BESIG conference). What notion of BE were they based on? Was it apparent? Did you agree with it?



# Business? English?

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Where is the focus – Business or English?

Business:

- How much do BE teachers really know about business?

Have they given sales presentations, written executive summaries, held negotiations, etc.?

# Business? English?

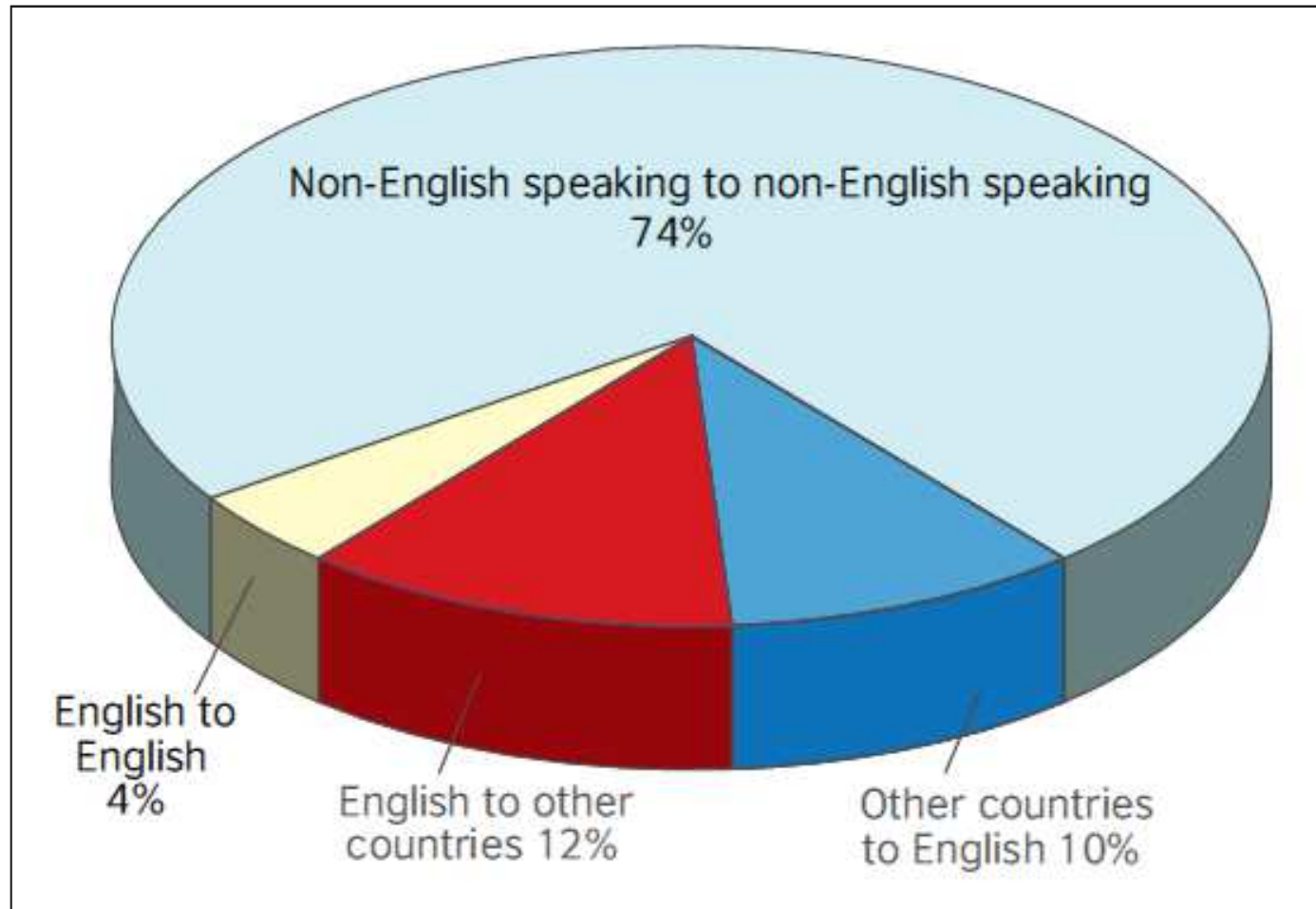
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Where is the focus – Business or English?

