

Business English materials – Where are we now?

Evan Frendo
www.e4b.de





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These presentation slides are available
for download at www.e4b.de



Abstract

Most big publishers produce business English materials, yet many trainers claim to rarely use them. This raises lots of questions. In this session I would like to briefly look at what we know about good practice in business English teaching today, ending with a checklist of key criteria. I will then use this checklist to examine a selection of recently published materials, and comment on possible discrepancies. Note that this talk is based on a survey review of business English materials which I wrote for ELT Journal in 2019, available at www.e4b.de.



ELT Journal 73/4 October
2019 pp. 463-482

(available at www.e4b.de)

SURVEY REVIEW

Business English materials

Evan Frendo

Introduction

A survey review of Business English (BE) materials has appeared in the *ELTJ* five times (1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011). In the eight years since the last review, much has changed. For some observers, BE has been (and is still) seen as a subset of ESP, but there is no doubt that research in many different disciplines has continued to offer new insights into BE methodologies and coursebooks. Chief among these are academic disciplines such as corpus linguistics, or research into English as a lingua franca (ELF), Business English as a lingua franca (BELF), business communication, and intercultural communication. Non-academic input has also played a role, ranging from publishers' marketing research, to authors' and practitioners' personal experiences, the world of work and its focus on training and development (e.g. negotiation and presentations skills training), and the sharing of ideas online via social media or at face-to-face events such as the IATEFL BE Special Interest Group (BESIG) Annual Conference. The aim of this survey is therefore threefold: to provide an overview of recent research and scholarship in the field of BE, to present a selection of coursebooks published since 2011, and to comment on the influence of the research and scholarship on those coursebooks.

BE and coursebooks
What is BE?

A clear definition of what we mean by 'BE' has always been difficult to

A question for you

Do you ever use published coursebooks in your business English classes?

- Write yes / no in the chat.
- If yes, write the name(s) of BE coursebooks you are familiar with.

Types of materials

- General BE coursebooks
- Supplementary materials
 - Specific business communication skills (e.g. negotiating, presenting)
 - Specific language knowledge (e.g. vocabulary, grammar)
 - Specific language skills (e.g. writing, listening)
- Coursebooks for specific business-related professions or industries (e.g. accounting, finance, marketing)
- Test preparation (e.g. TOEIC, LCCI English for business)
- Resource books (e.g. photocopiable materials, teaching ideas).

Outline



Good practice in
BE teaching today



Checklist of key
criteria



Possible
discrepancies

Where are we now?



Good practice in business
English teaching today

Routledge Introductions to English for Specific Purposes

Introducing
Business English



Catherine Nickerson
and Brigitte Planken



‘umbrella term to refer to any interaction, written or spoken, that takes place in English, where the purpose of that interaction is to conduct business’
(p. 3)

Routledge Introductions to English for Specific Purposes

Introducing Business English



Catherine Nickerson
and Brigitte Planken



Part 1: Introduction

1. What is Business English?
2. International Business English and Business English as a Lingua Franca

Part 2: Spoken Business English

3. Introducing Spoken Business English
4. Intercultural Business Interactions
5. Teaching Spoken Business English

Part 3: Written Business English

6. Introducing Written Business English
7. Understanding Written Business English
8. Teaching Written Business English

Part 4: The Modern Business World

9. Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in Business English
10. New Media and Business English

Part 5: Learners, Teachers and Materials

11. Teaching approaches and Business English
12. Designing Business English teaching materials
13. Business English Resources

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Designing Business English Materials (p. 144)

- Authentic spoken and written English
- Complex tasks with authentic business content
- Different genres
- Simulate real business situations (meetings, negotiations)
- Recreate workplace contexts (e.g. internal, external, international)
- Intertextuality, interdiscursivity and multimodality
- Skills e.g. relationship building across cultures, multimedia literacy

Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics
Series Editors: Jonathan Dighton and Christopher N. Candlin

Teaching Business Discourse



Cornelia Ilie
Catherine Nickerson
Brigitte Pfanken



Part I An Introduction to Teaching Business Discourse

- 1 What Is Business Discourse Teaching?
- 2 The Future of Business Discourse Teaching
- 3 Research Methodologies and Business Discourse Teaching

Part II Projects and Materials

- 4 Research and Client-Based Projects
- 5 Consultancy-Based Projects

6 Business Discourse Teaching Materials

Part III Business Discourse at the Practice-Classroom Interface

- 7 Learners and Business Discourse Learning Outcomes
- 8 Interviews with Business Discourse Teachers
- 9 Case Studies in Teaching

Part IV A Guide to Resources for Business Discourse Teaching

- 10 A Guide to Resources for Business Discourse Teaching

Teaching context



- Language school
- In-house / corporate
- One-to-one
- Tertiary education

“coursebooks that are perfect for one context may be totally inappropriate in another.”

