

Business English

An evaluation of Business English teaching materials and the adaptation/design of teaching materials for a particular Business English teaching scenario.

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Part A

First, this paper will focus on evaluating the chosen Business English teaching materials used to teach spoken business discourse in the context of meetings interaction. Secondly, this paper will look at a possible design of the materials for teaching in a specific Business English context.

Needs Analyses

The target of the following ‘needs analyses’ is represented by a mixed nationally and multilingual group of 8-10 employees from China, Egypt, France, Malaysia, Nigeria and Poland. The English language level of the participants is Upper Intermediate to Advanced (B2-C1). This group works in a multi-national automobile company that has requested a short Business English course on business interaction. This course aims to teach spoken business discourse through the features of business meetings. In order to provide an effective teaching that meets students’ needs, this module requires a ‘needs analyses’ before delivering Business English instructions.

Based on research, the design of a ‘needs analyses’ is to adapt the language sessions to meet the needs of mixed groups of students who have different native languages, different proficiency levels and “a variety of objectives in mind” (Zheng 2010). According to Richards (2001), the theory of a ‘needs analyses’ represents a collection of data based on the information regarding students’ needs. The purpose of a ‘needs analyses’ is to discover learners’ specific needs and to provide support for the ones who face particular linguistic issues with the spoken business discourse. Therefore, delivering a successful ‘needs analyses’ involves three important stages (McKillip 1987): identifying the target and the purpose of the analyses, describing the target environment for the analyses and finally, identifying the actual needs. This ‘needs analyses’ aims to evaluate the Business English language skills of the target group; moreover, this investigation focuses on: identifying students’ weakness regarding the language of business meetings, checking students’ proficiency level of Business English language, checking students’ speaking fluency and their language accuracy, investigating students’ language deficiencies, expectations regarding this course. In order to meet the required procedures for an efficient data collection, this ‘needs analyses’ uses the “triangular approach” (Richards 2001) and it involves group meetings (Appendix 1) and short surveys with open-ended questions (Appendix 2). The theme of the group meetings is “meetings - spoken business discourse interaction” and it aims to collect a wide range of

information by engaging the group into discussions. On the other hand, the surveys are delivered anonymously, and they are designed to find the learners' view about business meetings discourse. The purpose of this 'needs analyses' is to help the teacher understand students' communicative competence level and to provide the information required to meet learners' business aim. Fredo (2005) states that 'needs analyses' "simply consists of a series of brief questions which give the teacher a rough idea of the needs of the group" (2005 :15)

According to the findings of this investigation, it can be argued that the target group of students is aware of the significance of spoken business discourse and they aspire to develop their business interaction skills in meetings area. Based on the results of this 'needs analyses', students' face difficulties when it comes to speaking in front of an audience, therefore 45% of the students are interested in developing their public speaking skills, while 55% of them aim to improve their business language accuracy. The findings of the surveys show that the learners look forward to practice and to develop their language skills in the area of business interaction.

Unit evaluation

This section investigates the effectiveness of the teaching materials for practicing and developing speaking skills in spoken business discourse through business interaction by using Unit 5 of the "Market Leader" textbook. The key feature of the chosen materials (Appendix 3) include Business English contents and professional language that provide learners opportunities to practice the speaking skills required for business discourse interactivities. The textbook includes topics such as techniques to deal with conflicts, decision making, and meeting interaction practicalities and it delivers task-based activities and integrated skills approach. According to Koester (2012), Business English teaching materials have specific orientations of business discourse, include business related vocabulary, promote particular language features for problem-solving and it focuses on communication aspects. Therefore, it can be argued that the activities of this material are based on the Communicative Approach because they encourage students to focus on their language skills (Bygate 2001). On the other hand, research shows that lesson based on spoken business discourse (i.e. meetings, presentations) use "simulated scripts" (Handford 2013 :251). The evaluation of this unit involves three stages: pre-teaching, in-teaching and post-teaching.

