Writing at the crossroads; using authentic case studies in a Business EAP course

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Aim of my research

- To gain a greater understanding of the type of writing that Business students complete at university

- To gain more awareness of the linguistic features of writing for business courses at university

- To use these findings to inform my own practice and provision of EAP English for Business courses at Coventry University
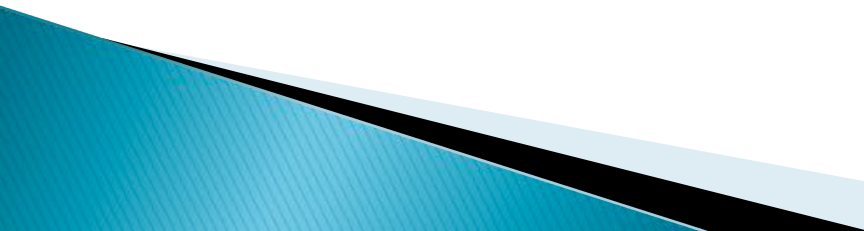
Background

- Increasing numbers of international students in the UK (435,230 non-UK students in the academic year 2011-2012)

- Nearly 30% (130,505) were studying on Business courses

- International students represent 36% of all students on Business courses in the UK

- Clear need for EAP teachers to understand the type of writing that students need to complete on Business degrees in the UK

- Source: UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA)

Background

- In our local context……

- Large Advanced English for Business module for 3rd year International Business students. Around 300 students on the course.

- Mainly Chinese direct entry students going into the 3rd year (previously also large numbers of French final year students).

- A credit-bearing module. Students have to complete coursework which counts towards their degree.

- Pre-sessional course, with over 400 students. Large proportion of Business students on the course (60-70% from this discipline). Mainly 3rd year students entering the International Business degree.

Literature Review

- Zhu (2004) looked at academic writing on Business courses in the United States.

- 4 specific 'business genres' – case analysis, business reports, proposals and design projects

- 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 and could include data from a variety of sources.

Literature Review

- Yeung (2007) emphasised the practical nature of Business assignments. They often work towards 'specific answers for specific situations'

- Business genres tend to have a 'funnel-shaped' organisation moving towards specific advice to the company or organisation.

- Contrasted to the 'hour-glass' structure of research articles.

Literature Review

- Gardner & Nesi (2012) – development of the BAWE corpus

- Based on 2858 texts gathered from 3 UK universities.

- 4 levels from 1st year to post-graduate, and 4 disciplinary groupings of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Life Sciences and Physical Sciences.

- Assignments were collected, analysed and organised into 13 genre families

Literature Review

- The focus of the project is on the *case study* genre family. Nesi & Gardner (2012) classified this within the *Preparing for Professional Practice* group.

- The educational purpose of a case study is to: demonstrate or *develop an understanding of professional practice through an exemplar*.

- Students have to analyse a particular case, with recommendations for future action

'Register' of case study assignments

MORE ACADEMIC		MORE PROFESSIONAL
Single issue Report	Organisation analysis	Company report

Gardner (forthcoming) divided case studies into 3 separate sub-genres
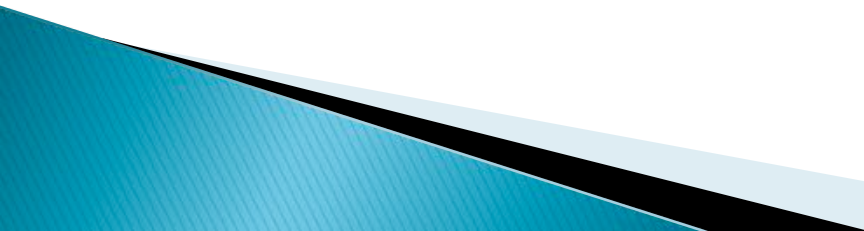
Single issue reports and *organisation analyses* were more academic in nature (theoretical and research based)

Company reports are more 'real-life' and professional (students more likely to take on professional persona)
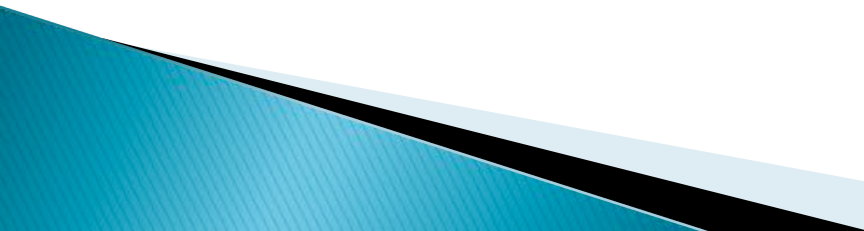
Research questions

- How widespread is the case study genre family in our local HE context? (Coventry University Business School – 3rd year International Business students)

- Within the case study genre, which sub-categories *(single issue, organisation analyses, company report)* are most common?

- Within the case study corpus, which linguistic features are commonly found in different sub-genres?

Methods

- Investigation of 5 assignment briefs from final year core International Business modules. Categorised according to the sub-genres mentioned above (*single issue, organisation analysis, company report*).

- Creation of a learner corpus of work submitted to 301ENL, a Business English EAP module. Analysed for linguistic features according to the same sub-genres.

Results – Business assignments

- *All* of the assignments identified were classified as case studies. It is the dominant form of assessment for this group of students at Coventry University.

- Many of the questions were actually a combination of *organisation analyses* and *company reports*.

