



**The Asian ESP Journal**

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**Editors: Paul Robertson and Joseph Jung**

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## Foreword

John Adamson, Senior Associate Editor

The June 2006 edition brings some changes to the journal. Firstly, we have decided on a new name signalling a perhaps clearer direction. The new title, *Asian ESP Journal*, reflects the core vision that we hold of creating a forum for ideas into English for Specific Purposes in Asian education. This reaches across a wide range of subject areas to include Business English, English for Science and Technology and the various specialist professional and occupational purposes for which English is taught. The cohesive element within this diversity in ESP are the considerations that ESP practitioners must address when assessing student needs, designing the syllabus, gathering feedback from all the stakeholders involved in shaping the course, and continually developing themselves academically. In this sense, there are many commonalities in the depth and diversity of ESP research in various working and academic contexts. These contexts covered in the *Asian ESP Journal* may, at first sight, be only within the Asian geographical area. However, reflecting upon the flow of Asian students, scientists and business people across borders into other continents for study, training and business purposes casts another perspective on the diversity of research into 'Asian' ESP. This means that the relevance of Asian ESP research extends beyond the Asian zone into, for example, the experiences of Asian students in American and European universities, as well as research into the various work-related issues of Asian business people negotiating contracts with South American counterparts. Clearly, the *Asian ESP Journal* has the potential to address a variety of topics of relevance from teaching methodology, research, and issues which inform the ESP practitioner. The first 2006 edition of the journal is an example of this diversity. It has a mixture of research articles, a paper on teaching methodology, and an interview with a leading Japanese business professional.

Dr. John Adamson interviews Shigeo Toda from the leading Japanese electronics manufacturer, Seiko Epson. This in-depth interview casts light on the company's strategic approach to investment in Asia and also takes a look into internal management style.

The academic and teaching section of the issue is comprised of three articles. Mansour Arvani's study "A Discourse analysis of business letters written by Iranians and native speakers" presents research into Iranian and native speaker business letters using Halliday's (1985) notion of "lexical density", schematic structures of "moves" and "steps" (Swales, 1990; and Bhatia, 1993), and Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness strategies to analyze follow-up letters in English. His conclusion that "Iranian business letter-writers mostly focused on surface linguistic aspects of English language while... politeness strategies, were ignored in their letter writing" carries great significance for ESP course design in the Iranian context.

Dr. Yong Chen's article "From Common Core to Specific" describes the evolution of an ESP program for multi-disciplinary needs in a Chinese steel company. This study focuses on the ways in which the English language curriculum is shaped by the insights gained from student needs analyses and

regular course evaluation. Specifically, it shows how General English still has a role to play alongside more specialist English in the ESP curriculum in meeting “common core” needs. The manner in which course designers continually reflect upon student feedback and requirements as a program develops provides valuable insights for ESP curriculum designers in similar settings.

Finally, Dr. John Adamson puts forward a proposal for a teaching methodology in Business English entitled “The Globalization Debate in Business English: Exploiting the Literature through matrices.” In this paper, the use of reading grids in encouraging an “active reading” (Davies, 1995) approach to the globalization debate is outlined. This methodology argues that articles from a variety of stances and ‘ages’ can be successfully utilized with grids which focus the students upon key concepts in the texts.

We hope you enjoy this mixture of insights into the Asian business world, research papers and teaching methodology. It represents the eclecticism which we hope can inform and enrich Asian ESP practice.

*This interview is one in a series with leading business and technical leaders in the Asian zone. Such insights into the business world carry great relevance for ESP practitioners since syllabus design constantly needs to look into the practicalities and developments inside leading companies in order to address their needs more closely. In one sense, such interaction between the ESP instructor and client represents the kind of inter-disciplinary communication which informs better practice. From another perspective, it informs a wider audience about current business thought and practice.*

**The Asian ESP Journal June 2006 Volume 1. Article 1**

**Author**

**Dr. John Adamson**

**Title**

**Company Interview**

**Seiko Epson: Setting Standards throughout Asia**

In March 2006 Shigeo Toda, General Manager of the TFT (Thin Film Transistor) division of the Nagano-based Japanese electronics company, Seiko Epson, was interviewed by John Adamson, Senior Associate Editor of *Asian ESP Journal*. Thin Film Transistors have a variety of applications in the electronics industry, ranging from Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) projectors to projection T.V.s. and mobile phones. Research and production of TFTs at Seiko Epson is one of the company's key strategic business units. In this interview, the themes discussed were the internal management style of the company, and its business strategies in Asia.

**New management blood**

The first theme turned to the changing management style in the company. Toda san himself has over twenty-five years experience in Seiko Epson and has seen the company develop into one of the leading printer, projector and electronic devices manufacturers in the world. In his forties, he is young to carry such responsibility in management in Japan. In Seiko Epson, however, he is one of the new generation of managers who leads by his ability to communicate and motivate people around him, rather than relying on the power that his status could bring him. With more than one hundred people under him, I questioned him about his own personal management style and how it differed from other managers. In response, he professes to be less reliant on *igen*, the Japanese concept of clear hierarchical distance between superiors and subordinates, than previous managers. "This idea of *igen* doesn't interest me because it doesn't motivate people to share ideas," he explained in the casual meeting area in Suwa Minami called The Club House. "I just enjoy communicating with people," he went on, citing his influences in this regard as his old school and university teachers, as well as one his first managers in the company. "Heart-warming communication" was an expression he frequently referred to in the communication style of these previous mentors, an expression which Toda san himself genuinely exudes.

"So many managers in the past used to speak without this ability to connect with people," he continued. "They had *seiron* and *tatema*" at which point we both scrambled for our dictionaries to explain in English these concepts. *Seiron* refers to 'logically correct opinions' and *tatema* the superficial, polite 'face' often seen in more traditional relations. "What they didn't express is their *honne*", their real opinions or heart. This affected people in that it made them reticent to freely open up and 'risk' expressing an idea.

### *Igen, the Japanese concept of hierarchical distance in relations*

Toda san went on to stress how Seiko Epson remains a market leader by drawing upon “bottom-up” ideas. This entails creating an atmosphere in meetings and any interaction with staff which avoids the “tallest poppy syndrome”, referred to in Japan as “knocking down the nail that sticks up.” The most conducive workplace atmosphere, he argues, is one in which people are prepared to become *deshabata hito* or *tongata hito*, people unafraid to voice their opinions in a direct way to those around them, in particular towards their superiors. This is a clear break from the past hierarchical nature of Japanese corporate workplace relations. The current Board of Directors at Seiko Epson themselves are keen to encourage this new style of communication in order to provide a model to company employees of how the company can be innovators in the market place, not merely followers.

Delving into the practicalities of enhancing employee innovation, one aspect Toda san stressed was that his own style of managing people was based on the ability to listen well and give genuine feedback to those under him. This, he believes, was passed on to him by a former boss. “The best managers have a sense of ‘sympathy’ for those around them,” he explained. If too much *tatemaie* and *seiron* exist, it can stifle the willingness of subordinates to object to their seniors, resulting in a corporate culture of “yes” men. Genuine listening entails actively showing the conveyer of the message that the boss appreciates someone who is thinking innovatively about the company’s progress. Subordinates who say “no” and give alternatives to current strategy need to be encouraged, not suppressed, Toda san stressed.

### **Company culture**

In Seiko Epson a “One Epson” motto exists which encapsulates the corporate thinking and vision set down by the Head Office in Suwa, Japan and is disseminated among its worldwide network of branches, franchises, research laboratories, and production facilities. Toda san admits that the translation of this corporate vision is a work-in-progress. There are currently 13,000 employees in Japan with over a further 80,000 overseas. In this sense, the globalization of the Seiko Epson vision over the last decades has advanced quickly in terms of the number of people representing the company’s image. However, in reality, each local branch or office has developed its own regional philosophy permeating its modus operandi – in effect, as Toda san stresses, the process of globalization has moved naturally on from a Japan-centric vision to one which embraces local knowledge in order to more effectively penetrate the diverse markets in which the company operates. This is an age in which Epson has established regional Head Quarters (Holland, the USA among others) which have the autonomy to determine their own direction. This stage of globalization is what Toda san refers to as “The Third Age of Globalization” (Hindle, 2003), the first being in the post-war years when many companies sold products abroad that had been made in Japanese factories. The second age, generally from the 1960s saw the transfer of the production facilities abroad, whilst maintaining their head offices - and therefore the

decision-making power - in their home countries. The third currently emerging age is one in which companies start to transfer the location of their head offices to different countries in an attempt to include more 'local' considerations in the decision-making process.

*The "Third Age of Globalization" encapsulates Seiko Epson's global corporate culture*

Although this new age is not without its problems, Toda san feels that this regional autonomy enhances the talent that exists within the larger global Epson group in a bottom-up manner similar to the way he himself manages his own staff directly under him. In this sense, there is a consistency at the global and local levels of corporate culture.

**Seiko Epson's markets**

The next part of the interview moved on to Seiko Epson's markets, both geographical and demographic. The TFT products themselves that Toda san is responsible for are categorized into three 'domains', termed as "3 i's": imaging on paper (printers), imaging on screen (projectors and rear projection T.V.s.) and finally imaging on glass (LCDs on mobile phones). The established geographical markets for these domains are North America, Europe, East Asia and South-East Asia (particularly Singapore and Malaysia), however, more attention is being paid to the emerging market areas of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC countries). Although disposable income levels in the BRIC areas are perhaps lower than those in the more established markets, Seiko Epson is looking at them more in terms of their future demographic potential. BRIC countries, Toda san explains, have a younger average age of population than their western counterparts. In these countries, governments are purchasing Seiko Epson's technical equipment for schools and the tertiary education sector for students who will become familiar with their use and aspire to buy them for their own personal use after graduation in their 20s and 30s. These potential future consumers, termed as *anken mono* in Japanese, are the next market of Seiko Epson users who, unlike their parents, have the chance to gain a more technologically-oriented education.

The demographic targets in the more established markets are, in contrast, a generation ahead and are either those who are termed as the *dankai sedai* (the Baby Boomer generation) in their 60s, or those in their 40s and 50s with high disposal income. In Japan itself, Toda san emphasizes the importance of catering to the needs of the elder generation of consumers who are perhaps not so up-to-date with technological developments, but nevertheless wish to keep pace with the latest that their disposable income can buy.

*A reversal of the 'hollowing out' – ku do ka - of Japanese production to Chinese production plants will eventually occur*

Toda san continued by talking about the corporate activities in other Asian markets. TFT production facilities do exist in China but the company presence there is based firmly on the idea of cost advantage. Without the benefit of low



labour costs in China, there would be no reason for Chinese investment since margins are tight. This is the stark reality facing not only Seiko Epson, but other Japanese manufacturers who have been forced to adopt a *ku do ka* (hollowing out) policy of their domestic production and, consequently, to move to overseas factories. Asked how he sees the Chinese market in the next few years, Toda san commented that there is a limit to how much production Japanese companies should transfer away from Japan. Manufacture of peripherals in China is currently beneficial cost-wise, but Quality Control remains an issue with such labour-intensive production. It is important, he stresses, to retain the fundamental “know-how” in Japan and utilize Asian markets for their labour cost advantage. Eventually, he predicts, advances in automated production will reach the point where production, like their rivals Cannon, can be retuned back to Japanese plants. “High end” production should, he believes, take place in Japan, leaving low-price production to overseas Asian plants. This reversal of the *ku do ka* process may eventually occur for Seiko Epson, resulting in purely automated production in Japan in which only a small number of highly trained engineers are required to maintain mass production.