Pre-teaching

The first activity of this phase plays an important role for the teaching session because it activates the schemata, it introduces the topic and engages students in the discussion. Activity A (Appendix 3) requires students to answer to discuss if they agree or disagree with the provided statements. This exercise encourages personal response, it involves interaction through collaborative work and peer-correction, and it provides learners autonomy. Developing language skills to resolve conflicts may be useful for learners because this is a real-life situation that can occur in any meeting and they may need to handle this kind of discussions. Also, learners must develop business language skills to express understanding and encouragement in a meeting context. The second activity of this phase is represented by exercise E (Appendix 3) which requires students to identify the suitable expressions for paraphrasing and summarizing, for showing understanding and for encouraging someone to keep talking. Research shows that “the ideal activity is probably to interact with the authentic material in the same way that the learners might have to in real life” (Fredo 2005 :53).

In-teaching

The activity related to this phase is represented by Task 2 (Appendix 3) and it requires students to develop a discussion based on the scenario of an emergency meeting. Through this task students have to work in groups as a management team of a company that faces a major crisis and initiate a discussion about possible decisions to solve the issue. This activity may be efficient because it portrays a real-life situation which represents an advantage for Business English learners because they can produce language on while doing a relevant task (Fredo 2005). Moreover, doing exercises based on a specific context may be more beneficial for learners, rather than developing discussion on an isolated topic (McDonough & Shaw 1993).

Post-teaching

The follow-on exercise of this lesson is represented by the Writing activity (Appendix 3). Students are expected to have a look at a draft email and decide how this can be improved before sending it to the recipient person. The email plays an important role in teaching business communication because it is a source of real-life context that may provide authentic topics (Evans 2012) which are very relevant for Business English students. This exercise may provide learners’ opportunities to practice their language skills, produce personal response, learn in context and produce new vocabulary. Base on research, ESP teachers describe the

writing activity as a “problem-solving process” that involves an instrumental process, brainstorming and structuring ideas, drafting and getting active feedback (Fredo 2005).

Part B

Rationale of the material choice

Scholars state that particular language knowledge for meeting discussion plays an important role in the area of spoken discourse and business interaction because it has key features that lead to effective meetings; for instance, learners have to acquire communication skills that teaches them how to start a meeting, how to interrupt when they aim to make a statement, how to ask questions and how to listen and how to take decisions (Comfort & Utley 2005). Based on the ‘needs analyses’ it can be argued that the evaluated materials (Appendix 3) require improvements in order to meet students’ needs. Therefore, the materials for delivering business language instruction have been changed and adapted for a 20 minutes student-centered lesson. This lesson (Appendix 4) is designed based on task-based approach and it is focused on an “input-rehearsal-performance” phases (Willis 1996) because students discuss the tasks in groups, and they give spontaneous responses. Moreover, this lesson follows an interactive approach that is essential for delivering language instruction, therefore, the activities of this session follow a “whole-class” design. Group-work and peer interaction seem to be a key element for the ESP sessions because this may provide a creative learning environment, it encourages dynamics, it may be useful for time management and it can be beneficial for the learners; for example, group-activities may encourage students to get involved into discussions because they may feel safe in pleasant atmosphere (Dörnyei & Murphey 2003).

Phase 1: Input

This phase involves the first three activities of the lesson plan (Appendix 4) which includes a warm-up activity, the discussion topic and the introduction to new vocabulary. According to Emmerson & Hamilton (2013) short activities for delivering Business English lessons may be beneficial for students; for example, a warm-up activity may disconnect the learners from daily issues, and it may engage them with the topic of the session by encouraging them to practice their communication skills. Moreover, short activities may be useful in teaching business language to the target of this lesson because they are employees and time management is essential on “in-company” courses. The purpose of these activities

is to deliver creative business content in terms of language features. The lead-in activity (Appendix 5) of this phase requires students to discuss the purpose of business meetings, aiming to encourage personal response and learners' prediction, to activate the schemata and to involve the students in discussions. The second exercise of the lesson requires providing possible definitions for the concepts of 'business spoken discourse' and 'business interaction', while the third exercise asks students to discuss effective ways to open a business meeting. Koester (2012) states that there are a wide number of studies that "discrepancies between teaching materials and actual business practices" (2012 :148), arguing that teachers should use real meeting topics when it comes to designing their activities; therefore, this lesson delivers authentic materials based on real-life topics.