- Students are expected to balance the academic and professional requirements of these assignments (see next assignment brief)
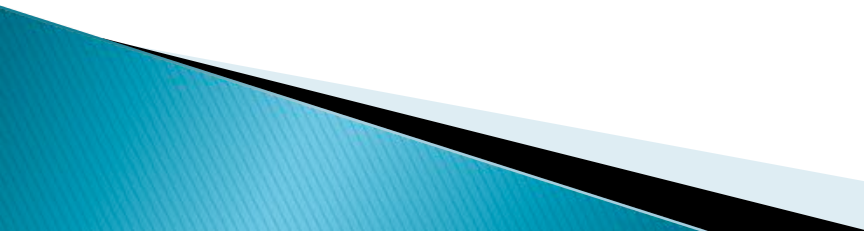
Results – Business assignments

- Coursework question:

- *As a* *marketing consultant* you have been asked to produce a set of *recommendations* on the key macro and micro-environmental factors that may influence Peroni's success in the UK, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. You are required to:

- Conduct *secondary research* to collect information about these markets' environment, using appropriate academic sources of information.

- Produce a report that synthesises the information collected through desk research and critically evaluates the macro-environment in these markets using *relevant international marketing theories*. The report should contain a *set of recommendations to Peroni* which identifies opportunities and challenges in each of the markets. Justify your recommendations and, where relevant, use examples to support your argument.
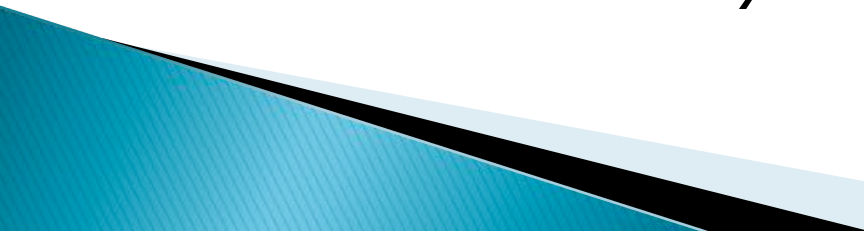
Corpus creation

- To investigate the language used in case study writing a corpus of student writing was constructed in response to a Business EAP assignment on 301ENL (2011-2012)

- The corpus was constructed across degree classification (1st to 3rd class) and across the two main nationalities on the course (Chinese and French)

- 5 assignments were selected from each group at each level which gave a total of 40 assignments (approximately 60,000 words)

- The organisation of the corpus allowed for comparisons to be made and analysed using *w:matrix*, *Antconc* and *Sketch-Engine*

Business assignment used in the corpus

- *Assessed Task*

- *You are working as a consultant and have been asked to produce a written report for Sylvia's Bar in Birmingham. Read the Case Study and write a Report containing an analysis of the current situation and recommendation/s for action.*

- Taken from 301ENL (2011-2012 cohort) – A Business EAP module

Results – corpus investigation

- Company Reports in the Corpus:

- Some students had approached the assignment as a *company report*, taking on the role of a consultant and using a professional register

- *We are a consulting company named "fresh consult" specialized in advising companies and businesses that do not go well in order to enhance the way they function.*

Results – corpus investigation

- <u>Organisation Analyses in the corpus:</u>

- Some students had approached the assignment with a more academic register, and were writing *organisation analyses* rather than *company reports*

- *Profitability, **according to Friedman (2007),** stands for a corporation's capability to obtain profits*

Results – corpus investigation

- French and Chinese writers:

- Results suggested that French students were more likely to approach the task as a *company report*.

- Chinese writers were more likely to approach the task as an *organisation analysis*
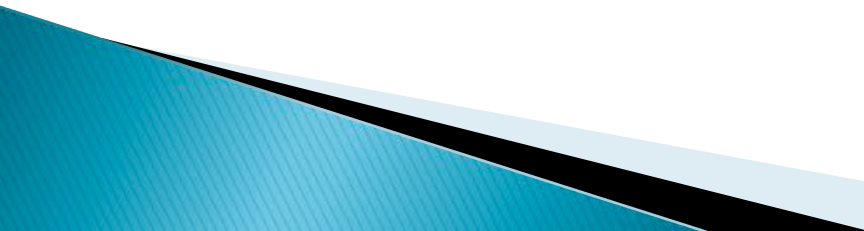
Comparison between language groups

- Strong French writers compared with strong Chinese writers
- *'you' 'your'* and *'we'* are much more commonly used by French writers than Chinese

Comparison between language groups

- Strong Chinese writers compared with strong French writers
- Higher frequency of *'marketing' 'strategies'* and *'product'* amongst Chinese writers than amongst French

Conclusion

▸ <u>Limitations of the study</u>:

▸ Quite a small localised survey. Some of the findings would need to be tested on a larger sample

▸ Focused on an EAP Business assignment. May have influenced the findings (higher concentration of company reports?)

▸ Only looked at 3rd year modules. Could be interesting to look at a wider spread of Business assignments in terms of genres across different years

▸ Would be interesting to approach subject lecturers and interview them using a more qualitative approach. Perhaps look at a variety of sub-genres and record their reactions.

Discussion

- Applications of the study / future directions:

- Could inform teaching and learning on in-sessional and pre-sessional courses. Guidance for students and teachers to focus on the types of writing that are produced on Business courses.

- Possibility of material design or online resources. Very little available for Business students writing reports from case studies (most material is still dominated by the essay genre)

Selected References

- Gardner, S. & Nesi, H. (2012) 'A Classification of Genre Families in University Student Writing' in *Applied Linguistics* 2012: 1-29

- Gardner, S. (forthcoming) 'A Pedagogic and professional Case Study genre continuum in Business and in Medicine' in *SFL Insights on Professional Discourse*

- Nesi, H. & Gardner, S. (2012) *Genres Across the Disciplines: Student Writing in Higher Education*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press

- Yeung, L. (2007) 'In search of commonalities: Some linguistic and rhetorical features of business reports as a genre' in *English for Specific Purposes* 26; 156-179

- 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

▸ Any questions?