English:

*80% of all business communication in English is carried out without any native speakers present.*

## ENGLISH USED IN TOURISM:



2004

David Graddol. English Next 2006. p. 29

# Business? English?

Where is the focus – Business or English?

English:

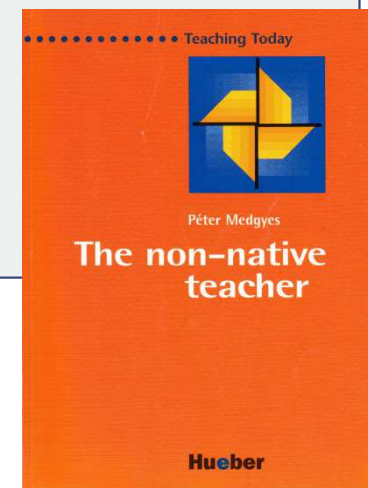
*80% of all business communication in English is carried out without any native speakers present.*

What implications does this have for requirements for teachers?

Are native speakers really the best teachers of BE?

*“I regard the ability to be reflective as a far more important condition for success than any other factor, including that of language proficiency.”*

Peter Medgyes: The non-native teacher, Hueber 2003





# Business? English?

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Where is the focus – Business or English?

*80% of all business communication in English is carried out without any native speakers present.*

What implications does this have for the English you teach in terms of

- grammar?
- vocabulary?
- content?
- skills?