Phase 2: Rehearsal

This stage of the lesson (i.e. exercise 4) delivers a "meeting simulation" activity (Fredo 2005), which requires the learners to imagine that they are part of an administration group of a multi-national company that faces major issues due to the financial crises; the learners have to discuss ways to lead a possible meeting on this subject. Meeting simulation activities provide learners background information that offers them possibilities to practice language skills in through a "tailored material" (Fredo 2005 :46), based on a common business situation. Throughout this activity, students can simulate the scenario of a "large formal meeting" and practice particular lexical items that are frequent in official meeting; for instance, research shows that key language items for this scenario may be sentences as "Do you agree?", "Can I interrupt please?" or "In my opinion" (2005 :73). This kind of language idioms can lead to particularities used in business meeting to manage interaction such as reaching agreement, asking for clarification or explanation, keeping to the agenda or summarizing the discussions (Nickerson & Planken 2016 :33). Furthermore, Business English students should be encouraged to develop their competence in all language skills when it comes to "face-to-face meetings" (Handford 2013). On the other hand, scholars state that "language development requires learners to be able to generalise from specific learning events in order to apply new understanding to the communication of the message" (Bygate et al. 2001 :28).

Phase 3: Performance

The last phase of this lesson plan includes a role-play meeting and takes place in a global company which has operating points in different corners of the world. Through this

activity each student has to choose a country to represent; this is going to be an online meeting and it requires an urgent discussion based on the issues company faces due to the pandemic situation. Furthermore, each group has to lead discussions in order to complete the meeting agenda in exercise 5 (Appendix 5). Based on research, role-play meetings proved to be the most useful if learners engage in real-life scenarios. Designing materials based on this topic represents a challenge for teachers because they have to adapt the activities on different scenarios, for instance, the target group of this session is represented by pre-experienced people who already have a job in a business company; therefore, this group can easily get engaged in a role-play scenario set in the classroom, in order to discuss the required agenda.

This activity meets the students' needs identified in the prior analyses because it provides them opportunities to practice their public speaking skills, their communication skills and most important, this task may lead to the improvement of their business language accuracy. Based on research, role-play meetings provide a realistic environment in the ESP classroom. Moreover, "role-play provides an excellent opportunity to practice language and concepts already introduced in earlier activities" (Fredo 2005 :54) because this task focuses on the primarily use of language for business interaction. The most important part of this activity is represented by the outcome; scholars state that the actual language is acquired through interaction and that students learn by doing specific tasks, consequently it can be argued that task-based language learning can be an effective way to learn language for specific purposes (Handford 2013). The necessary language in meetings needs can be divided in four categories: procedure-focusing, information focusing, decision-focusing and negotiation focusing (Ibid.) and people who use it have to be aware that the language they use has an audience, a purpose and a response.

As a final observation, it can be argued that the design materials for this lesson may be useful for the learners who aim to develop business interaction skill. This lesson provides them possibilities to practice communication skills in business meeting context; for example, students can practice required vocabulary for asking questions, passing information, interrupting, leading, defending their position or justifying their actions in an official meeting. Based on research, English Business is an essential element for international trading because it is used as a Lingua Franca in multicultural and multilingual environments. It can be argued that business interaction faces challenges at a linguistical/phonological level. The designed lesson may help this individual group to avoid frustrations in the workplace by delivering them an authentic context to overcome language issues. Scholars argue that the language used

in business meetings should “focus on message content rather than form and avoidance of highly-contextualised language” (Rogerson-Revell 2008 :357).