Frendo, 2019, p. 464

German manager – IT department in supermarket chain

09:05 – Answering an IT question via chat

10:00 – 45 min daily status meeting with a Dutch developer team

11:35 – Writing a solution for an incident (closing the ticket)

13:10 – 5-minute system support via phone with a Belgian user

15:25 – Coordinating some project's next steps with Slovenia (20 minutes telephone conference)

17:30 – 1,5 hour wrap up and roadmap meeting with the Dutch developer team

19:30 – Sending a project status mail

Chinese manager – consulting firm

9:30 ~11:00 - Responding to mails from various parties in English

11:00 ~13:00 - Meeting with a group of colleagues via VC and Webex, the message was presented in English and the conversation was conducted in Mandarin

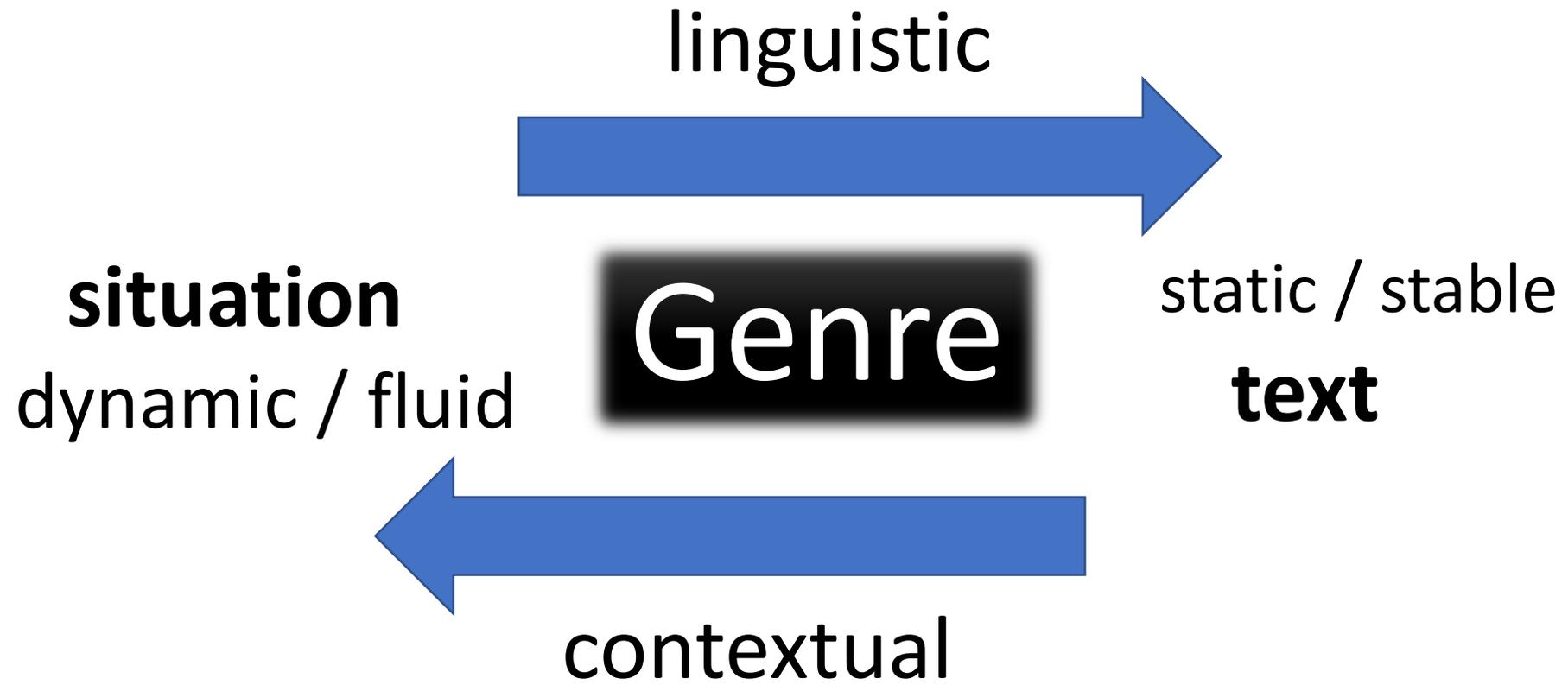
14:00 ~ 15:00 - Attending meeting with a group of colleagues face-to-face, mainly discussion in Mandarin