### **Strengthening the business**

Upon moving into the theme of how the company can strengthen its business, Toda san outlined various points which are currently being considered. The previously mentioned three domains – the 3 i’s – need to be expanded. In other words, new business models are needed, not simply those which emphasize selling products which meet an existing need, but those which create new ones in the market place. He explained this by taking the example of projectors; due to the increased popularity of MicroSoft and PowerPoint, Seiko Epson could meet a need which had, fundamentally, been created by other companies. It followed the market trends in the demand for projectors for PowerPoint presentations in business and education and has profited greatly. This is, however, reacting to market circumstances, not creating and controlling those circumstances as a market leader should. To achieve this level of innovation and control over their business, he stressed how important it is to create new demand, especially with the upcoming changes in Japanese broadcasting in July 2010 over to digital T.V. A greater challenge, but also one seen as an opportunity, lies in research into the application of TFTs in control panels in household use. The next generation of Seiko Epson’s technological research is focusing on how consumers can control their living environments with all-purpose control panels to manipulate heating, security systems and communications. TFTs are essential in this research and represent a means by which the company can take leadership in the lucrative household electronics market

### **Ecological policy**

The interview then turned to an area in which Seiko Epson has been taking clear leadership for several years, its ecological policy. The company has set a benchmark for other electronics companies in the way that it reduces waste, recycles as much energy as possible, and produces environmentally-friendly

products. This has been an evolving policy over the years and has resulted in the company adopting the slogan “The Earth is our Friend.” In 1990, Seiko Epson took the impressive step of abandoning the use of carbon fluoro-chloride products which are harmful for the ozone layer. Toda san spoke of the pride which company employees have in their day-to-day policy of avoiding waste and the extreme safety measures they take when handling any dangerous substances.

***We are looking at how European companies conduct environmental accounting and are prepared to learn and adapt these lessons to our context***  
But what benefit does this have for business itself? In response, Toda san talked of the concept of *kankyo kaikei* – environmental accounting. “We are looking at how European companies conduct environmental accounting and are prepared to learn and adapt these lessons to our context,” he explained. It is a difficult process to create added product value through an ecological policy, but it is one which Japanese consumers are beginning to appreciate. Toda san remains convinced that more and more buying decisions will be based on such ethical principles. Seiko Epson has a policy of no CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and aims to win over more environmentally-aware customers with this as a selling point. Toda san stressed the idea that this process of setting a value standard in ecological policy is one which needs to be easily translated in marketing terms. Every year he is involved in formulating the corporate “Risk Communication” to the public outlining current ecological activities and data. This is part of an on-going effort to create a sustainable policy and open dialogue with the public about how the company is conducting itself. “We cannot afford to make environmental mistakes,” he explained and warned: “Accidents which damage the environment require much compensation.”

### **Asian relations**

The interview moved on to the final topic of how Seiko Epson viewed relations with other Asian countries. 2005 saw anti-Japanese demonstrations in China and there are regular outcries at the visits by Japanese political leaders to Yasukuni shrine. How did Toda san see the impact of these events on business in the Asian zone for Seiko Epson and Japanese companies in general? Toda san reflected deeply on this point and explained how aware Japanese must be of the historical relations between Japan and the outside world. Politicians, he stressed, tend to communicate differently to business people. Although in the Japanese context, business leaders and politicians need to co-operate closely at times and appear to be similar, there are fundamental differences in how they convey their objectives to the public. Carefully he continued: “..modern people can respect each other...but psychologically many people have complaints, for example, the past and their memories...so sometimes they want to complain.” This seems to suggest that, despite the shock experienced by many Japanese business people in 2005, there is a sense of acceptance among many that voices are better heard than suppressed. Seiko Epson’s policy towards China has not changed throughout the difficult times. It remains positive about relations with China and sees the increasing disposal income of normal Chinese as an opportunity.

This sense of viewing Asia as a business opportunity is strong at Seiko Epson. Rising living standards in China, India, Vietnam and Thailand, among others, mean that Asian consumers will aspire to the same standards of technology that Japanese have taken for granted for years. “After 2008 (the Olympic Games), Chinese production facilities will start to move away from the Chinese west coast to the more central highland areas,” Toda san predicted. Foreign investment in China will shift to the lower labour-cost areas, eventually moving to other Asian countries. This is an opportunity for foreign investors in China if they remain flexible.

### ***Copyright infringement is a big threat for us***

The threats to foreign investors, however, cannot be easily brushed aside, he explained. There exist huge problems protecting Seiko Epson’s copyright in China. “Copyright infringement is a big threat for us,” he warned. It is one that needs to be addressed in the long-term since many other Japanese companies active in the semi-conductor and LCD development and production field have had similar problems to Seiko Epson. The difficulty lies in the protection and exploitation of a company’s original research. “Take for example, some Korean LCD makers. The basic, original technology was ‘grown’ in Japan but Korean manufacturers, like Samsung, are the biggest in the world.” This appears to be a weakness in Japanese industry, Toda san complained, and is basically due to the high labour costs in Japan which make it difficult to produce great ideas cost-effectively compared to other Asian competitors. The key is to automate Japanese production to the extent where production costs and quality on Japanese soil can compete with Asian competition. Transferring production overseas is one solution but always carries with it the danger of losing protection of the company’s copyright.

Looking back at the points covered in the interview with Toda san, one cannot help but admire the breadth of knowledge and insights which he has developed over the years. On a corporate level, the keys to the company’s success appear to depend on a manager’s awareness of a variety of perspectives on the positioning of Seiko Epson in the region and community. On a personal level, the strongest impressions remaining from the interview are those of the importance of knowing how to empathize and motivate people, and also of how to convey the corporate policy, particularly regarding its ecological accountability, to the public. These perspectives and skills are, as Toda san finally added, ever evolving, never static, and require the ability to look into the future from an Asian perspective.

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## The Asian ESP Journal June 2006 Volume 1. Article 2

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### Title

A Discourse Analysis Of Business Letters Written By Iranians & Native Speakers

### Key words:

discourse analysis, business letters, interpersonal language, pragmatic aspects of language.

### Abstract

The advent of the 21st century has accompanied globalization in scientific, technical, and economic activities on an international scale, which has magnified the role of English language in international communications. Hence, in order to achieve better and more effective results in international trade, the relevant authorities in non-native companies should be proficient in using business English.

To conduct a discourse analysis of business letters written by native English speaking and non-native Iranian communicators, 25 authentic follow-up letters written by Iranians in four big companies in Tabriz, Iran, and 25 authentic letters written by native English writers were sampled. Through Halliday's (1985) notion of lexical density, the number of lexical and grammatical words was computed. Then, on the basis of the model of schematic structure, the "moves" and "steps" of letters were specified and, finally, the politeness strategies used in the letters were analyzed.

The analysis of corpus showed that the Iranian business letter-writers mostly focused on surface linguistic aspects of English language while pragmatic aspects of language, such as using politeness strategies, were ignored in their letter writing.

Since the social and interpersonal aspects of language are of great significance for native speakers of English, any mismatch of linguistic forms such as interferences caused by Iranian writers may lead to misunderstanding and annoyance. Consequently, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teachers should try to familiarize the learners of business English with social features and interactional aspects of the language and direct the learners to use the social sub-skills and pragmatic elements in their business letters.

### 1. Introduction

Due to the profound political and economical changes in the world, the commercial relations of different nations have noticeably increased and English language is now considered by many nations as an international language. According to Strevens (1987: 56) “English is used by more people than any other language on the earth, although its mother-tongue speakers make up only a quarter or a fifth of the total.” Strevens (ibid.) estimates that the number of native speakers of English is around 350 million, but as many as 700 to 750 million people use English as a national, second, or foreign language, or as a language for commerce, industry, science, and other purposes.

To be involved in the world business, there is always a need for an internationally accepted language. While Zamenhof’s effort to make Esperanto a global language did not succeed, the English language has attained that status. English is used in global business for transactions in goods and services, technical specifications, financial reports, and other purposes among non-native and native speakers throughout the world.

In spite of widespread developments in communication technology, business letters are still widely used in the world as a main channel of business correspondence. However, to achieve desirable results in communicating through business letters, the communicators should deal with two major functions of language termed by Brown and Yule (1983) as “interactional and transactional functions”. It means that a business letter, in addition to being scrutinized from the semantic and syntactic viewpoints, should also be acceptable in respect to sociocultural aspects. Concerning the interactional function of written language, Widdowson (1984) believes that written discourse, like spoken language, represents an interactive process of negotiation. But whereas in spoken discourse this process is typically overt and reciprocal, in written discourse it is covert and non-reciprocal. The person to whom the writer wishes to transfer information is absent and this means that the writer has to conduct his interaction by enacting the roles of both participants. The writing and reading of letters becomes more important when one party of business is a non-native of English, highlighting the potential sociocultural differences when reading business letters exchanged between them.

This study intends to investigate the differences between English business letters written by Iranian writers and those written by English native speakers in light of its discourse features.

## **2. Methodology**

In order to analyze business letters written by native English-speaking (NE) communicators and those written by non-native Iranian (NNI) communicators, fifty business letters exchanged between four Iranian companies in Tabriz, Iran, and their business counterparts in England were sampled among selected letters. In the corpus, 25 letters had been written by Iranian writers in four big companies in Tabriz and the other 25 letters by native English writers in nine companies in England. The names of Iranian persons and companies in the

letters were removed to preserve confidentiality and, then, the letters were numbered according to the nationality of letter writers.

The selected letters were 'follow-ups' which had been exchanged between companies to conduct international business. Maggio (1999: 185) explains such correspondence as follows:

the follow-up letter which relates to an earlier letter, mailing, conversation, or meeting, is an effective and courteous way to tie up ends, to encourage some action or to build on something already begun.

The follow-up letters written by two groups were mostly concerned with issues such as asking or giving information about the specification of goods, terms of payment, type of packing and delivery, and other points related to selling or purchasing goods or services.

According to Halliday (1985) spoken and written form of languages differ in the ratio of content words to grammatical or function words. Content or lexical words include nouns and verbs, while grammatical words include such things as prepositions, pronouns, articles, conjunctions, and finite verbs. The number of lexical or content words per clause is referred to as lexical density. In this study, following Halliday's notion of lexical density, the number of lexical, grammatical and total words in the letters were computed and the lexical densities of letters were calculated. Then, on the basis of Swales' (1990) model of schematic structure, the "moves" and "steps" of follow up business letters were specified. Finally, applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness, the politeness strategies used in the corpus were identified and discussed.

### **3. Data Analysis**

#### **3. 1. The Surface Features of Business Letters**

The corpus in this study comprised 25 follow-up business letters written by native English-speaking writers and 25 business letters written by non-native Iranian writers. They consisted of a total of 2,313 and 1,539 words respectively. The average letter by the NEs had a length of 92 words, the longest 195 words and the shortest 19 words; however these figures in the NNI letters were 62, 187, 33 words respectively. The average lexical density of NE and NNI business letters were 0.38% and 0.36% respectively.

#### **3. 2. The Schematic Structure of Followup Business Letters**

The linguistic approach to genre analysis has used the notion of schematic structure in mapping the macro-structure of texts (Swales, 1990). The concept of genre has been defined differently by linguists. Swales (1990) provides a definition of genre which focuses on the communicative purpose of discourse. According to his definition, a genre comprises of a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes constitute the rationale for the schematic structure of discourse. Swales (ibid.) argues that from a language teaching perspective, it is useful to think of genre as consisting of a series of "moves". A move can be thought of as part of a text, which achieves a particular purpose within the

text. Each move is taken to embody a number of constituent elements called “steps”.