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Appendix 1 – Group Meeting

This appendix shows the outline of the group meeting.

The theme of this group meeting is business meetings and how to interact . The learners have to seat in a circle. Every student has to say his/name and describe what they want to learn about business interaction, what skills are they aiming to develop and what actitivites they would like to practice. In order to continue the activity, every student has to pass the ball to any person they want.

Appendix 2 - Survey

Q: What is the purpose of business discouse ?

A: The purpose of business discourse is to use practicular language for business interation.

Q: Do you have any experience with business meetings?

A: No, I am afraid to talk in public. I prefer desk work.

Q: How do you feel about taking part in business meetings?

A: I get nervoud because sometimes I can't find my words.

Q: What are the topics that you are interested in this course?

A: My aim for this couse is to develop my language accuracy and to be more confident with public speaking.

Q: What do you expect from the teacher?

A: To provide effective material and effective content.

Q: Do you face any difficulties when it comes to Business English language? If yes, what are they?

A: Yes, I cannot understand some element words. I prefer simple language.

Q: What do you want to learn most through this course?

A: I would like to learn how to speak freely in front of an audience.

Appendix 3 – Evaluated Materials

BUSINESS SKILLS

Resolving conflict



A Do you agree or disagree with these statements? Discuss your answers.

- 1 Conflict isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- 2 When there's a conflict, it's best to keep things rational rather than show your emotions.
- 3 The most common kind of workplace conflict is between colleagues of the same grade.

B Look at this checklist of techniques used to deal with conflict. Which do you most often use? Which get the best/worst results? What other techniques have you used or seen used?

- 1 Ignore the problem – it'll sort itself out.
- 2 Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- 3 Use humour to defuse a tense situation.
- 4 Say loudly and clearly exactly what's on your mind.
- 5 Remain calm and don't get emotional.
- 6 Ask lots of open questions.
- 7 Speak more than you listen.
- 8 Try to reach a compromise.
- 9 Accept you're in the wrong – anything for a quiet life.
- 10 Summarise what the other person says in your own words.

C Do you consider yourself to be a good listener? How do you show other people you're listening to them? Read this description of communication problems. To what extent does it reflect your experience?

According to Roger Fisher and William Ury in their book *Getting to Yes*, there are three major problems in communication. Firstly, people may not be talking to each other. Frequently, each side has given up on the other and is no longer attempting any serious communication.

Secondly, people don't pay enough attention to what other people say. Then there are misunderstandings which are compounded when people speak different languages.

The solution they propose is to listen actively; acknowledge what is being

said and question your assumptions. Understanding is not agreeing, but unless you can show that you grasp how the other person sees things, you may be unable to explain your point of view to them. You therefore maximise the chance of having a constructive dialogue.

D CO2.12 Listen to a conversation between two work colleagues. What techniques does Carl use to show he's listening actively to Yolanda? How would you resolve the situation?

E Which of these expressions are used to a) paraphrase and summarise, b) show understanding, and c) encourage someone to keep talking?

- 1 So, your point is that the office is too noisy. Is that it?
- 2 Tell me more about what you were just saying.
- 3 You sound as if you're disappointed.
- 4 I sense you're feeling anxious about the meeting.
- 5 So, what you're saying is you have too much work.
- 6 If I understand you correctly, you're saying the plan isn't viable.
- 7 I'm not sure I understand. Could you explain what you mean?
- 8 I'm listening. Please go on.
- 9 OK, from your point of view, we should scrap this idea. Correct?
- 10 It sounds like you're not convinced by that argument.

Task 2**Decision-making meeting**

Work in groups. You are the management team at Delaney. You have heard rumours that your main client, a major European car-hire company, is investigating an alternative supplier, possibly in Eastern Europe, where staff and operating costs are more competitive than in Ireland. The CEO and Chief Financial Officer of the car-hire company are coming to visit you next week.