# BE vs. EBP (and others)

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## BE

grammar & vocabulary

content

abstract

appropriacy

US/GB English

pre-service

homogenous

## EBP

skills

outcome

real

correctness

International English

in-service

heterogeneous

# Contexts



Teaching



University students

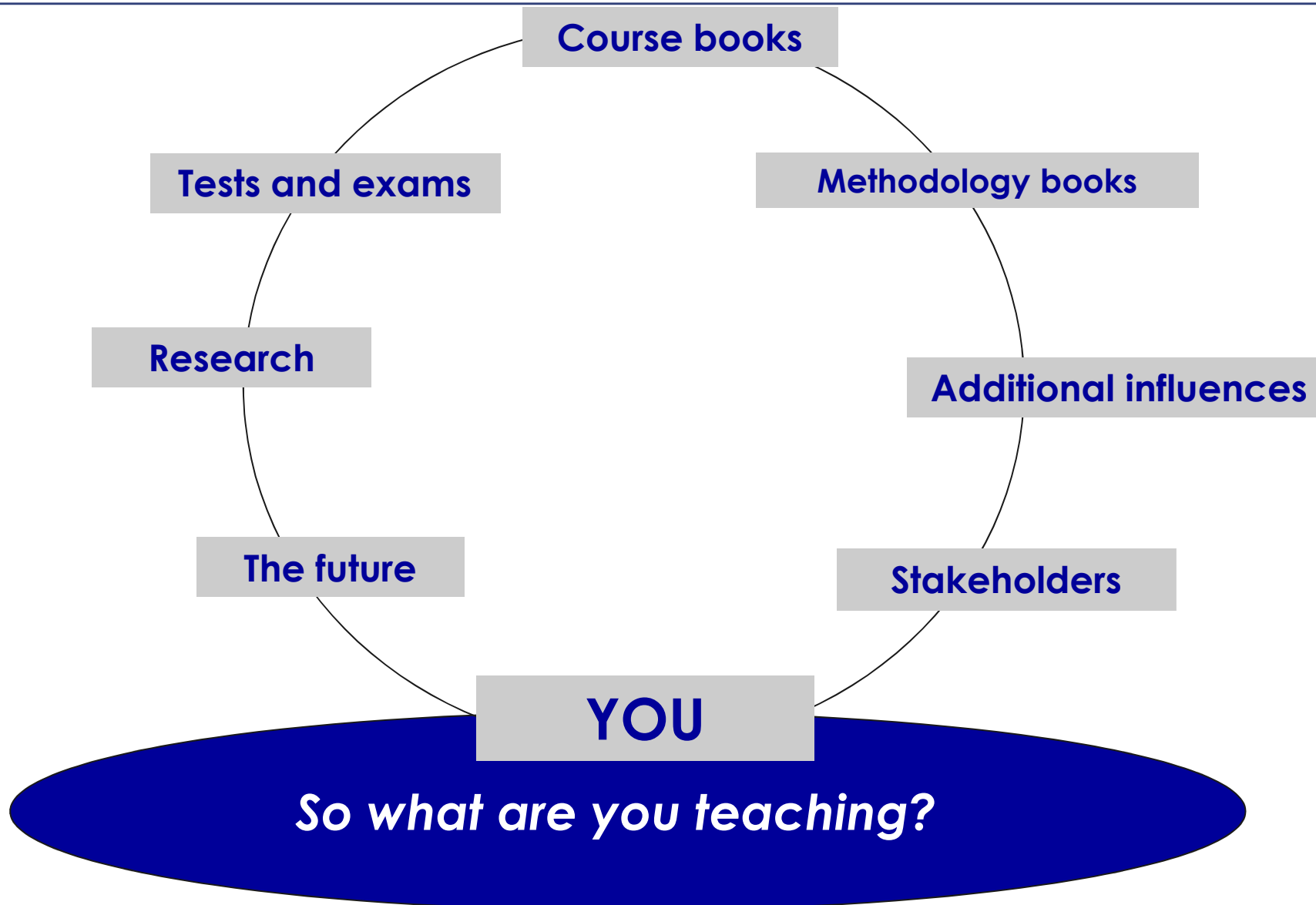


Testing



Company courses

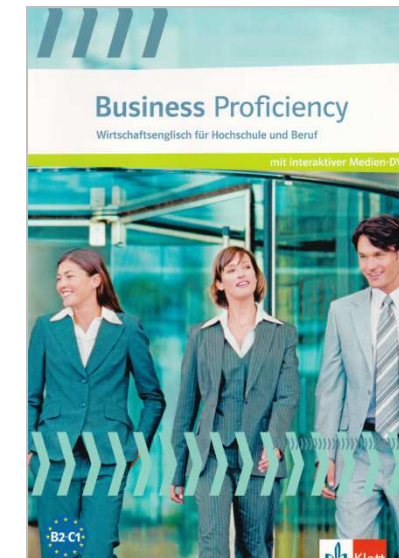
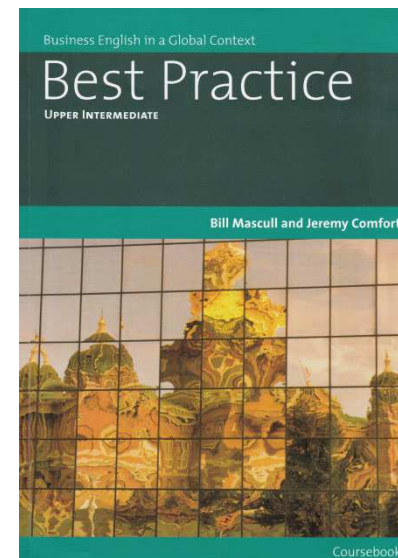
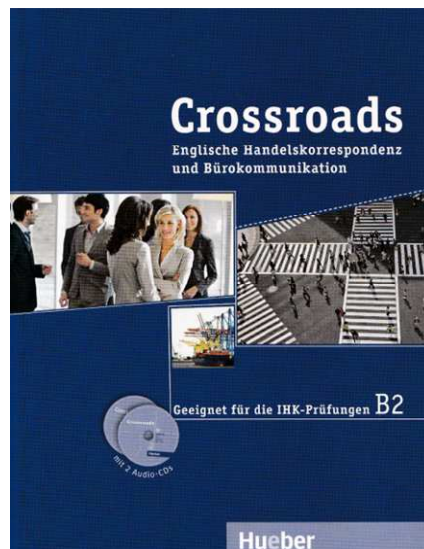
# Approaches