In a model of schematic structure, Swales (1990: 141) specified the following series of stages or ‘moves’ (along with their component ‘steps’) for the introductions to academic research articles (RA):

Establishing a territory  
 claiming centrality and /or  
 making topic generalization (s) and /or  
 reviewing items of previous research

Establishing a niche  
 counter-claiming or  
 indicating a gap or  
 question raising or  
 continuing a tradition

Occupying the niche  
 outlining purposes or  
 announcing present research  
 announcing principal findings  
 indicating RA structure

In a similar model, Bhatia (1993) proposed the following schematic structure of moves and steps for sales letters in business communication:

Establishing credentials

Introducing the offer  
 offering the product or service  
 essential detailing of the offer  
 indicating value of the offer

Offering incentives

Soliciting response

Using pressure tactics

Ending politely

The survey of follow-up English business letters in this study indicates that the schematic structure of these letters is as follows:

Move 1 Establishing a link

Step 1 referring to previous contact  
 and / or  
 Step 2 acknowledging pieces of information

Move 2 Soliciting information

Step 1 requesting / specifying product / service details  
 and / or  
 Step 2 requesting / specifying transaction details

Move 3 Prompting further contact

Step 1 expressing expectation of reply / attention

Table 1 compares the occurrence of these moves and steps in the corpus:

Move/Step No.	NE Letters	NNI Letters
1.1	12	14

1.2	8	7
2.1	8	18
2.2	18	10
3.1	20	21

Table 1. Distribution of Moves and Steps in NE and NNI Business Letters.

**Move 1 Establishing a link**

This move may be realized by means of one or two steps:

Step 1 referring to previous contact and / or

Step 2 acknowledging pieces of information

In the corpus, out of the 25 NE letters, 12 had “referring to previous contact” step (48%) and 8 had “acknowledging pieces of information” step (32%). The rate of occurrence of these steps in NNI letters was 56% and 28% respectively.

For example:

- *Thank you very much for your above referenced enquiry which is receiving our attention.* (NE letter # 1)
- *In reply to your fax dated 5 July 2002, we...*(NE letter # 7)
- *Referring to our telephone conversation please find attached the New Proforma Invoice.* (NNI letter # 8)
- *Many thanks for your fax dated 14.07.2000.* (NNI letter # 8)
- *Thank you for your enquiry, unable to...* (NE letter # 14)

**Move 2 Soliciting information**

In applying this move, one or two steps may be used:

Step 1 requesting / specifying product / service details

Step 2 requesting / specifying transaction details

An analysis of corpus showed that the occurrence rates of steps 2.1 and 2.2 were 32% and 72% in NE letters and 72% and 40% in NNI letters respectively.

For example:

- *.... the terms of payment were in fact changed to irrevocable letter of credit.* (NE letter # 7)
- *Please note the existing valve is a British (PN Rating) valve where ...* (NE letter # 16)
- *The goods has (a mistake in the original letter) been dispatched by flight No. 721 from Tehran today.* (NNI letter # 1)
- *.... Please arrange for air dispatch of any possible quantities available in stocks of your other sources of supply, ...* (NNI letter # 4)

**Move 3 Prompting further contacts**

Step 1 Expressing expectation of reply / attention

The survey of letters in the corpus revealed that 80% of NE letters and 84% of NNI letters included this step.

- *Looking forward to receiving the revised P/I soon...* (NNI letter # 2)
- *Looking forward to hearing from you soon.* (NNI letter # 9)
- *If you have any queries or require further information please do not hesitate to contact us.* (NE letter # 4)



- *Your feedback regarding the above is greatly appreciated and is beneficial in helping...* (NE letter # 5)

It is worth mentioning that the paragraphing of the letters does not necessarily correspond to the move boundaries (Bhatia, 1993). The following sample letter is an example in which we can trace two moves of follow-up business letter in a single paragraph:

*In reply to your fax dated 5 July 2002, we can confirm that as per our revised quote number 2, the terms of payment were in fact changed to irrevocable letter of credit.* (NE letter # 7)

As is evident in the above paragraph of a NE's letter, both "establishing a link" and "soliciting information" have been used by the writer. Also, in some NNI letters in our sample single paragraphs were found to include three moves of follow-ups (for instance NNI letters # 4, 5). This is, mostly, due to the paragraphing styles of NNI writers. In sum, though, it is clear that NNI writers attempt to follow the prototypes of business writing applied by native English-speaking writers.

### **3.3. The Use of Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies**

The most influential theory of politeness phenomena is that of Brown and Levinson (1987) who describe an interactional model consisting of two dimensions of "face": one positive and one negative. Positive face reflects the need to be accepted and to 'belong'. Using positive politeness strategies, the speaker seeks to reinforce the addressee's positive face by showing the addressee that the two of them are cooperators with common goals and expectations.

Negative face reflects the desire for independence, to be able to act freely and unimpeded by others. Respect is indicated with negative politeness strategies by showing that the speaker does not intend to limit the addressee's freedom of action.

Brown and Levinson (ibid.: 74) argue that three variables influence the degree to which an act might threaten one's positive or negative face: (1) the social distance between the speaker and the addressee; (2) the "power" relative to each other; and (3) the "absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture". If the speaker has less power than the addressee, for example, it is more likely the speaker will use negative politeness strategies to minimize the threat to the addressee's negative face.

#### **3.3.1. Negative Politeness Strategies**

As noted, negative politeness strategies are intended to reinforce the speakers' respect for the addressee, showing that speaker acknowledges the addressee's independence and freedom of action (Brown and Levinson, 1987). These negative politeness strategies can be indicated through indirectness of speech and modals.

##### ***Indirectness***

Indirectness is considered a negative politeness strategy to show respect for the addressee. After commands ("Give me..."), some of the most direct

linguistic structures are sentences that begin with “I” “you” or “my” (Upton & Conner, 2001). For example:

- *I believe you have already received ...* (NE letter # 18)
- *I hope this new arrangement would be helpful for you.* (NE letter # 19)

It should be mentioned that in just two letters written by an English writer, five sentences began with the pronoun “I” which was a direct linguistic structure.

However, sentences that begin with words other than “I”, “you” or “my” have a sense of indirectness. For example:

- *If you have any queries regarding this file, please do not hesitate...* (NE letter # 1)
- *Please could you send me sheets for ...*(NE letter # 6).
- *Would you please send me a copy of the original purchase order ...*(NE letter # 17)?

It is noticeable that the direct linguistic structure of sentences beginning with “I”, “you”, or “my” was not found in NNI business letters and sentences generally began with words other than “I”, “you”, or “my”. For example:

- *We hope to use your service in ...*(NNI letter # 13)
- *Your kind and soonest reply would be ...* (NNI letter # 13)
- *So please contact with your bankers ...*(NNI letter # 3)

### **Modals**

Modals that qualify statements have the effect of softening the idea being communicated. These types of modals fall under a category of modals called “socialinteractional” by Celce-Murcia and Larson-freeman (1999) because modal choice depends, to a large extent, on the speaker’s perception of the social situation in which he or she is interacting. The use of qualifying modals in the corpus can be seen as a negative politeness strategy. Modals that frequently serve to qualify statements include: would, could, may, might, shall, and should. In Table 2 the number of occurrence of qualifying modals in the NE and NNI letters is shown.

<i>Qualifying Modal</i>	<i>NO. of Occurrence</i>	
	<i>NE</i>	<i>NNI</i>
<i>Could</i>	9	0
<i>May</i>	1	0
<i>Shall</i>	1	0
<i>Might</i>	0	0
<i>Should</i>	5	2
<i>Would</i>	12	7
<i>No. of QM</i>	28	9
<i>No. of Letters</i>	25	25
<i>Use Rate (%)</i>	112	36

*Table 2. Occurrence of Qualifying Modals in NE and NNI Business Letters.*

As is revealed in table 2, native English speaking communicators applied more than three times the amount of qualifying modals in their letters in comparison to their non-native Iranian counterparts. The reason for this may be the lack of such forms as modals in the Persian language and the unfamiliarity of Iranian writers in applying them in the English language.

### **3.3.2. Positive Politeness Strategies**

A speaker uses positive politeness strategies to emphasize the shared goals and common ground between the speaker and addressee. These strategies are most effective when both the speaker and the addressee see themselves as equals or as colleagues. The risk in using positive strategies is that the addressee may not view the speaker as belonging to the addressee's group and may take offence. The directness of the speaker and also a sense of optimism are strategies of positive politeness (Upton & Conner, 2001).

#### ***Directness***

Two common structures stood out in the data as rather direct and thus threatening to the independence of the addressee. These were sentences that started with the phrase “kindly +[action verb]...” and “please + [action verb] ” both of which give the impression of commands, although politely. Table 3 compares the occurrences of these structures in two groups of corpus.

	Occurrence of Kindly + action verb	Occurrence of Please + action verb	Total	Rate of Occurrence
NE	0	7	7	28%
NNI	8	8	16	64%

*Table 3. Occurrences of “Kindly + action verb” and “please + action verb ” in the corpus.*

As can be seen in table 3, NNI letter writers used the aforementioned structures more than twice as many times as NE writers. The reason for using of these forms by NNI writers may be related to the patterns applied in formal letter writing of Iranians who usually end their formal letters with phrases such as “kindly / please + action verb.” Consequently, NNI writers might transfer their first language patterns over to English letter writing.

#### ***Optimism***

Optimism is considered a positive politeness strategy because it connects with the addresser’s desire to have his or her needs met. It also demonstrates that the speaker is trying to minimize the distance between the speaker and addressee by showing that they have common goals. Optimism was expressed

through the phrase “look forward to” and the word “hope” (Uptown and Conner, 2001).

Table 4 shows these expressions of optimism as they were expressed by NEs and NNIs.

	“Look forward to”	“Hope”
NE	9	1
NNI	4	0

Table 4. Optimism expressed by the phrase “look forward to” and “hope”.

For example:

- *We hope this answers your concerns.* (NE letter # 3)
- *We look forward to hearing from you.* (NE letter # 5)
- *We look forward to receiving your further information.*  
(NE letter # 9)
- *Looking forward to hearing from you soon.* (NNI letter # 9)
- *Looking forward to receiving the revised P/I soon.* (NNI letter # 2)

In order to provide insights into the types of letters under investigation in this study, two sample business letters from each group of writers (native English speaking writer and non- native Iranian writer) are presented below.

**NE’s Sample Letter:**

Dear Sir,

In reply to your fax dated July 2002, we can confirm that as per our revised quote number 2, the terms of payment were in fact changed to irrevocable letter of credit.

Regarding the question of origin of goods, they will all be UK.

We look forward to receiving your official papers releasing us to supply the goods as requested.

Project Engineer

**NNI’s Sample Letter:**

Dear Sirs,

Please be informed that with regard to HMC-630 machine concerning A/M L/C, no foundation drawing and writing information of the machine have been received so far. So please expedite dispatch, advising us of the result.

Best Regards,

### Procurement Chief

Taking into consideration the number of lexical and grammatical words used in the sample letters, the lexical density of sample letter written by the NE writer is 0.59%, while the figure for the NNI's letter is 0.60%. However, the schematic structure of sample letters is rather different. While in the sample letter written by the NNI only the move/step 2.1. "requesting / specifying product / service details" has been used, the NE writer has used the following moves/ steps in the letter:

- 1.1. referring to previous contact
- 2.1. requesting / specifying product / service details
- 2.2. requesting / specifying transaction details
- 3.1. expressing expectation of reply / attention

In terms of the application of negative politeness strategies in both samples, there is no trace of the use of qualifying modals; furthermore, all sentences begin with words other than "I", "you", or "my" and, hence, are indirect. At the same time, the NNI writer, by using the phrase "please + ( action verb )" and the NE writer, by applying the phrase "look forward to", have tried to benefit from the positive politeness strategies.

## **4. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

In this study the researcher has investigated some discourse features of business follow-up letters written by native English-speaking and non-native Iranian communicators. The study into the surface features of letters has shown that both groups enjoyed nearly the same lexical density and that the other differences in linguistic features of letters may not be considered as a significant factor in creating barriers to communication. Meanwhile, Iranian communicators tended to share similarities in the patterns of moves and steps of follow-up business letters to establish a business relationship.