Hold an emergency meeting. Prioritise the issues to deal with. Then discuss and decide how best to resolve them.

- Decide a company policy to manage and reduce absenteeism rates.
- Define good practice for the use of call recording and monitoring.
- Review staff performance targets and the bonus scheme.
- Decide the company's internal e-mail policy.
- Devise a strategy to reduce staff attrition rates.
- Decide how best to persuade our main client not to change suppliers.

Watch the Case study commentary on the DVD-ROM.



Subject: Monthly performance

Tricia

For the second consecutive month, you have failed to reach your target. This is simply NOT ACCEPTABLE. As I have told you in the past, all agents are expected to deal with a customer's booking in no more than five minutes. The average time you spend with a client is 6.2 minutes.

As for absences, you were off sick three days this month, and arrived late for work on four occasions. Try to do better next month.

Regards

Bernadette

Writing

Look at this draft e-mail and decide how to improve it before you click on SEND.

→ Writing file page 143



Appendix 4

MICROTEACHING LESSON PLAN

Number of students expected: 25 Level: Upper Intermediate to Advanced (B2-C1)

Aim:

At the end of this lesson the learners will have been exposed to Business English language related to the topic of meetings/business interactions.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson the learners will:

1. have been introduced to the concept meetings.
2. have an understanding of business spoken discourse
3. have understood the meaning of bussiness language in the context of meetings/ business interaction

Stage	Approx Time (min.)	Student Activity	Teacher Activity	Interaction Pattern ¹	Reason and link to Objectives	Materials required
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Warm-up	0-2	Ss work in groups and discuss the purpose of business meetings.	T asks the students why are business meeting important Monitor	G S→T	To activate the schemata and to engage Ss with the topic.	Board markers Handout
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¹ T=Teacher, C=Class, P=Pair work, G=Group work, S=Individual Students

			Feedback			
Introducing the discussion	2-5	Ss work in groups a provide a possible definition for business spoken discourse and business interaction.	T asks Ss to provide possible definition of the concepts T provides the definitions	T→C G	To provide a definition for spoken discourse and business interaction	Handout
Introduce new vocabulary	5-8	Ss have to discuss ways to open a business meeting	Monitor Feedback:	G	To increase STT and to provide personal response and learning in context	Handout
Practice New Vocabulary	8-13	Ss get into a role-play activity by orchestrating a possible meeting to discuss an important issue.	T gives handout Monitor Feedback	G T→C	To practice new vocabulary	Handout
Produce New Vocabulary	13-18	Ss work in groups and practice the spoken discourse They have conduct an efficient online meeting with the representants of the company from other countries by filling in the provided agenda.	T issues instructions for task and monitors.	G	To produce new vocabulary And to encourage personal response	Handout

			Feedback	G		
Consolidation	18-20	Ss write a few words about what they've learned in this session.	T summarises the lessons aims and objectives and asks Ss to do an evaluation task.	T→C G	To check that the objectives have been achieved	Board marker

Appendix 5 – Handout

- 1. What is the purpose of business meetings? Discuss in your groups.**
- 2. Discuss in your groups and identify a possible definition for the following concepts: business spoken discourse, business interaction**
- 3. How can you start a meeting? Have a look at the following expressions and decide if any of them may be used at the beginning of a business meeting:**

Please go on, You've got this, that is a good idea, we must discuss emergency matters, it sounds like we found a solution, try to work harder.

- 4. Imagine you are part of an administration group of a multi-national company and you are facing serious issues due to the financial crises. Discuss in your groups how would you lead a possible meeting on this subject.**
- 5. You are working for a global company that has operating points all around the world. Everyone in your group has to choose a country to represent in order to get in an online meeting. This meeting requires an urgent discussion about the issues company faces due to the pandemic situation. Discuss in your groups and complete the meeting agenda:**
 - New updates on prior discussions:
 - Emergency issues:
 - Topic of the day:
 - Announcements:

