

Writing for Business courses: A genre and corpus based investigation

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3.25pm Rothley and Oakham

Introduction

- 435,230 non-UK students in British Higher Education in 2011-2012
- 30% of these students were enrolled on Business courses
- International students represent 36% of the total cohort of Business students in the country
- Clear need for EAP teachers to understand the demands of the discipline

Our local context

- Large credit-bearing in-session EAP module for Business students (around 300 students per year)
- Direct entry students to the 3rd year of an *International Business* degree
- Students mainly from a partner institution in Guangzhou, China
- Business students also make up a large proportion of the pre-session courses in Coventry
- Pre-session classes are largely organised around subject groups

Research questions


- What are the features of successful academic writing for Business courses?
- What makes writing for Business different from other academic disciplines?
- What can EAP teachers do to help students succeed in this discipline?

Research frameworks

- Genre Analysis – *Move structures, stages of academic writing*
- Systemic Functional Linguistics – *How context gets into text*
- Corpus Linguistics – *Source of language data*
- Academic Literacies - *The situation of writing, expectations of students and lecturers*

Definitions of 'genre'

- A troublesome concept....
- A *'class of communicative events which share communicative aims'*
- These genres contain similarities in terms of *'structure, style, content and audience'*
- Swales 1990:58

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- For Martin.....
 - Genre is a
 - *‘staged, goal oriented social process’*
 - Martin (1997:13)

Genre Analyses in Writing for Business Courses

- Zhu (2004) looked at academic writing on Business courses in the United States.
- 4 specific 'business genres'.
- A *case analysis* was based on an actual business situation where students had to apply theories and make decisions.
- A *business report* was the most flexible in focus and scope.
- A *proposal* focuses on strategies.
- A *design project* would design or improve a business system.

Literature Review 2

- Zhu argues that there is a ‘strong problem solving orientation’ and a real world element designed to ‘socialize students into the business world’ (2004:123)
- But students have to satisfy the ‘institutional purposes’ (2004:123) by demonstrating theoretical knowledge as part of their writing.
- A dual purpose in writing...professional and academic demands.....problematic for students?

Literature Review 3

- Yeung (2007) focuses on the overall rhetorical structure of academic writing on Business courses.
- Research articles generally have an ‘hour-glass’ structure moving from the general to the specific and then concluding with more general points.
- Business genres tend to have a more ‘funnel-shaped’ (2007:162) organisation.
- The writer may refer to some general theories but the emphasis is to move towards practical solutions in the recommendations section.

Literature Review 4

- Nathan (2013) built a corpus of 53 marketing and management case reports and compared them with the BAWE corpus
- Identified three obligatory moves reports (*orientation, analysis and advisory*)
- Five optional moves (*methodology, options and alternatives, summary and consolidation, supplementary supporting information and reflection*)

Business writing in the BAWE corpus

- Case studies '*analyse an exemplar in order to demonstrate or develop an understanding of professional practice*' (Nesi & Gardner 2012:189)
- Part of the *Preparing for Professional Practice* group which includes Problem Questions, Proposals, Design Specification and Case Studies.
- Case studies are common assignments on Business and Medicine courses

Business writing in the BAWE corpus

- The case study genre family....
 - 1) *Company Reports* where students pretend to address a business or shareholder
 - 2) *Organisation Analyses* concerned with business issues but not set in the imagined workplace
 - 3) *Single Issue Report*; more ‘overtly academic’ with no assumed consultant role or personal responsibility for advice

(Nesi and Gardner 2012:194)

	MORE ACADEMIC	MORE PROFESSIONAL	
BUSINESS GENRES	Single issue Report	Organisation analysis	Company report

The type of Business assignment affects the register used by successful students (from more 'academic' to more 'professional')

Register can be analysed in terms of the *field* (topic) *tenor* (writer – reader relationship) or *mode* (presentation of information)

Gardner (2012)

Initial study

- Investigates assignments on the EAP support module and main Business courses:
 - 1) What type of Business writing do our students have to produce?
 - 2) How do the assignment types influence the register of student writing? (field, tenor and mode)
 - 3) How closely should our EAP writing tasks and teaching be geared towards assignments on the main Business modules?

Data and data collection

- International Business students were approached in the EAP classes and informed about the project
- Students signed consent forms and ethical clearance was granted at Coventry and Birmingham University
- Initial research is into writing awarded over 60% by subject lecturers and EAP tutors (2:1 and 1st class)
- Currently 59 texts in the corpus (88019 words)
- All data is anonymised in the writing up of results
- Corpus analysis using *w:matrix* and *Antconc* tools

Business module assignment

- **Assignment Information**
- This assignment requires you to write a 1750 word original essay / report critically evaluating **BarclayCard** using the key frameworks of International Business.
- **Case Study: Barclay Card Case Study**
- **Frameworks;**
 - International business trade theories (Legal, political, cultural, economics).
 - FDI (Greenfield, JVs, Franchising),
 - Strategy (Risk, Organization structure, Porters 5 Forces, Value Chain, Ansoff).
 - You can use diagrams to explain the frameworks.
- **Guidelines;** Use the theories and frameworks of International business as an analytic lens to explain the policies of BarclayCard

EAP module assignment

391DEL - Advanced Business English: Assignment Brief

Coursework 2: (50% weighting)

Imagine you are working as an independent business consultant and that you have been commissioned by the management board of Tesco plc to provide them with some advice.

Write a clear and detailed report of 1000-1200 words. The report must contain:

- 1) a title page
- 2) an analysis of the current situation and the problems faced by the company
- 3) recommendations for action
- 4) all the other main sections used in a business report, as discussed in class
- 5) a list of references

Business module
Assignment



EAP module
assignment



	MORE ACADEMIC	MORE PROFESSIONAL
BUSINESS GENRES	Single issue Report	Organisation analysis Company report

How are these differences realised in the register of student writing?

Imagined consultant identity



Dark Knight Consultancy Service

2012

1.0 Terms of Reference

The scope of this report is to provide the management board of Tesco, with recommendations to implement regarding the current problems they face. Innovative Business Consultancy has been commissioned to deliver the report by 12th of December.



Language of advice / recommendation

should	82	0.41	Concordance
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EAP module

should	38	0.18	Concordance
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Business module

need	17	0.08	Concordance
needed	5	0.02	Concordance
needs	34	0.17	Concordance

EAP module (56 tokens)

need	26	0.12	Concordance
needs	14	0.07	Concordance
needed	1	0.00	Concordance

Business module (41 tokens)

Recommendations are important in both assignments, but more central to the EAP assignment.

4716 words EAP / 21,476 = 22% of assignment length

2697 words subject tasks / 21,421 = 12.5% of assignment length

Often mixed with 'conclusions' in the subject assignments in this corpus

Rank	Freq	Cluster
1	36	Tesco should
2	12	should be
3	9	company should
4	4	should consider
5	4	should do
6	4	they should
7	3	firm should
8	3	should also
9	3	should pay
10	2	experts should
11	2	it should
12	2	It should
13	2	should always
14	2	should cut
15	2	should establish
16	2	should have
17	2	should improve
18	2	should make

Most frequent clusters
with 'should'

Tesco or synonym (*company / firm / it*) = 50 / 82 = 60%
of occurrences

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1 e accounting policies in Tesco should be standardised and regu
2 , it is significant that Tesco should implement new strategies
3 ship with its suppliers, Tesco should strengthen its position
4 ts, it is important that Tesco should make efforts in dominati
5 ve competitive ability, Tesco should conduct a research of its
6 service was crucial. So Tesco should find methods to achieve
7 e business. In addition, Tesco should set up different regulat
8 similar mistakes. Then, Tesco should change its dividend poli
9 y to expand Tesco Extra. Tesco should pay more concentrate on
10 y to expand Tesco Extra. Tesco should pay more concentrate on
11 Tesco. At the same time, Tesco should guarantee the quality of
12 decrease of stock price, Tesco should introduce ârights issueâ
13 ly, including which part Tesco should enhance and where the st
14 o retain more customers, Tesco should boost its services quali
15 ent in this context. â Tesco should establish more e-stores t
16 ions It is our view that Tesco should do many changes in order
17 owing recommendations: * Tesco should do some research on the
18 om other supermarkets. * Tesco should not develop oversea mark
19 get through its crisis, Tesco should hire senior marketing sp
20 pattern better. * In UK, Tesco should do more online promotion

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Concordance lines with
'Tesco should'

'Should be'

1 counting policies in Tesco should be standardised and regulated
2 fore, a thorough overhaul should be implemented in Tesco's acc
3 e outcome of the analysis should be setting a clear vision whi
4 following recommendations should be applied: â€¢ Tesco would n
5 poor management problem should be solved at first. Problems of
6 f the companies objective should be to maximize shareholders w
7 pecial online offersâ€” should be boost. References -
8 with inferior performance should be shutdown in order to save
9 in order to save costs or should be converted to warehouses an
10 l state, immediate action should be taken to ensure that Tesco
11 ild the brand image. This should be started with the direct de
12 directed by those experts should be provided for the managemen

Able students were also able to use the passive voice to frame their advice

Use of frameworks and models in Business assignment



Visual information and models emerged as a major part of this assignment

This affected the *mode* of production with greater use of diagrams and application of models in successful student writing

Frequency list: Business module assignment

	Item	O1	%1	O2	%2	LL
1	Concordance Barclaycard	318	1.50	0	0.00 +	423.03
2	Concordance credit_card	167	0.79	0	0.00 +	222.16
3	Concordance Barclays	108	0.51	0	0.00 +	143.67
4	Concordance card	102	0.48	4	0.02 +	107.40
5	Concordance credit_cards	74	0.35	0	0.00 +	98.44
6	Concordance Johnson	81	0.38	1	0.00 +	98.39
7	Concordance bank	59	0.28	0	0.00 +	78.49
8	Concordance cards	58	0.27	0	0.00 +	77.16
9	Concordance Scholes	63	0.30	1	0.00 +	74.95
10	Concordance Whittington_2012	41	0.19	0	0.00 +	54.54
11	Concordance 2003	41	0.19	0	0.00 +	54.54
12	Concordance 1965	41	0.19	0	0.00 +	54.54
13	Concordance market	167	0.79	54	0.27 +	54.36
14	Concordance they	157	0.74	52	0.26 +	49.43
15	Concordance banks	37	0.17	0	0.00 +	49.22
16	Concordance entrants	36	0.17	0	0.00 +	47.89
17	Concordance high	80	0.38	15	0.07 +	45.21
18	Concordance when	60	0.28	7	0.03 +	45.06
19	Concordance debit	32	0.15	0	0.00 +	42.57
20	Concordance visa	30	0.14	0	0.00 +	39.91
21	Concordance clock	30	0.14	0	0.00 +	39.91
22	Concordance forces	39	0.18	2	0.01 +	38.79
23	Concordance transaction	27	0.13	0	0.00 +	35.92
24	Concordance Whittington	32	0.15	1	0.00 +	35.05
25	Concordance the	1763	8.31	1352	6.75 +	33.54
26	Concordance ansoff	25	0.12	0	0.00 +	33.26
27	Concordance new	108	0.51	37	0.18 +	32.39
28	Concordance was	173	0.82	78	0.39 +	31.67
29	Concordance cash	29	0.14	1	0.00 +	31.25
30	Concordance payment	28	0.13	1	0.00 +	29.99

Importance of models can be seen by the frequency list

Entrants, clock, forces, Ansoff

30 occurrences.

gic position we are and the Bowmans clock . We are going to conclude with a co
Wood .) Strategic Choice . Bowmans Clock . (Bowman 's Strategy Clock - Strat
owmans Clock . (Bowman 's Strategy Clock - Strategy Skills Training from Mind
ools.com. 2014 . Bowman 's Strategy Clock - Strategy Skills Training from Mind
e to a cheaper company . At Bowmans clock we see that they are moving to a ver
er 2014] . Bowman 's Strategy Clock - Strategy Skills Training from Mind
ools.com. 2014 . Bowman 's Strategy Clock - Strategy Skills Training from Mind
etitive rivalry BCG MATRIX Strategy Clock Recommendation Conclusion Introducti
ycard faced . BCG MATRIX , Strategy Clock to analysis the danger condition of
ys market share declined . Strategy Clock At the first , for the first-mover a
and special features which fit the clock point 4 , differentiation , and issu
ecially in 1900s . This changed the clock from five to six . Barclays have a h
analyse , I go to use the BOWMAN S CLOCK H I G H L O W L O W H I G H P R I C
I G H P R I C E Figure 4 : Bowmans clock (Johnson , et al. , 2012 : 121) It
clock for Barclaycard on the Bowman Clock in 1965 . Indeed , the Barclaycard C
oice 4.1Ansoff Matrix 12 4.2Bowmans Clock Strategy 13 5.0 Conclusion 14 6.0 Re
and Whittington 2012) 4.2 Bowmans Clock (Bowman and Falkner 1995) In 1967
the competition . Bowmans strategy clock illustrates the phases Barclaycard h
, in 1965 they almost got into 6 o clock , Risky high margins , in the late 1
lse too . - When looking at Bowmans clock Barclaycard should be looking at goi
the competition . Bowmans strategy clock illustrates the phases Barclaycard h
, in 1965 they almost got into 6 o clock , Risky high margins , in the late 1

Concordance lines can reveal how students use the models and apply them to the facts of the case study.


Successful students are able to demonstrate that they have understood the models and can apply them to the case

Conclusions and future directions

- Corpora of student tasks can be used to model successful writing on EAP courses. This can provide useful input in ESAP classes.
- An awareness of writing on main Business modules can influence EAP course design (in-sessional and pre-sessional)
- Collaboration with subject lecturers can inform teaching and the setting of assignment tasks
- Future interviews with subject lecturers will help to identify disciplinary demands more clearly

Selected references

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- Zhu, W. (2004) 'Writing in business courses: an analysis of assignment types, their characteristics and required skills' in *English for Specific Purposes* 23; 111-135

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- Thank you for your attention....
 - Any questions / thoughts / suggestions?