In order to reveal the pragmatic discourse features of business letters written by the two groups, the use of positive and negative politeness strategies in letters was investigated. This part of the study showed that the business letters written by Iranians bore a few traces of politeness strategies. By using more informal and direct language in their letters, the Iranian communicators intended simply to convey their messages without thinking of how to employ forms which are acceptable to their counterparts. Maier (1992: 189) suggests that "business writing by non-native speakers, even that which is grammatically flawless, may be perceived negatively by the reader because of the inappropriate use of politeness strategies."

It is interesting to note that letter writers in Iranian companies, in interview responses with the researcher, expressed that they were not familiar with the concept of politeness strategies in business letter writing. Taking into consideration the importance of cultural aspects of the language in the development of global awareness and international understanding, it can be

claimed that pragmatic aspects of the language such as politeness strategies are often neglected in business English training in Iran.

This problem is also apparent in letter writing textbooks used at Iranian universities and in courses for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These are often editions of textbooks written by, and for, native speakers of the language and so some concepts, such as clearness and courtesy in writing business letters, may be perceived as vague for the Iranian learners. To address this problem, business English course designers need to place an emphasis on presenting intersectional aspects of language into their syllabi.

As business letter writing is a social activity, a 'thick' description within sociolinguistic frameworks of business communication can provide useful evidence for EFL and ESP researchers and teachers (Louhaila-Salminen, 2002). Teachers should try to raise learners' awareness of the power principle and the solidarity principle between interlocutors. In effect, the syllabus should pursue complex aims, besides those of teaching linguistic structures to learners. The implementation of tasks that involve active training through the use of authentic materials could represent one means to achieve this. Such activities should depart from simply the use of formulaic language learning and, instead, provide a bridge between the linguistic skills of learners and their professional knowledge goals. For today's business professionals it is insufficient to simply master the four skills in English. An authoritarian and teacher-centered style of teaching will certainly not come to terms with the objective of conveying interactional aspects of language through language teaching. Only a cooperative and learner-centered style will conform to the roles of both teacher (who becomes more of a facilitator and less of an instructor) and learner (as a discussion partner and ideas generator). After all, as Crystal (2000: 56) argues, "Language is an immensely democratizing institution. To have learned a language is to have rights in it."

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**Title**

**From Common Core to Specific**

**Abstract**

This paper looks at the process of designing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program for learners of various disciplines within a Chinese industrial institution. It stresses the importance of the identification of a 'common core' of English language needs among the program participants, as well as teaching a diverse range of discourses and genres to meet their 'specific' needs. It is argued in this study that the consideration of 'common core' and 'specific' needs in course design for program participants from multi-disciplinary backgrounds can greatly enhance their English language competence.

The study firstly reviews the literature and case studies related to ESP theories and professional practices in the field and then describes how the course designers in this particular context have conducted needs analyses to identify the sponsor's expectations, job-related needs, and the learners' general and specific needs. As a result of this process, the course designers have been able to formulate the program's foci, which in this case include common core and specific language needs. From the initial curriculum proposal to the revision of course and syllabus design, the author has reflected on the particular features of the program, its relative success and issues of the organization and implementation of materials and language input. Such a study may have some significance for other course designers involved in similar projects for multi-disciplinary learners.

**Key words:** ESP, needs analysis, common core, specific, course design, curriculum development

**1. Introduction**

The Chongqing Iron and Steel Designing Institute (CISDI) project was a workplace English training program intended to improve the English of the technical employees. CISDI initiated and sponsored the project, while the Sino-British English Training Center in Chongqing University conducted all the program implementation including needs analysis, curriculum and course design, material production, teaching and instruction, testing and participation in course/program evaluation.



This article is an expansion of recent research concerning the design of an ESP program for multi-disciplinary technical learners (Chen 2005). It firstly discusses the modified definition of variable characteristics of ESP and case studies, which form the theoretical foundations of this research. Many of the variable characteristics of ESP are identified in the CISDI project. Then various background and management issues will be supplied, which give more detailed demographic information to understand the nature of this project. Following this, the needs analysis structure and summary which identified the learners' objective and subjective needs and sponsor's expectations will be presented. Following this, the structure of the curriculum and course design will be discussed from the initial assumption of more 'specific' language elements to the adjustment of a more 'common core' array of language needs, which makes curriculum and course syllabi dynamic during the process of program implementation. Finally, the ESP language features and material development in this program, which emphasize the 'common core' rather than 'specific' language features, will be outlined.

## 2. Literature Review

An ESP course design is usually based on the specific needs of learners of a particular discipline. There are different purpose-oriented ESP courses, such as EST, EAP, EOP, EBP, ESS, etc. (see, e.g. Trimble 1985, Hutchinson and Waters 1987, Robinson 1991, Holliday 1995). Many articles have discussed the course design for special learners who have specific professional or academic needs (see, e.g. Bloor 1998, Puzyo and Val 1996, Stapp 1998, Yogman and Kaylani 1996). Several successful experiences in designing ESP courses are outlined in which the ESP course designers conduct needs analyses to ascertain the learners' target needs and learning needs (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: pp.54-63) and then integrate the required linguistic elements and skills into the syllabus.

Stevens (1988, pp.1-2 as cited in Gatehouse 2001) defines the absolute characteristics of ESP as being:

- designed to meet specified needs of the learner;
- related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
- centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse;
- in contrast with General English.

Later Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, pp.4-5 as cited in Gatehouse, 2001), offered a modified definition of the variable characteristics of ESP:

- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students;

From the above absolute and variable characteristics of ESP, a change can be seen in how the range of ESP has been extended and become more flexible in its modified definition. As noted by Gatehouse (2001), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, pp.4-5) have removed the absolute characteristic that 'ESP is in contrast with General English' and added more variable characteristics. They assert that ESP is not necessarily related to a specific discipline.

In addition, Anthony (1997 as cited in Gatehouse 2001) notes that it is not clear where ESP courses end and General English courses begin; numerous non-specialist ESL instructors use an ESP approach in which their syllabi are based on analyses of learners' needs and their own personal, specialist knowledge of using English for real communication. Many ESP programs are examples of such curriculum development and course design.

In the development of an ESP curriculum for Greek EFL students of computing, Xenodohidis (2002) stated that "the goals should be realistic, otherwise the students would be de-motivated." The integration of a considerable amount of General English along with various functions with computing terminology into the syllabi was based on the needs assessment from students, and was consequently considered as being realistic by the learners.

In the ESP course for employees at the American University of Beirut, as described by Shaaban (2005), the curriculum development and course content also focus on a common core for the learners from various workplaces. This content includes basic social English communication, following directions and giving instructions plus work-related terms and expressions.

Gatehouse (2001) also integrates General English language content and acquisition skills when developing the curriculum for language preparation for employment in the health sciences.

From all the cases of ESP curriculum design described, it can be concluded that General English language content, grammatical functions and acquisition skills are dominant in curriculum development and course design, while terminology and specific functions of discipline content are integrated in the course to meet the learners' specific needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) liken ESP to the leaves and branches on a tree of language. Without tree trunks and roots, leaves or branches can not grow because they do not have the necessary underlying language support, seen through an analogy of water. The same is true of ESP since content-related specific language can not stand alone without General English syntax, lexis and functions.

This is also true for ESP students whose specific needs emanate from disciplinary content English. In such cases, they usually have a sound language background before they proceed to ESP study. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, as cited in Gatehouse 2001) define ESP as being generally designed for intermediate or advanced students and is likely to be suited to adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation.

Since ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methodology are based on the learner's rationale for learning (Hutchinson and Waters 1987), the role of the ESP practitioner is essential to the success of ESP programs. Dudley Evans and St. John (1998, as cited in Gatehouse 2001) identify five key roles for the ESP practitioner: teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator.

As an ESP practitioner, I will offer insights into my experiences in developing an ESP project for multi-disciplinary technical learners, and also discuss the research process and findings of the curriculum and course design based on the above literature review in ESP theories and case studies.

### **3. ESP Project in CISDI, China**

Chongqing Iron and Steel Designing Institute (CISDI) is a state-owned design institute for the metallurgical industry in China. It has a little over one thousand staff, of which 90% are technical personnel. Since English, as a world-wide language, is required more and more often at work, in conferences, at business occasions as well as in personal communication, CISDI decided to sponsor a 16-week full-time English training program every year for its technical staff to enhance their English competence. This project lasted three years during which three classes of learners underwent training.

#### **3.1. The trainees**

Trainees numbered between 20 to 28 in each class and were mostly undergraduates, some of them post-graduates, aged from 25 to 38. All learned English for at least 10 years at school and most of them had working or design experience for several years. In terms of their subject-matter specialties, there existed a wide variety, among which are: mechanics, automation, electrical engineering, civil engineering, architecture, computer science, water & waste water, heating & ventilation, steel manufacture, casting, material engineering, precision instrument, environment protection, accounting, economics and even meteorology.

In addition, participation in this program was voluntary. Upon entry, learners had to take a pre-course test which they needed to pass before being admitted. It should be noted that they also incurred a loss in income by participating in this program. Usually the designers received a higher bonus depending on their completion of design tasks. However, they just received an average bonus if they took this program. This indicates that the trainees were very motivated learners with high enthusiasm for improving their English.

#### **3.2 The trainers**

The Sino-British English Training Center in Chongqing University was responsible for this project. The mission of this center is to design and offer English courses and programs to Chinese learners from technical, engineering or science backgrounds on campus or at their workplaces. The British Council assigned an EFL specialist each year to the center, who worked with our EFL

professionals, designing programs, teaching courses, as well as conducting evaluation and research in EFL, ESP, EAP, etc. The cooperation with the British Council in Chongqing University lasted for four years. For each class, four to seven trainers were involved in needs analysis, curriculum and course design, teaching and evaluation. Generally speaking, there was not a big turnover among the trainers, with the exception of the specialist from the British Council who only worked for one year. This meant that three different British trainers worked on the CISDI project, each working one year respectively. The other trainers were all involved for at least 2 years. At the time, some of us had master degrees in TESP or applied linguistics in the UK and most of us had had many years teaching and research experience in Chongqing University before the project started. According to Holliday (1995), implementation phases also include trainer training. Therefore, in this project we applied a collaborative approach in which we held regular meetings to discuss and solve teaching problems and difficulties in materials. This was a valuable process since experienced teachers helped the less experienced. Peer observation and co-teaching were both carried out and, in addition, regular staff development was offered. This took the form of in-service staff training in which workshops, seminars and video demonstration were given on methodology, ESP language studies and material production.

### **3.3 Project Administration**

The project administration included both parties from the trainees' institute and the trainers' center. After discussion and negotiation, it was agreed that the Sino-British English Training Center was responsible for curriculum and course design, needs analysis, material preparation, course teaching and coaching, test design and the organization of program evaluation. All the administration was shared by the trainers from the Training Center. For example, I was the course coordinator, and also the co-designer of curriculum, a materials writer as well as a trainer. In the center, we had a meeting room and a teaching staff room in which there were sufficient resources of books and other teaching aids, such as tape recorders, tapes, a video recorder and technical facilities, for example, TV sets, a photocopier, computers, and a printer. We also set up a self-access library in CISDI during the program equipped with many books and tapes.

The Education Section in CISDI took the role of student management, supplying the classroom and facility, and coordination with the trainers in terms of student and project affairs. CISDI assigned a full-time administrator to this program and prescribed strict regulations to the learners to guarantee a smooth course implementation. They also offered a suitable furnished classroom and a language laboratory. This was intended as a means to create a harmonious institutional culture beneficial for the learners and to make educational management more effective in CISDI.

