

Cambridge English

Developing business skills through real recorded meetings

Almut Koester, BESIG 2012



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Language **about** vs. language **doing**

Nelson (2000):

- Language **about** business:
 - language used (e.g. by business experts, journalists) to talk about business
- Language **doing** business:
 - language used to perform business and workplace activities (problem-solving, planning, briefing, training etc.)



The Gap between research and practice

- Recent business textbooks only include authentic language ***about*** business:
 - business texts
 - interviews with business experts



The Gap between research and practice

Handford (2010):

Survey of over 20 best-selling business textbooks found no lessons based around real spoken business interactions (e.g. telephone conversations, meetings)



The Gap between research and practice

Cheng and Warren (2006) compared 'opine markers' (expressing an opinion) in HKCSE-bus* with EFL textbooks in Hong Kong:

Top 4 in corpus:

- *I think/don't think ...*
- *It's ... (a sad thing)*
- *I know/don't know ...*
- *I + say, e.g. I would say...*

Only *I think* occurred in the textbooks.

*business sub-corpus of the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English



Cambridge English Corpus research



What is a corpus?

- A collection of texts

In Applied Linguistics Research:

- A **database of authentic written or spoken 'texts'** which can be analysed for word frequency, collocations and phraseology using special software.



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Corpus research

- **CANBEC** (Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus)
1 million words spoken data
Meetings: 912,734 words
64 meetings from 26 companies
- Part of the **Cambridge English Corpus** (CEC) - 1.8 billion words



Vague Language (Being Vague)

Frequent 'chunks' in CANBEC

- *the other thing*
- *sort of thing*
- *kind of thing*
- *et cetera*
- *things like that*
- *a lot of*
- *and this that and the other*



Vague Language (Hedging)

Frequent 'chunks' in CANBEC

- *I think*
- *sort of*
- *kind of*
- *a bit (of a)*
- *I don't know*
- *I don't think*



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What about lingua franca speakers?

Hong Kong Business Corpus (HKCSE-bus)

Frequency per 10,000 words (Cheng 2007)

Vague Item	Hong Kong Chinese	Native English Speaker
about	33.7	35.2
something	11.4	12.6
things	9.6	11.4
kind (of)	10.1	7.0
bit	9.0	6.7
all VL	187.7	185.6

Why be vague in business?

1. Because you are uncertain about something

Rob: Oh the NC- the NCOA stuff won't be back until next week **or something?**

Tom: Right. Until... Wednesday or Thursday earliest

(from Corpus of American and British Office Talk – ABOT)



Why be vague in business?

2. Because it is not necessary to be more explicit (shared knowledge)

Chris: Did it also include by the way... uh those **things** that we talked about, that I- that I just called you up about?

Mike: Yeah, the monthly **thing**

(from ABOT)



Why be vague in business?

3. To create a sense of shared knowledge (collaboration, informality)

So we take all the funny sizes... an'
all the- you know the- **odd... bits**
an' pieces an' things

(from ABOT)

→ Collaborative Strategy



Why be vague in business?

4. To be indirect (polite or strategic use)

I heard you did a deal with HPC,
didn't you, to- take a lot of board in
an' things

(from ABOT)

→ **Competitive Strategy** (bargaining
technique)



Business Advantage Intermediate Briefing (5.3)

Why do Paul and Daniel use **vague language**?

Paul = manager

So this week, you need to **sort of erm...** find out who's who. Erm... Who haven't you met? Who have you met?

Daniel = employee

As I understand it, there's – there's a fair **amount... of sort of** business to be getting on with.

(adapted from CANBEC)



5.3 Skills: Briefing

Learning outcomes

- Explain, check and clarify information.
- Use language describing a range of job activities.
- Brief somebody and actively respond to a briefing.



Introduction

1 Look at the dictionary definition of the verb to *brief* from the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, then discuss the questions below.

brief (GIVE INSTRUCTIONS) /briːf/ verb [T] FORMAL to give someone instructions or information about what they should do or say: *We had already been briefed about/on what the job would entail.*

- 1 What information does the dictionary give you about how to pronounce and use the word?
- 2 What do you think *debrief* means?
- 3 Can you think of situations which involve briefing (e.g. telling a new employee what the main duties of the job are)?

2 In a briefing situation, there are two roles:

- the role of the person who does the briefing
- the role of the person being briefed.

How are these roles different? What things are important for each person to do for the briefing to be successful? Discuss and write your ideas in the table.

The person who does the briefing	The person being briefed
Give clear instructions ...	Listen carefully ...

Listening: Informing a colleague

1.31

1 You are going to hear a conversation from the Sales Department of an Internet Service Provider. Paul is the division manager and Daniel's boss. Daniel is the new senior accounts manager. Paul is briefing Daniel about the department and his new job.

- 1 How long do you think Daniel has worked for the company?
How do you know?
- 2 What kind of work will his job involve?

2 Listen again and answer these questions.

- 1 Has Daniel met everybody in the department?
- 2 What three things is Daniel doing this week?
- 3 Is Daniel worried that the work will be too difficult? How do you know?
- 4 How many companies should Daniel contact?
a 300 b 150 c 30?
What reasons does Paul give?
- 5 How many action points should he get from his calls?

Language focus 1: Briefing and being briefed

When you are briefing someone or are being briefed, you often need to:

- explain things
- check or clarify information
- show enthusiasm
- be an active listener to show you understand, for example by saying *yeah, OK*
- use vague language when you are unsure of information or because you want to be polite.

1 Look at the following phrases for doing each of the things above. Which of the expressions do Paul or Daniel use? Listen again and tick (✓) the ones that you hear.

1.31



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Business Advantage Intermediate

Briefing (5.3, LF1)

Language focus 1: Briefing and being briefed



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1 Explaining organisational structure and procedures			
You need to ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	You have to ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
So what you're doing this week is finding out ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	So what you're doing this week is you're going to ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
You should go into ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	You can go into ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will go through that with you ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	I will run through that with you ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Checking and clarifying			
Have you had a tour ...?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you seen ...?	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I'm not sure about at the moment is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	What I'm unsure about at the moment is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you want me to ...?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Should I ...?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Showing enthusiasm			
I'd like to get going as soon as possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm keen to get going as soon as possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Active listening			
Sure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	OK.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yeah.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Absolutely.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Great.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wonderful.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Vague language			
a bit of	<input type="checkbox"/>	a fair amount of	<input type="checkbox"/>
kind of	<input type="checkbox"/>	sort of	<input type="checkbox"/>
and so forth	<input type="checkbox"/>	etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>



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Business Advantage Intermediate **Briefing** (5.3, LF1)

2 Notice that Paul uses all the language for explaining, but that both speakers check and clarify things. Why do you think this is?

3 What about the other language: showing enthusiasm, active listening, vague language?

1 Which are used by just one speaker? Why?

2 Which are used by both? Why?

When answering the questions, think again about the roles each of the speakers plays in this situation.



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Business Advantage Intermediate

Briefing (5.3, LF1) - **Teacher's Book**, p.43

Vague expressions... are extremely frequent in business conversations.

Sometimes people use vague expressions because they are unsure of something, as Daniel does:

• *As I understand it, there's – there's **a fair amount... of sort of** business to be getting on with.*



Sometimes people use vague language to be polite, for example if they don't want to sound like they are giving orders, as Paul does:

•Paul: *So this week, you need to **sort of erm...** find out who's who. Erm... Who haven't you met? Who have you met?*



Business Advantage Upper Intermediate **Negotiating a pay rise** (3.3)

Listen to a pay negotiation between a trainee business advisor, Sophie, and her boss (Leroy)

- What vague language does Sophie use?

and all that kind of thing

we had these sort of early conversations

were certainly paid probably more than double

It's not a huge issue but it may become one



1) Being deliberately vague can be very useful in a negotiation, both as a way of showing you share understanding (**collaborative strategy**), and as a bargaining technique (**competitive strategy**)

Business Advantage Upper Intermediate **Negotiating a pay rise (3.3)**

Language Focus: Vague Language

A. Showing shared knowledge (collaborative strategy)

- *We talked about pricing **and things like that**.*

B. Not showing your true position (competitive strategy)

- *We **might** be able to do it.*
- *It will **probably** cost **about** 40 a unit.*



Business Advantage Upper Intermediate **Negotiating a pay rise** **(3.3)**

Does Sophie use vague language as a
collaborative or competitive strategy?

*You know, like having to be approachable and flexible
and having to meet clients earlier in the morning or
having to meet them after the working day or having
to work through lunch and all that kind of thing.*

→ Collaborative Strategy



Business Advantage Upper Intermediate **Negotiating a pay rise** **(3.3)**

Does Sophie use vague language as a
collaborative or competitive strategy?

*And I was equal to some of the business advisors that
were also in the room who were certainly paid **probably**
more than double.*

→ **Competitive Strategy**



Business Advantage Upper Intermediate **Negotiating a pay rise** **(3.3)**

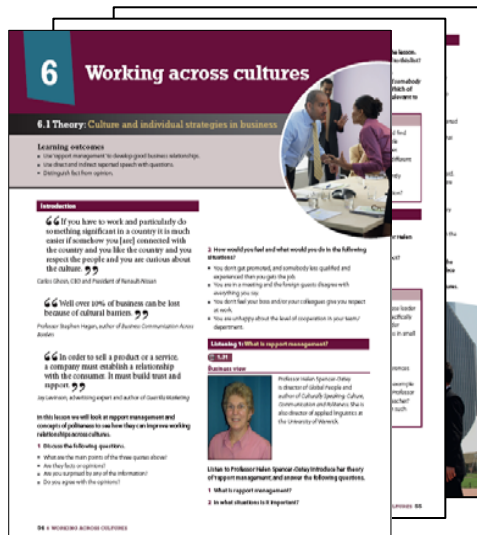
Language Focus (cont.)