## Course books

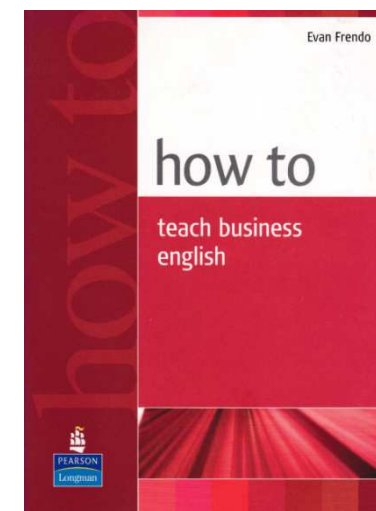
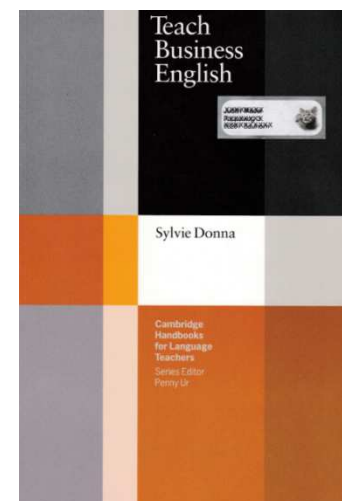
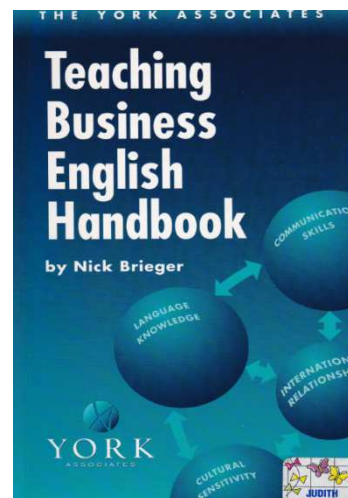
Think of the titles of the BE course books you use or have used. Do they reflect an attitude to the content? Do the words Business or English occur in the title?