## **4. Needs Analysis**

The project needs analysis consisted of pre-course and ongoing needs analyses (Chen 2005). With the pre-course needs analysis, we obtained information and data concerning ‘the need for communication skills’ (Holliday, 1995) to guide the curriculum development and course design. Additionally, through the ongoing needs analysis, we kept improving the program so that the learners’ needs could be optimally satisfied.

#### 4.1 The Structure of Needs Analysis

We employed pre-course needs analysis and ongoing needs assessment. The following (Table 1) is the structure of the needs analysis applied in CISDI:

Pre-course Needs Analysis:	Questionnaires
	Interviews
	Pre-course Tests
Ongoing Needs Assessment:	Weekly Student Feedback
	Student Testing Results
	Course Evaluation Reports

**Table 1. The Structure of the Needs Analysis**

##### 4.1.1 Pre-course Needs Analysis

Questionnaires were given to potential course participants in order to gain insights into their perceived needs, wants and defects. Additionally, information was sought about their specialist areas, work experience, personal background and other relevant details that would play some role in shaping the program.

Interviews were conducted with administrative personnel in the Education Section and the chief engineer in the institute, from whom we could determine the objective communication needs in jobs and the sponsor’s expectations for this project.

Pre-course tests included listening, reading and speaking, and were taken by all the potential course participants every year before each class began. From the results of the tests, we could ascertain the language level of the learners, which was helpful in course design and materials selection.

##### 4.1.2 Ongoing Needs Assessment

Weekly student feedback was considered an essential part of the ongoing needs assessment of the students. To achieve this, a questionnaire was distributed to gather data from students about their perceived progress, drawbacks and requirements in all the courses.

The test results from the previous class or from students themselves in scores gathered from quizzes and final tests were used for data collection and analysis for the further improvement of the project.

The course evaluation report from the previous year was also helpful for us to continuously improve all the courses and the project as a whole.

## 4.2 Summary of the Needs Analysis

### 4.2.1 Objective Needs

At the initial stage of the project, we conducted several interviews, first with administrative personnel in the Education Section in CISDI, then with the chief engineer, in order to find their job requirements or “what they have to be able to do at the end of their language course” (Robinson, 1991: p.7). These types of needs were regarded by the sponsor or institute as being relevant to the job. From the interviews, we identified the following as constituting their ‘objective’ needs:

- reading specialist literature, academic journals, reading instructions,
- writing instructions, drawing labels, writing technical and academic articles,
- attending conferences, lectures, technical or business negotiation in English,
- communicating with foreign engineers in design and at work,
- visiting and receiving foreign visitors.

### 4.2.2 Subjective Needs

The other important needs emanated from learners themselves in the form of ‘subjective’ needs. Robinson (1991: p.7) describes these as “what the students themselves would like to gain from the language course. This view of needs implies that students may have personal aims in addition to the requirements of their studies or jobs.” By means of informal talk with course potential participants, the following were adjudged to represent such needs:

- passing English examinations for professional promotion,
- working or studying abroad or in joint ventures,
- doing part-time translation,
- enjoying films, songs or VCD in English.

The following summary from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) led us to deduce that the learners did not really use much English for their jobs:

Q3 To what extent do you use English at work?			
never	rarely	sometimes	often
	continuously		
	3	13	6

Q4 How much listening, speaking, writing and reading of English do you do in and related to your work?

	None	not much	some	a lot	almost all
Reading		3	15	3	
Speaking	5	12	5		
Writing	5	9	7	1	
Listening	5	6	11		

We may also interpret needs as their shortcomings, or what they lack in knowledge and ability in English (Robinson 1991). These findings also helped us design a program to meet language needs. From the completed questionnaires in the pre-course needs analysis, we gathered the information about what they perceived themselves as lacking as listed in the questionnaire summaries below:

Q6 What is your weakest area of English?

Ranks 1 & 2	Listening	10	
	Speaking	11	
	Pronunciation	5	
	Writing		3
	Reading	2	

Q7 How much difficulty do you have in each of the skills listed?

	a lot	some	a little	None
Giving oral reports & short talks	7	9	3	
Expressing your own opinions	9	10		
Using a variety of grammatical structures when speaking	9	8	3	
Using a variety of grammatical structures when writing	2	13	3	
Using a wide range of vocabulary when speaking	13	4	2	
Using a wide range of vocabulary when writing	6	12	1	
Expressing what you want to say clearly	10	8	2	
Spelling	3	11	5	
Reading carefully to understand all the information in a text	2	10	5	
Reading to get the main idea from a text	1	8	11	
Understanding different accents	8	12		
Understanding spoken description or narrative	7	13	1	
Understanding informal language	10	7	2	
Recognising individual words	11	5	2	

Q8 What kinds of things would you not like to be included in an English course?

- Course Book - Step by Step
- Too much grammar
- Monotonous teaching style

Q9 What would you most like to improve?	
Numbers 1 & 2	Reading 3
	Writing 4
	Listening 14
	Speaking 12
	Pronunciation 3
	Vocabulary 4

It could be concluded from the analysis of the above summaries that they felt they lacked and wanted mostly a focus on the improvement of their listening and speaking skills.

#### 4.3 The Effect of Ongoing Needs Assessment

Every week we asked students to fill in a questionnaire to provide feedback on the course instruction and on their progress in learning (see Appendix 2). The following is one of the question summaries:

Q2 Do you feel that your conversations were generally successful?			
YES	14	NO	4

Summarizing the feedback from this question, it was found that the learners' speaking skills had improved. This was considered to be the most difficult skill and one in which the learners wanted to make most improvement. However, a summary of the results from the following question showed their progress in reading and writing was not obvious. The findings revealed that our course design, material selection or instruction needed some modifications.

Q7 How would you rate your general progress?

	A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all
Reading	2	4	11	1
Writing	2	4	11	1
Speaking	2	10	5	1
Listening	2	9	7	1

The testing results analysis (see Appendix 3) also demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of our program. Generally speaking, by comparing Test One and Test Two in listening, reading and grammar, the progress was substantial. But there were some negative different percentages in reading and grammar tests, while all the different percentages in listening tests were positive. This assessment guided us with our adjustment to concentrate more attention on reading and writing courses.

### 5. Curriculum Development and Course Design



Based on interviews with the education administration personnel and the chief engineer in CISDI, we put forward a proposal for curriculum design and general course syllabi. But after analysis of the questionnaire findings and the pre-course test from potential learners, we revised our initial assumption to focus on the learners' needs and perceived weaknesses. Over the three years of the project implementation, the program became dynamic externally, in the sense that there were continuous changes in curriculum design, and internally in the revision of course syllabi.

### 5.1 Initial Assumptions of Course Design

Since the course was designed for an iron and steel designing institute, our first assumption of this ESP course was to provide English instruction for the metallurgical industry. From the interview with the chief engineer and section director of the Education Section of the designing institute, we determined that the institute wanted to offer English language training to the technical staff in order that they could meet the work place demands of the future market. This illustrates, as Robinson (1991) points out, the goal-directed nature of ESP provision. That is, students study English not because they are interested in the English language (or English-language culture) as such, but because they need English for study or work purposes. The CISDI viewed English as a necessary international language for future work needs, so it provided English training to the staff. Robinson (1991: p.4) calls this an "institutional" (or even national) requirement to study English, usually because of the known role of English as an international language of communication, trade and research. She also notes that "first, needs can refer to student study or job requirements, that is, what they have to be able to do at the end of their language course" (1991: p.7). Along with course designers and the leaders of the institute, we all assumed that the learners needed to learn technical English for the iron and steel industry for their job needs. Therefore, we started to collect materials from the literature in metallurgy for preparation of linguistic input in the learners' specialties and proposed a curriculum design with emphasis on specific language content as shown in the following diagram (Figure 1):

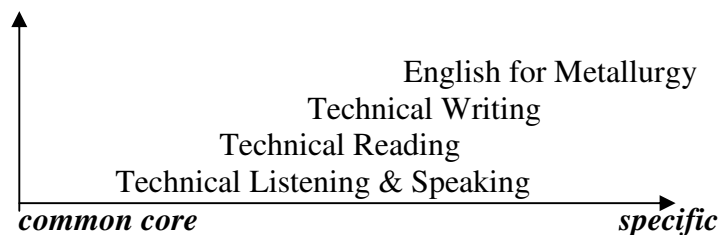


Figure 1. The Initial Curriculum Design Proposal

This curriculum proposal was a typical ESP course design which focused on the learners' supposed institutional and job needs to meet the sponsor's expectations for the program.

### 5.2 The Revision of Curriculum and Course Design

Our first assumptions about the nature of the program were found to be incorrect when we conducted the pre-course oral test. When talking with potential course participants, we found out that many of them had not graduated from the metallurgical discipline, but from various other specialties. It was also discovered that they wanted to improve their General English proficiency, such as speaking, listening, reading and writing rather than their specialist English. Robinson (1991) notes that students may wish to practice general topics and activities, in addition to those shown to be relevant for their work or specialist study. We almost ignored such preferences while concentrating too much on institutional requirements. But the question remained as to what kind of language and content could be offered to them if the course in metallurgical English could be flexible. Robinson (1991) suggests that in mixed ESP classes of engineers from electrical engineers and mechanical engineering backgrounds, much remains in common among participants in the sense that they have shared knowledge and overall objectives even though they have different job duties. To deal with such mixed classes, the following is proposed:

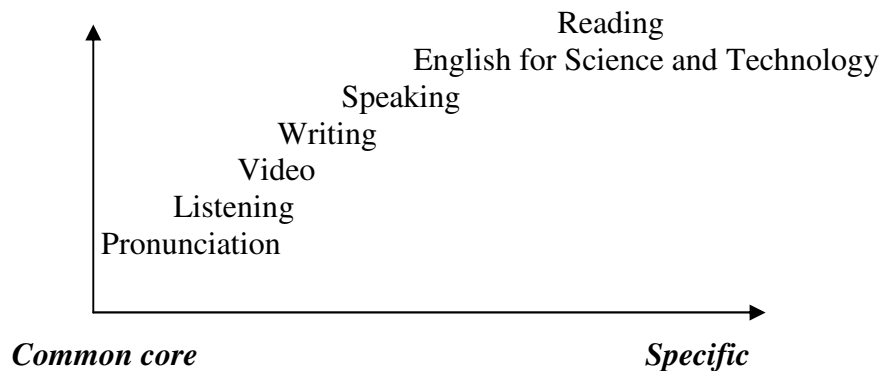
... an ESP course need not include specialist language and content. What is more important is the activities that students engage in. These may be specialist and appropriate even when non-specialist language and content are involved. We should be guided by what the needs analysis suggests and what we are institutionally capable of, and cases certainly exist where apparently general language and content are best. (Robinson, 1991: p. 4)

After reviewing the ESP literature and theories, we revised our course design and put more stress on classroom activities in General English and General Technical English instead of content-specific language. Our resulting experiences proved that Robinson's suggestion was the most feasible approach to the CISDI project.

After the first assumption was proven as false, we quickly made changes in our perception of the original course design. By looking at the learners' objective work and study needs and subjective personal needs, we mixed and filtered these needs into core needs as follows:

- the need to improve General English in four skills, particularly in listening and speaking;
- the need to improve common-core Technical English in five skills (including translation).

This significant reorganization of needs led to our first curriculum design comprised of General English and General Technical English including 7 courses as follows (Figure 2):



**Figure 2. The Revised Curriculum and Course Design**

This design was based on the above needs analysis and our understanding that ESP is not a separate discipline from general EFL or ESOL (Holme, 1996: p. 1). Courses of Listening, Pronunciation, Video and Writing focused on General English topics, while Speaking classes embraced a range of input in both General English and General Technical English. English for Science and Technology was initially designed to bridge General Technical English and Technical English, but Reading classes concentrated more on Technical English. This revised curriculum structure changed the perception of the ESP program, resulting in a program in which General English, representing the 'common core' of language input, had more weight than Technical English, which was seen as meeting the 'specific' language needs of the participants. General Technical English was stressed more than 'specific' Technical English. Thus, 'common core' English and General Technical English played a more dominant role in the curriculum in this ESP project at CISDI. This curriculum structure was applied over all the three years of its operation with a little modification in the third year program in which a Business English component replaced the subject of Pronunciation.