6 Read through the audio script about negotiating for more money on pages 150-1. and find the following

- 1 and all that kind of thing in style?
- 2 probably more than double
- 3 I would be able to get a job as a business advisor
- 4 It's not a huge issue, but it may become one
- 5 allowances and everything else
- 6 and that kind of thing



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Theory

Practice

Skills



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Quiz Question

What is the most frequent vague expression in CANBEC?

- a bit of
- sort of
- I think
- I don't know



Quiz Question - Answer

What is the most frequent vague expression in CANBEC?

- I think (2,765)
- sort of (912)
- I don't know (578)
- a bit of (220)



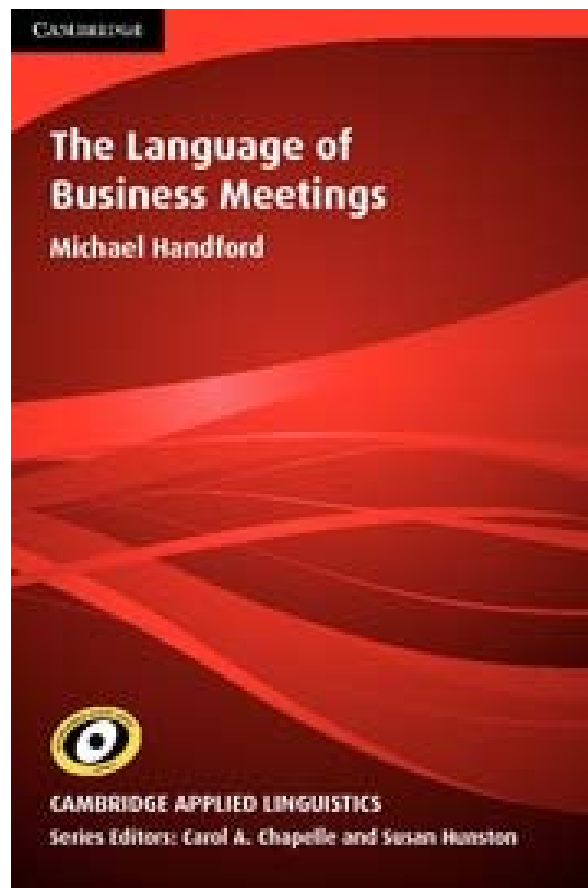
Conclusion

- Real business conversations show the language, skills and strategies used in key business tasks, e.g. briefing, negotiating, decision making.
- Using real business conversations in teaching prepares learners to interact in real business situations.



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Handford (2010)



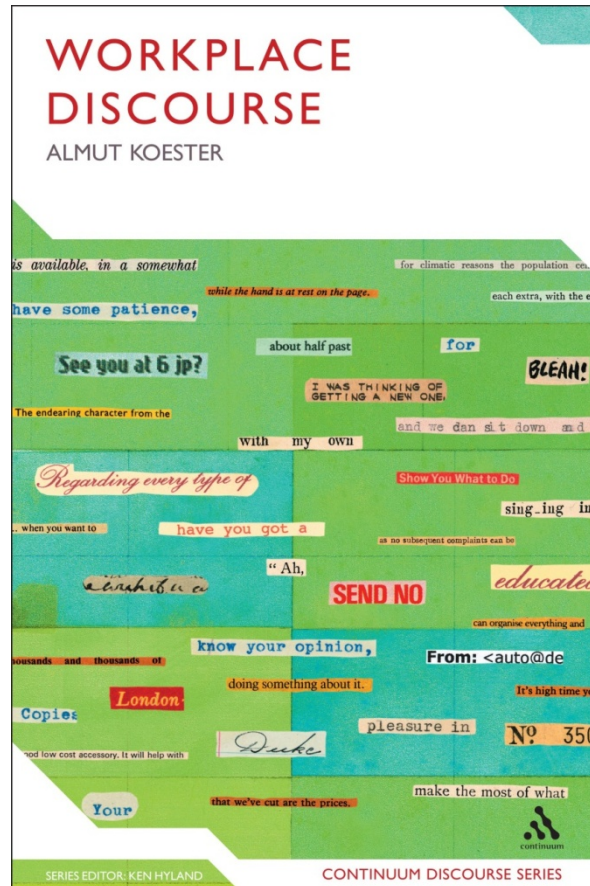
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Questions?



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