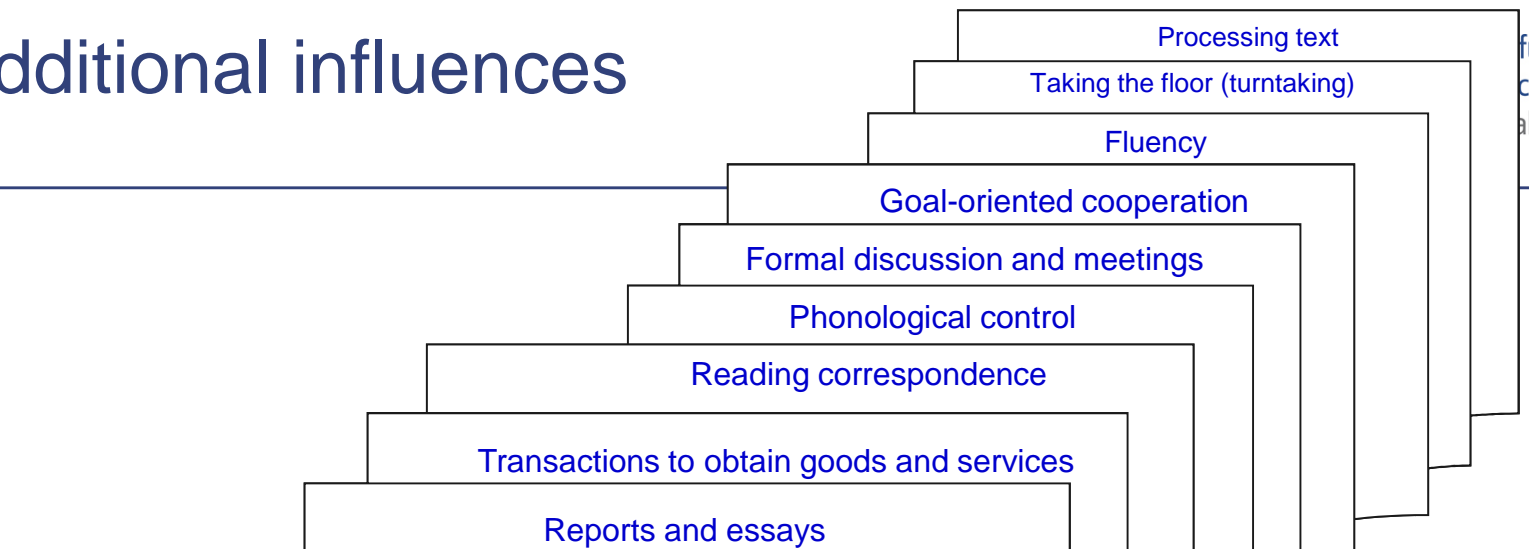


## Methodology books

Brieger (1997)	“What is clear, though, is that language teachers are not content specialists. They cannot be expected to provide management training within the guise of language training.”
Donna (2000)	“Business English has much in common with general EFL, but in many ways is very different as the aims of a course may be quite radically different from those of a general English course.”
Frendo (2005)	“...business English is an umbrella term for a mixture of general everyday English, general business English and ESP.”



# Additional influences



## Qualitative Aspects of Spoken Language : range, accuracy, grammar, coherence

Table 3. Common Reference Levels: qualitative aspects of spoken language use

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intensional cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making, etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2+	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions. There are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.

## Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

Council of Europe  
Conseil de l'Europe



European Year of Languages 2001

Modern Languages Division, Strasbourg

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



## Stakeholders

Learners	Content Skills	<b>“We want more business terminology. Combining business skills and English is best.”</b>
Teachers	Vocabulary Grammar	“We’re here to teach them language.”
Others	Grammar	“Grammar is the most important thing. They learn business skills in other courses.”



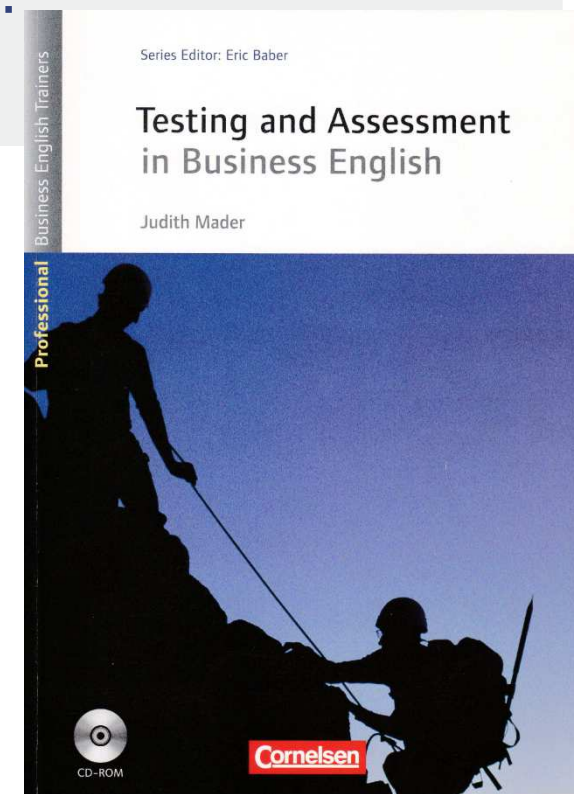




## Tests and Exams

- Your own – placement, classroom, final exams
- Exam boards – BEC, LCCI, TOEIC,...
- Tests in coursebooks

“...we should first attempt to define what BE is before going on to consider what a good test of BE is. There is no standard definition of BE, although ...”