### **5.3 Dynamic Design of Curriculum and Course Syllabi**

Over the duration of the project, the program did not remain static, instead becoming quite dynamic in the design of the curriculum structure and syllabi. As Robinson (1991) notes, there are often constraints from administrative factors, financial factors, learners' expectations and the status of English in society which play a role in shaping English courses. For example, in the third year program, a Business English course was added to take the place of the Pronunciation course. This decision was made because the learners' needs in pronunciation were not considered so important as those of other language areas; another reason for this change was that the learners' wants had partly shifted to the Business English area. This is an example of how the curriculum structure was changed to meet their evolving needs. In addition to these external factors which bring about changes in the course, there were also cases of some amendments emanating from internal origins. One instance of this occurred in the EST syllabus. For the first two classes, EST focused on Technical English for building construction and architecture, yet there were

only a few participants who were actually working as civil engineers, architects and HVAC engineers. For them, the syllabus was seen as being practical in nature, but not for others. So in the following two years, the EST syllabus was revised to include 'common core' Technical English covering more specialist subjects. Table 1 below represents the EST course objectives, materials used and comments from the evaluation report in the third-year program:

---

### **English for Science and Technology**

#### Aims

- \* to help students communicate effectively in their professional field
- \* to develop all 4 skills
- \* to enhance the ability to solve problems
- \* to understand the general features of a text
- \* to discuss, ask and answer questions related to technical topics
- \* to make notes of the main points of a reading text
- \* to write summaries and paragraphs related to technical topics
- \* to understand and increase technical vocabulary related to general science and technology, computer science, general mechanical engineering and building construction
- \* to describe or present technical content related to their work

#### Materials Used

CU Materials involving the technical content of computer science, material engineering, technical engineering, construction and case study. There are 8 units in the course each presenting different and/or related topic areas

Unit 1 Properties and Shapes

Unit 2 Computers

Unit 3 Structure

Unit 4 Computer Application

Unit 5 Engineering Materials

Unit 6 Construction

Unit 7 Operating systems

Unit 8 Glass under tension

#### General Comments

Previously 'Nucleus: Architecture and Building Construction' was used as the core textbook. However, due to the fact that there were many areas which were not relevant to the majority of the participants, it was thought important that CU develop their own materials which would be more relevant.

Each unit consists of all four skills together with a variety of activities to give students the opportunity to develop their communicative competence. Since the content includes different topics, the language presented in the text varies - it includes technical vocabulary, sentence

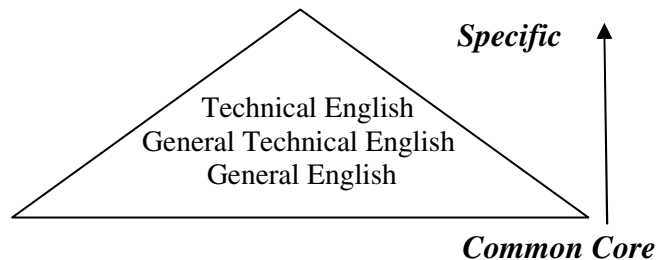
structure and paragraph development. It also includes a grammar review.

This approach has proved to be an improvement on previous training courses. It is hoped that further materials will be trialed and developed in the future.

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### **Table 1: The EST Course Evaluation**

Based on the needs analysis and theories of ESP, our perception of this project was that it did not represent a typically specialist content-focused ESP program, but rather, a project with much stress on General English, and 'common core' Technical English. As a consequence, we designed the curriculum structure and course syllabi in a bottom-up manner (Figure 3). Many courses aimed to improve General English; some courses concentrated on 'common core' Technical English enhancement; and a few courses focused on subject knowledge and terminology.



**Figure 3: Bottom-up Course Design**

## **6. Implementation Issues of Language and Materials**

In accordance with the curriculum and course design stressing 'common core' language, General Technical English and little specific language, the course syllabi were designed with the same stress on the selection of language and materials based on course organization.

### **6.1 Language Elements Selection**

Based on the theories of language description and the findings from needs analyses, we placed the language input in the program into three categories - General English, General Technical English and Technical English (Chen 2005). As Chen explains (2005):

We did not sequence them in terms of priority, namely, General English first, General Technical English second and, finally, Technical English. Instead, we distributed all the input of the three categories into courses simultaneously. However, we did sequence language in each category internally in terms of degrees of difficulty and complexity, and from generality to specificity in each course.

The following demonstrates the distribution of the courses in three categories:

Categories Courses	General English	General Technical English	Technical English
Pronunciation	√		
Listening	√		
Video	√		
Writing	√	√	
Speaking	√	√	
EST		√	√
Reading		√	√

**Table 2. Course Distribution in Categories**

### 6.1.1 General English Coverage

From the above table, it can be seen that most courses focused on General English. In these courses, participants' existing knowledge of English was reviewed and new lexis, structures, and content as well as all the skills were improved. This approach was based on the cognitive view of language learning and the affective factor in language learning, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) consider learners as 'feeling' beings. When new knowledge comes in the form of input with familiar language elements and topics, learners tend to perceive learn as easier. The contents of these courses focused on general topics so the learners became more interested in the lessons, leading, in turn, to an increased sense of motivation in their studies. Moreover, General English improvement could fill the gap in sub-technical English because "scientific English, for example, uses the same structures as any other kind of English but with a different distribution" (Kennedy and Bolitho 1984: p.19). As a result, at the sub-technical level, learners could easily deal with sub-technical contents with the help of General English knowledge because in Technical English, as Robinson (1991) points out, many common core language words are used for technical purposes. One interesting example was noted when the common core word 'preliminary', which was learned in an EST class, was applied by many participants when describing their technical drawings. In brief, these General English courses helped the learners build their vocabulary and led to overall improvement in their English.

### 6.1.2 From General English to General Technical English

The second category is the bridge to connect General English with Technical English. Speaking and Writing courses are organized with the language input from general to specific. For example, in the speaking class, topics were sequenced in three stages. In the first stage, very general topics were involved, such as personal details, weather, traffic problems and story telling. However, the second stage progressed a little further to cover general technical topics, such as talking about buildings, advantages and disadvantages of dams, modern and old vehicles. The third stage of topic selection was most relevant to the participants' work since it included designing projects, technical negotiation and holding specialist conferences. The participants felt very

comfortable in producing language since productive skills were acquired gradually from simplicity to complexity and from generality to specificity. In addition, EST and Reading courses started from this category. Since the learners were from multi-disciplinary areas, their needs in technical English varied greatly so that the 'common core or nucleus' (Robinson 1991) of special English had to be taught to bridge the gap between General and Technical English.

### **6.1.3 From General Technical English to Technical English**

There was no very obvious difference crossing from the second to the third category. Considering that all the participants were engineers and designers, albeit from various fields, 'common core' subject content as language input was selected in EST and Reading. However, the crossing to the third category placed more emphasis on the organization of the content, which ranged from the very general technical to the more specific. As the content input became more and more technical, language input in the content grew more and more specific. In addition, quite a lot of visual input was included in the EST. Johns (1998: pp.183-197) states the importance of visual presentations in ESP to include graphs, charts, maps, technical drawing, plans, etc, because engineers read such visually-related literature frequently in their work. The visual information includes language input as well as content input, so it can be transferred to verbal information or vice versa. The course participants were very familiar with the visual input of the content; as a result, they were interested in utilizing this language feature and tried to express themselves by means of the visuals to which they were exposed, thus promoting their language learning. At the end of the program, all the learners felt very confident in using Technical English as well as General English.

## **6.2. Material Organization**

As Hutchinson and Waters (1987: p. 96) state, there are three possible ways of applying materials: using existing materials, writing materials and adapting materials. Robinson (1991) indicates that these come in the form of textbooks and in-house materials. In the light of the aims and objectives of the CISDI course design and course syllabi, all these types of materials --- published textbooks, tailor-made materials and written materials--- were employed in the program.

### **6.2.1 Selection of Published Textbooks**

According to Robinson (1991), published textbooks have the advantages of saving time, costing less than in-house materials, having greater availability, and being easy access for learners to reviewing and referencing. Since the program had seven courses, there was insufficient time and human resources to write all the textbooks for this program. Consequently, it was decided that some courses, such as Pronunciation, Listening, Reading and EST, should be instructed with published textbooks to exploit the syllabus objectives. In order to meet the learners' needs and expectations, the selection of textbooks followed these emphases (Chen 2005):

- 1) the avoidance of selecting extremely advanced textbooks in language because learners would be confounded by difficult language added to the complexity of content information, and hence lose interest in the text full of new lexis;
- 2) the selection of textbooks with appropriate subject contents relevant to learners' common knowledge, personal interests and professional fields;
- 3) paying attention to both verbal and visual information existing in the textbooks;
- 4) matching difficulty extent of textbooks between courses.

In addition, we carried out the strategies of ongoing textbook evaluation and selection based on learners' ongoing needs analysis. For example, reading textbooks were changed several times, even within the course of one class because of difficulty levels and the learners' changing needs. In the first two years, a published textbook, *Nucleus: Architecture and Building Construction* was selected as the EST course material. However, it was changed to a tailor-made textbook in the following years, because it met neither the objective specialist needs, nor the personal interests of the most course participants.

### **6.2.2 Tailor-Made Textbooks**

Since materials adaptation is less time-consuming and less expensive than in-house materials, the courses of Speaking, Writing and Video were taught with tailor-made textbooks. Besides, adapted materials are more suitable to ESP learners than textbooks since no textbooks could fully satisfy the particular needs of any ESP learners. Adapted materials are also reliable, available and various to select in the physical sense. In the process of material selection, reorganization and sequencing, three kinds of consideration were stressed (Chen 2005):

- 1) the selection of materials with properly difficult language input in terms of vocabularies and structures with consideration of their level transition from simplicity to difficulty;
- 2) attention to subject content input in the tailor-made materials, usually from general topics to subject-specific topics;
- 3) the adaptation of adequate and appropriate activities in the selected materials, namely, the activities in each unit have to be coherently matched to avoid discretion and isolation in materials adaptation and to make the adapted textbooks complete.

### **6.2.3 Writing Textbooks**

According to Robinson (1991: pp.56-58), in-house produced materials are more specific for unique learning situation, and "have greater face validity in terms of the language dealt with and the contexts it is presented in" and more suitable methodology for the intended learners. However, they are also more expensive and time consuming to produce than published textbooks or adapted



materials. Moreover, they will appear more difficult to deal with in both contents and language if the authentic materials are not carefully or cautiously organized, or if the data are not properly collected (Chen 2005). Due to all those difficulties, this method was only used in part of the textbook for EST, in which some units were tailored from published textbooks and some were written by course teachers. This production of the mixed materials was for two reasons. First, there were various subject contents in the course, so it was hard to gather authentic material from all the content areas. As a consequence, we had to create a mixed package from both existing and authentic materials. Secondly, authentic materials produced with academic information in disciplinary fields were usually more subject-specific, therefore, they seemed more difficult in terms of content complexity and subject lexis. Such a case had actually occurred in a previous ESP project, in which all in-house authentic materials had been written and used after much time had been spent writing materials collected from specialist academic journals, literature and data. The materials were very specific and suitable for the learners' target needs, yet they perceived them as too difficult and lost interest in learning. The lesson from that project led us to produce the partly-written EST course materials for this program at a more appropriate level of difficulty, complexity and challenge in language and contents.

From the implementation of the project, these integrated materials proved to be a success in terms of assisting the learners' linguistic development.

## **7. Conclusions**

The CISDI project finally proved to be an example of a successful ESP project and it is felt that the experiences gained from its development have benefited subsequent ESP programs on campus or at other workplaces. This paper has expanded upon the previous study by Chen (2005). The study and research on the implementation of the project and has drawn important conclusions on the process of formulating and conducting needs analyses, and the development and design of the ensuing ESP curriculum. Moreover, it has provided insights into the challenges facing ESP or EFL practitioners who are required to take on a multitude of roles, not only as instructors, but also as course designers, material writers, researchers and evaluators. From this further research on the program, my understanding of ESP program design has led to two major deductions: 1) course designers of any ESP courses should firstly explore the potential learners' actual and various needs, wants, shortfalls and requirements. The designers should also help learners identify their needs since sometimes the learners do not have a clear picture of their own; 2) though ESP learners are usually adults at the intermediate or advanced level and in specific disciplines, they still need to improve their General English or General Technical English before they actually take English for their specific subject areas. If these two steps are completed, all other stages can be performed successfully. Therefore, ESP course designers should strive to ascertain the learners' needs, wants, lacks and whether the program has a technical or common core focus. In this way, curricula and syllabi can be developed which are both more dynamic in nature.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: CISDI Needs analysis questionnaire

Q1 How long have you been learning English?

10 - 11 Years 14  
12 - 15 years 5  
Over 15 years 7

Q2 How important is English to you?

Not important 1 2 3 4 5 extremely  
important  
3 6 13

Q3 To what extent do you use English at work?

never rarely sometimes often  
continuously  
3 13 6

Q4 How much listening, speaking, writing and reading of English do you do in and related to your work?

	None	not much	some	a lot	almost all
Reading		3	15	3	
Speaking	5	12	5		
Writing	5	9	7	1	
Listening	5	6	11		

Q5 What kind of reading do you do?

Technical papers 10  
Architectural drawings 2  
Engineering 1  
Faxes 1  
Technical data 1

What kind of writing do you do?

None 10  
Letters 4

Technical data 2  
 Reports 2  
 Faxes 1

What kind of speaking do you do?

None 14  
 Speaking to foreign experts 9

What kind of listening do you do?

None 14  
 Negotiations with foreigners 3

Q6 What is your weakest area of English?

Ranks 1 & 2      Listening 10  
                          Speaking 11  
                          Pronunciation 5  
                          Writing 3  
                          Reading 2

Q7 How much difficulty do you have in each of the skills listed?

	a lot	some	a little	None
Giving oral reports & short talks	7	9	3	
Expressing your own opinions	9	10		
Using a variety of grammatical structures when speaking	9	8	3	
Using a variety of grammatical structures when writing	2	13	3	
Using a wide range of vocabulary when speaking	13	4	2	
Using a wide range of vocabulary when writing	6	12	1	
Expressing what you want to say clearly	10	8	2	
Spelling	3	11	5	
Reading carefully to understand all the information in a text	2	10	5	
Reading to get the main idea from a text	1	8	11	
Understanding different accents	8	12		
Understanding spoken description or narrative	7	13	1	
Understanding informal language	10	7	2	
Recognising individual words	11	5	2	

Q8 What kinds of things would you not like to be included in an English course?

Course Book - Step by Step  
 Too much grammar  
 Monotonous teaching style

Q9 What would you most like to improve?

Numbers 1 & 2                      Reading 3

Writing 4  
 Listening 14  
 Speaking 12  
 Pronunciation 3  
 Vocabulary 4

**Appendix 2: CISDI Student Feedback Week 13**

Q2 Do you feel that your conversations were generally successful?

YES 14 NO 4

Why?

More confident 1

More fluent 1

I can express my opinions more effectively 5

Others can understand me 1

Others can't understand me 1

I can catch the main idea 1

I can't use the correct intonation 1

Q3 What English Language films/TV programmes have you seen/listened to ?

VOA 2

BBC 3

CCTV 8

Films 1

Listening materials 1

Q5 Have you written anything in the last two weeks

Comparisons 6

Business Letters 9

Newspaper articles 5

Speech 7

Q6 Write down 10 new words you have learnt in English in the last two weeks and their Chinese translation

There seems to be a wide dispersal of words taken from all the courses

Q7 How would you rate your general progress?

	A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all
Reading	2	4	11	1
Writing	2	4	11	1
Speaking	2	10	5	1
Listening	2	9	7	1

Q12 Do you have any comments on the course so far?

All the courses are very difficult

It is very good. My interest level is higher. Now my level of English is bad but I believe I can study well in the future  
 We should tape some engineering discussions such as negotiations and use them on the course.  
 Time is very limited which is a pity  
 The course is good but progress depends on us  
 More error correction is needed on the spoken course  
 It is successful  
 I don't like the teaching methodology  
 Generally speaking I have made great progress in all 4 skills  
 The course we have is so good that I don't want it to end

General Comments

Students seem to feel that they have made the most progress in speaking and listening which is encouraging given the balance of the whole course. More students comment that they feel their conversations were generally successful. Students also comment that they feel their general progress has been greater than before although I feel that many students are still under-estimating the progress they have made.

In general, I believe most students are happy with the course we have offered and in light of comments at the end of the questionnaire, I believe that many have now become more independent learners. I am therefore satisfied that they will continue to study and to improve their language skills in the future.

**Appendix 3: CISDI TEST SCORES 1**

(100)	Listening (100)	Reading (100)	Grammar
1. Li Yun Nan	76	55	70
2. Jing Wei Guo	79	64	76
3. Yang Bing Yi	74	45	52
4. Liu Shu	61	30	52
5. Jin Wenjie	70	30	58
6. Gao Huiping	77	45	64
7. Yao Bin	51	25	53
8. Fu Qiang	67	30	66
9. Wang Yong	66	25	41
10. Feng Xiao Hong	69	25	75
11. Zhou Haw	50	45	58
12. Chen Guang Yan	63	25	66
13. Zhang Wei	68	50	53
14. Zhou Xing Guo	51	30	57
15. Wang Yong Tao	67	40	41
16. Zou Hang	69	35	70
17. Lie Li Xing	57	60	46
18. Zhang Ben Hong	64	35	47
19. Duan Gang	23	45	75
20. Shao Bo	67	60	70
21. Hu Xing Cai	49	45	52

22. Li Zheng Yuan	64	0	72
Average Scores	62.8	38.36	59.7

**CISDI TEST SCORES 2**

	Listening	Reading	Grammar
1. Liu Shu	73	56	68
2. Duan Gang	89	----	86
3. Zhang Wei	82	64	62
4. Zhang Ben Hong	70	28	51
5. Chen Guan Jan	81	40	70
6. Yao Bin	70	20	54
7. Zhou Haw	79	56	52
8. Wang Yong Tao	82	40	59
9. Hu Xing Cai	76	20	58
10. Yang Bi Yi	75	36	56
11. Li Zhang Yuan	81	40	79
12. Zou Hang	80	56	74
13. Li Yun Nan	78	64	81
14. Wang Yong	78	52	64
15. Feng Xiao Hong	83	60	62
16. Zhou Xin Gou	70	64	78
17. Lei Li Xing	74	32	58
18. Jing Wei Guo	86	60	84
19. Fu Qiang	79	48	71
20. Gao Hai Ping	91	64	80
21. Shao Bo	84	56	71
Average Scores	79.09	47.8	67.52

**Progress Test Scores Compared**

	Listening Test 1	Listening Test 2	Percentage
difference			
1. Li Yun Nan	76	78	2.5
2. Jing Wei Guo	79	86	9
3. Yang Bing Yi	74	75	1.3

4. Liu Shu	61	73	24
5. Jin Wenjie	70	-----	
6. Gao Hai Ping	77	91	18
7. Yao Bin	51	70	37
8. Fu Qiang	67	79	18
9. Wang Yong	66	78	16
10. Feng Xiao Hong	69	83	20
11. Zhou Haw	50	79	58
12. Chen Guang Yan	63	81	28
13. Zhang Wei	68	82	20
14. Zhou Xing Guo	51	70	37
15. Wang Yong Tao	67	78	22
16. Zou Hang	69	80	16
17. Lei Li Xing	57	74	30
18. Zhang Ben Hong	64	70	9
19. Duan Gang	23	89	287
20. Shao Bo	67	84	25
21. Hu Xing Cai	49	76	55
22. Li Zheng Yuan	64	81	26

**Progress Test Scores Compared**

	Grammar Test 1	Grammar Test 2	Percentage
difference			
1. Li Yun Nan	70	81	15.7
2. Jing Wei Guo	76	84	10.5
3. Yang Bing Yi	52	56	7.6



4. Liu Shu	52	68	30.7
5. Jin Wenjie	58	----	-----
6. Gao Hai Ping	64	80	25
7. Yao Bin	53	54	1.8
8. Fu Qiang	66	71	7.5
9. Wang Yong	41	64	56
10. Feng Xiao Hong	75	62	17.3
11. Zhou Haw	58	52	10.3
12. Chen Guang Yan	66	70	6
13. Zhang Wei	53	62	16.9
14. Zhou Xing Guo	57	78	36.8
15. Wang Yong Tao	41	59	43.9
16. Zou Hang	70	74	5.7
17. Lei Li Xing	46	58	26
18. Zhang Ben Hong	47	51	8.5
19. Duan Gang	75	86	14.6
20. Shao Bo	70	71	1.4
21. Hu Xing Cai	52	58	11.5
22. Li Zheng Yuan	72	79	9.7

**Progress Test Scores Compared**

	Reading Test 1	Reading Test 2	Percentage Difference
1. Li Yun Nan	55	64	16.3
2. Jing Wei Guo	64	60	- 6.25
3. Yang Bing Yi	45	36	- 20

4. Liu Shu	30	56	86.6
5. Jin Wenjie	30	-----	-----
6. Gao Hai Ping	45	64	42.2
7. Yao Bin	25	20	- 20
8. Fu Qiang	30	48	60
9. Wang Yong	25	52	108
10. Feng Xiao Hong	25	60	140
11. Zhou Haw	45	56	24.4
12. Chen Guang Yan	25	40	60
13. Zhang Wei	50	64	28
14. Zhou Xing Guo	30	64	113.3
15. Wang Yong Tao	40	40	0
16. Zou Hang	35	56	60
17. Lei Li Xing	60	32	- 46.6
18. Zhang Ben Hong	35	28	- 42
19. Duan Gang	45	-----	-----
20. Shao Bo	60	56	- 6.6
21. Hu Xing Cai	45	20	- 55.5
22. Li Zheng Yuan	0	40	400

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**Article**

The Globalization Debate in Business English:  
Exploiting the Literature through matrices

**Introduction**

This article puts forward a proposal for the teaching of reading through the use of matrices in Business English classes. The reading material focuses on globalization, a current and controversial issue for students of Business English on English language preparation courses for university-level postgraduate business-related courses. It is argued in this paper that the use of this literature in such classes can challenge the beliefs and ethics of the students and, in this process, forms a means to engage in multi modes of learning from reading the literature and writing summaries guided by matrices to subsequent discussions with classmates of what they have understood and how they react to the conceptual content of the literature. The ethical nature of the debate itself is clearly a potentially sensitive one, evocative and even cathartic, as it calls upon the participants to review their fundamental belief systems concerning the nature and role of commercial activity in society.

The proposed methodology employed to facilitate such reading lessons through matrices was employed in English preparation courses for foreign students wishing to enter U.K. Master courses in Business Administration (M.B.A.). These students were mostly from China, Turkey and various West African countries who were studying at a U.K. college prior to university entry. The course was part of an English curriculum lasting up to one academic year including university entry test preparation (IELTS) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This class was a compulsory part of the EAP component of the curriculum and was assessed by means of an end of course test and continual assessment.