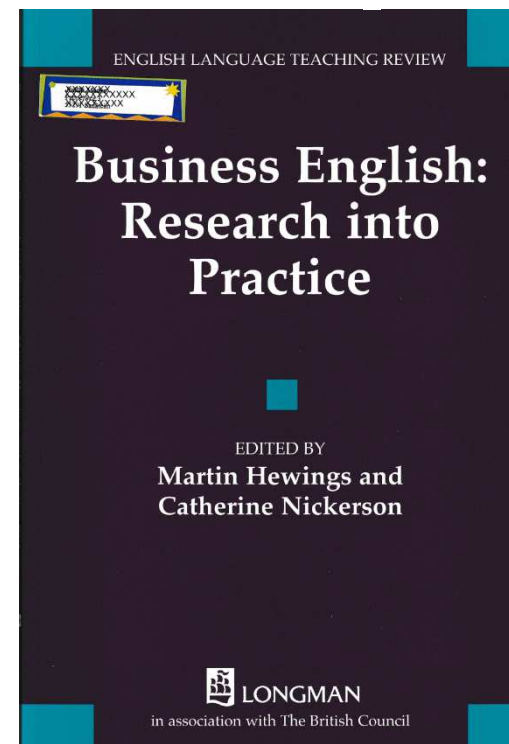
## Research

“Real business people should evaluate students’  
communication (written and spoken) from time to time ...”

(Van der Walt)

“...what is actually said in  
meetings is not what is taught.”

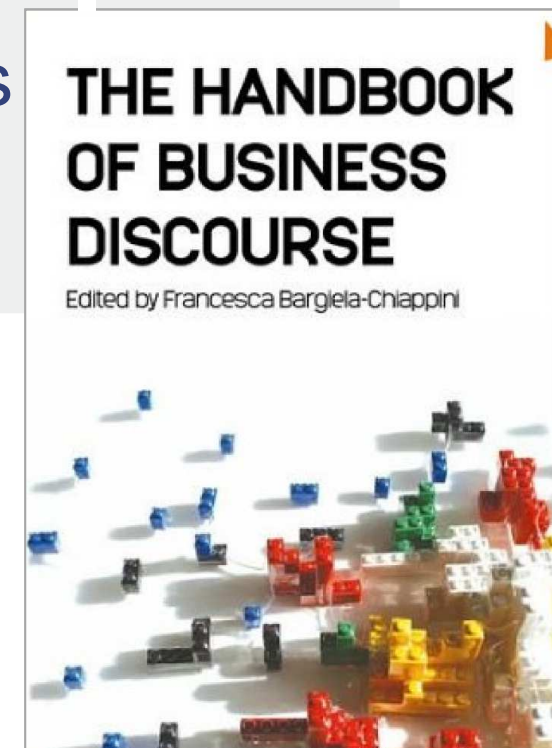
(Rogerson-Revell)





## Research

- computer-mediated
- gender issues
- power factors
- cultural influences and implications
- outcome orientation
- ...





In 2030 ...

- **the demand for comprehensive long-haul BE courses has fallen, giving way to skills-based micro-courses and workshops.**
- **employers no longer invest in Business English training because they expect new staff to be proficient in English.**
  
- **BELF is the established model for BE.**
- **most BE degree courses at European universities are taught in English, so BE has been dropped from the curriculum.**
  
- **BE is defunct.**
- **More than a third of participants enrolled in international communication skills courses are native speakers of English.**

Stephanie Ashford (2013) The Future of Business English A Delphi Study

# Over to you!

1. How do you define Business English?
2. Does it matter what you call it?
3. Should BE teachers have experience of business as well as English?
4. Considering the use of English in international business, are native speakers necessarily the best qualified to teach BE?
5. What are the practical implications of all this and how will they affect you?

Thank you!  
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