In this explanation of how globalization can be used as a topic in the Business English classroom, I will firstly describe the choice of literature and then move on to examine what linguistic objectives can be set when working with it. Following this, the methodological steps involved in the proposed lesson will be outlined, particularly focusing on the use of a reading 'grid', or matrix, as a visual organizer. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn about using such controversial literature.

## **The chosen literature**

In this section, I will look at the possible choices of literature to be used in the lesson, showing the historical and stance-related perspectives under consideration in that selection.

The literature for or against globalization, or simply weighing up these pro and anti stances is plentiful in the media. Many M.B.A. and other postgraduate business-and media-related courses have course components which require students to analyze the impact of globalization upon economies and societies. As a consequence, globalization as a topic carries an immediate topic relevance for those students embarking upon postgraduate study, so it is important that they are exposed in advance to the diverse range of literature available. Of equal importance are the opportunities such literature can offer in the development of the students' lexical knowledge in the field, and also their ability to interact with reading material and fellow students in a critical manner. This is particularly the case in many business course seminars in which students are asked to read various materials and engage in debate. For these purposes, the literature can meet both future needs of content-based instruction and help in linguistic development.

In order to meet these various needs, the proposal is put forward to select literature not simply addressing current viewpoints, but also those from the past, in this case, written over thirty years ago about the activities of multinational corporations, long before the term "globalization" began to be coined. This historical perspective is taken on theoretical grounds because of recent insights into the stage at which globalization currently finds itself, which is, according to Hindle's (2003), "the third age of globalization". To elucidate this important concept, Hindle explains that the first age took place mostly in the post-war years when large companies sold products abroad that had been made in their own home-country factories, i.e. US products made in the USA. The second age, generally from the 1960s saw these companies transfer the production facilities abroad, whilst maintaining their head offices in their home countries. In this sense, decision-making processes about doing business globally still took place on home soil. The third age, which is now emerging, is one in which companies start to transfer the location of their head offices to different countries in an attempt to include more 'local' considerations in the decision-making process. Most companies are somewhere between the second and third ages.

If the concept of the existence of three ages is used as a premise for the choice of reading materials, then the inclusion of literature emanating from these periods in history can be seen as an attempt to bring a historical perspective to the debate, as well as investigating what texts are pro- or anti-globalization. The combination of both the identification of historical and stance-related perspectives is seen as a means to encourage and expand student 'schemata' (their knowledge of the world), the latter area of which possibly approaches content-based teaching for those unaware of some the issues under debate.

The texts have been chosen from the following sources and are, in most cases, often the first few pages of each source outlining the thesis of the book or article:

Hindle (2003) *The Third Age of Globalization*  
Jacobs, Lent and Watkins (2003) *Progressive Globalization*  
Klein (2001) *No Logo*  
Klein (2002) *Fences and Windows*  
Ohmae (1994) *The Borderless World*  
Round (2000) *Time for Tobin New Internationalist*  
Tugendhat (1973) *The Multinationals*

The choice of Hindle's (2003) article is based on the fact that it informs the reader of the historical perspectives of globalization which are then used as one of the criteria to guide students through their subsequent reading texts. In terms of the other materials, Jacobs et al (2003) expose the students to a politically left-wing stance on globalization, outlining some of the negative social consequences of uncontrolled direct foreign investment in third world countries, yet retaining some fundamental support for a free-market approach. The two texts from Klein (2001 and 2003) take a more aggressive anti-globalization stance, again pin-pointing negative social effects of globalization worldwide to the extent where globalization is seen as undermining the social fabric of some countries. The articles from the early years of the New Millennium (Hindle, Jacobs et al, Klein) all address the downside of globalization to varying degrees. To expose students to older literature adopting a more pro-globalization perspective, extracts from Ohmae's (1994) *Borderless World* and Tugendhat (1973) are used. These views focus more upon the positive effects that globalization is said to have on societies and the business community.

This literature choice is clearly a subjective one, open to debate in itself as to what materials best represent the various stances about globalization and the ethical nature of multinational activities through time. The debate is potentially one which is highly political, apart from the multitude of economic, social and ecological considerations which can also exist. However, the choice is not intended as definitive and the process of arguing about what literature best represents stances and ages is in itself another potential source of constructive debate among teachers and even students themselves. Particularly of interest was the contrast, when first implemented in the syllabus, in the personal, national and regional viewpoints among the students themselves in the debate. One argument put forward by West African students in my own classes was the lack of an 'African perspective' among the literature. The Chinese students noted the absence of a Chinese voice in the materials despite the fact that China has experienced phenomenal economic growth and was often referred to by various writers. These were, and remain, valid comments which can help to shape the future choice of literature. In response, though, to claims of the choice of inappropriate materials, it is, in fact, the linguistic and concept-based analyses, enhanced through the matrices, which are the core foci in the proposed lesson plan. Reflection on materials forms a secondary objective to what is, fundamentally, an English preparation

class. I will now turn to those core foci by showing what linguistic objectives the students could be set when presented with the literature.

### **Linguistic objectives**

In terms of what linguistic objectives this literature can meet, there are perhaps two main criteria for their choice. The first focuses on tense since the three ages identified in the texts involve use of simple past and past habit (“IBM invested in...”, “BT used to trade with...”), and can be supplemented by comparing different ages through the past perfect simple and progressive (“This company had been cutting wood forests without license before government controls were implemented”). The second focuses on the use of present tenses (“US companies are now exploiting the South American markets..”). Finally, future tenses, conditionals and speculative language can be used for the texts relating to the third age of globalization (“future managers will have to outsource production facilities”, “companies are likely to face more demands for disclosure..”).

The specific topic-related lexis is also an area which requires exploitation by the teacher. The exposure to the students of vocabulary (like “offshoring”, “outsourcing”, “hollowing out”) is one source of input from the material, as is the contrast, for higher level students perhaps, of the change of tone and vocabulary between authors who are pro- or anti-globalization. This contrast in lexical style could represent for more advanced students a way to identify so-called “genres” among pro- or anti-globalization authors.

The successful acquisition of such lexis, however, requires the students to consider additionally the type of strategies necessary to manage the task of processing and working with the literature. These strategies are described below in the methodological approach.

### **Methodological approach**

I will now describe the specific methodological steps to be taken to practice those strategies. They involve, firstly, choosing the correct reading strategies to process the texts. The second step is how to orally interact with other students to collect information about texts they have read, like an information gap exercise. This is, then, a multi-modal reading and speaking-based methodology, involving skimming to get the “gist” of a passage, and summarizing it in written and then spoken form. The recognition of the difference between written and spoken genres is also an important teaching point to monitor during this process.

To focus the students on a step-by-step progression through these potentially difficult tasks, a matrix is utilized so that students have a clear visual structure, along with a limited amount of space to write the information in which encourages key word selection (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). This is fundamentally an adoption of an “active” reading approach in which students are engaged collaboratively in processing the literature beyond the surface meaning. According to Davies (1995), this stands in contrast to passive

reading which requires the completion of purely language-focused tasks and moves students into a more critical understanding of the underlying coherence and logic in the texts. This active reading is clearly more challenging to the learner and so, to aid them in that process, matrices can be employed to help students trace the essential concepts in the text, termed by Waller (1981) as the “visual argument” constructed by the writer. This ‘road-map’ through the text should also engage the reader, I would argue, in more than a comprehension of the non-surface elements, i.e. the main arguments and overlying stance, but also some surface related features, such as key vocabulary which has led the reader to an understanding of the larger non-surface concepts. In my proposed matrices, this “transfer of information” (Nuttall, 1996, p. 195) entails the inclusion of sections which ask the reader to identify lexis which encapsulates a key concept; in effect, inter-complimentary bottom-up and top-down processing is required. Additionally, in order for the lesson mode of reading to be transformed into an interactive speaking mode between the students, a section in the matrices requires students to reflect upon and react to the concepts in the text. Since the subject-matter being read is one which is relevant to student lives, this interaction between text and reader has often been strongly evoked, as can be seen in table 1 which was completed by an African student.

The seven texts require the following information to be entered. Hindle’s (2003) article is used as an example in table 1:

<b>Text</b>	<b>Stance Pro/Anti/ Neutral</b>	<b>Main arguments/ Age of globalization</b>	<b>Main vocab/ expressions</b>	<b>Your stance to text</b>	<b>Other stances</b>
Hindle (2003)	Pro to Neutral	3 ages, more “offshoring”, corporate responsibility	Offshoring, Responsible, ethical	Agree but how about currency speculation?	Does not consider an African perspective.

**Table 1: The Matrix**

In the matrix above, the fundamental “stance” (for, against or neutral) needs to be identified, followed by the “main arguments” and the “age of globalization” from which the material emanates. These are the most important objectives in reading, requiring, by means of skimming, key words to be written which crystallize the text’s main points. Specifically focusing on main vocabulary and expressions then requires the students to choose what lexical items (“Main vocab/expressions”) they consider to be relevant in the main arguments. Following this, in preparation for a final oral stage of the lesson, their own reactions (seen in the matrix in “Your stance to text”) to the text is needed, for example, how they agree or disagree with the text, or what they consider the author has failed to address.

The specific steps which this materials writer advocates to exploit the texts with the matrix are suggested as follows:

Give each student two or three texts out of the available seven (adopting a jigsaw reading approach). Each student receives a different set of texts. The objective is to complete the matrix categories by reading their own texts and summarizing them, then gather the remaining text information. In brief:

1. Students read and summarize their texts.
2. Students interact orally to ask and answer questions regarding the missing texts.

At this point, students should have an almost completed matrix in front of them. The next stage is to exchange opinions on their particular stances to the texts they have read and found out about (“Other stances”). It may be the case that some students want to read all texts themselves before passing judgment on those they have not read, however, time limitations may exclude this extra reading stage. In any case, the lesson ‘mode’ has progressed on to an oral exchange based on the expression of opinions about the texts they have read. Some students may actually be more trusting of the summaries of other classmates and feel ready to evaluate them on that basis. This stage clearly is one which is an accumulation of vocabulary and comprehension acquired so far, an orally productive one in which students are to be encouraged to represent their own stances and justify them in small groups.

In brief, the use of such matrices provides a type of linguistic and conceptual “scaffold” (Diaz-Rico and Weed, 2002) upon which Business English students can use as a guide through their multi-modal reading, note-taking, and discussion activities. It can also be argued that this support to language output is a type of learning strategy, which is, as Chamot et al (1999) point out, “observable” since the teacher can actually see the students fill in the matrix with appropriately concise and accurate language.

## **Conclusions**

This article has shown how literature from different times, or “ages”, in the globalization debate can be taught in the Business English classroom through the use of matrices. The skills of reading, summarizing and oral interaction encourage linguistic and critical analysis of the selected materials. As a note about the literature, it is argued that the choice of what represents valid reading material is open to debate both among teachers and students, inducing a new process which in itself can be seen as an extension to the objective of enabling students to think critically about globalization. Overall, the sensitive and evocative nature of the subject-matter, along with potentially difficult lexis, is viewed as a challenge to most students. It is a challenge, though, that carries with it great potential benefit in adding more relevance to Business English materials. Furthermore, it can be argued that a sense of “common ground” (Clark, 1996) is created among the classroom participants since they are encouraged to interact with each other and critically analyze the material in terms its suitability of choice. This new rapport, so to speak, is seen as one in which students actively engage with materials collaboratively. To aid this deeply reflective process, the interaction with the reading material and collaboration with fellow students through the matrices presents a clear focus



for reading and speaking, possibly a methodology which is not sufficiently exploited in Business English teaching for university preparation.

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