15:00 ~ 16:30 - Attending department gathering for new year, fully in Mandarin

16:30 ~17:00 - Helping a leader to address technical problem via mail, wechat and sametime, all in English

17:00 ~ 18:00 - Discussing a task with one manager via phone call, the message was presented in English and the conversation was conducted in Mandarin

18:00 ~ 18:30 - Searching for information in website, all in English



Challenges

“Someone participating in a genre who does not have a command of these specific patterns and the limits to their possible variability is quickly recognized as either incompetent or an outsider”

Flowerdew, 2011, p. 124

How is workplace language different?



asymmetrical
genre-based
vague context specific
specific lexis
lingua franca requires expertise
work-related + social/ personal
goal-oriented

Community of practice



“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

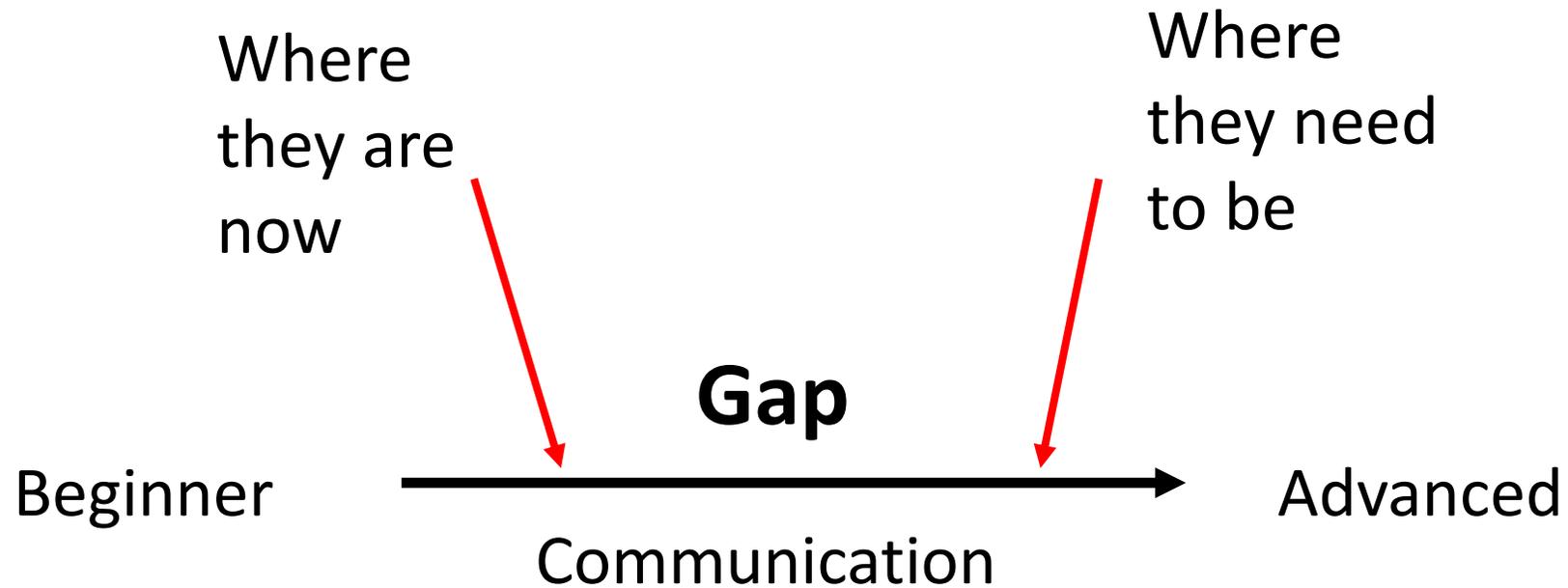
Wenger, 2006

Community of practice

No pre-packaged course can hope to prepare people for such communicative diversity and the associated challenges. Rather people need assistance in developing their observational and analytical skills, so that they can identify for themselves the appropriate ways of interacting in their specific community of practice on any particular occasion.

Holmes and Stubbe, 2015, p. 173

Finding the gap



Learning a language

input

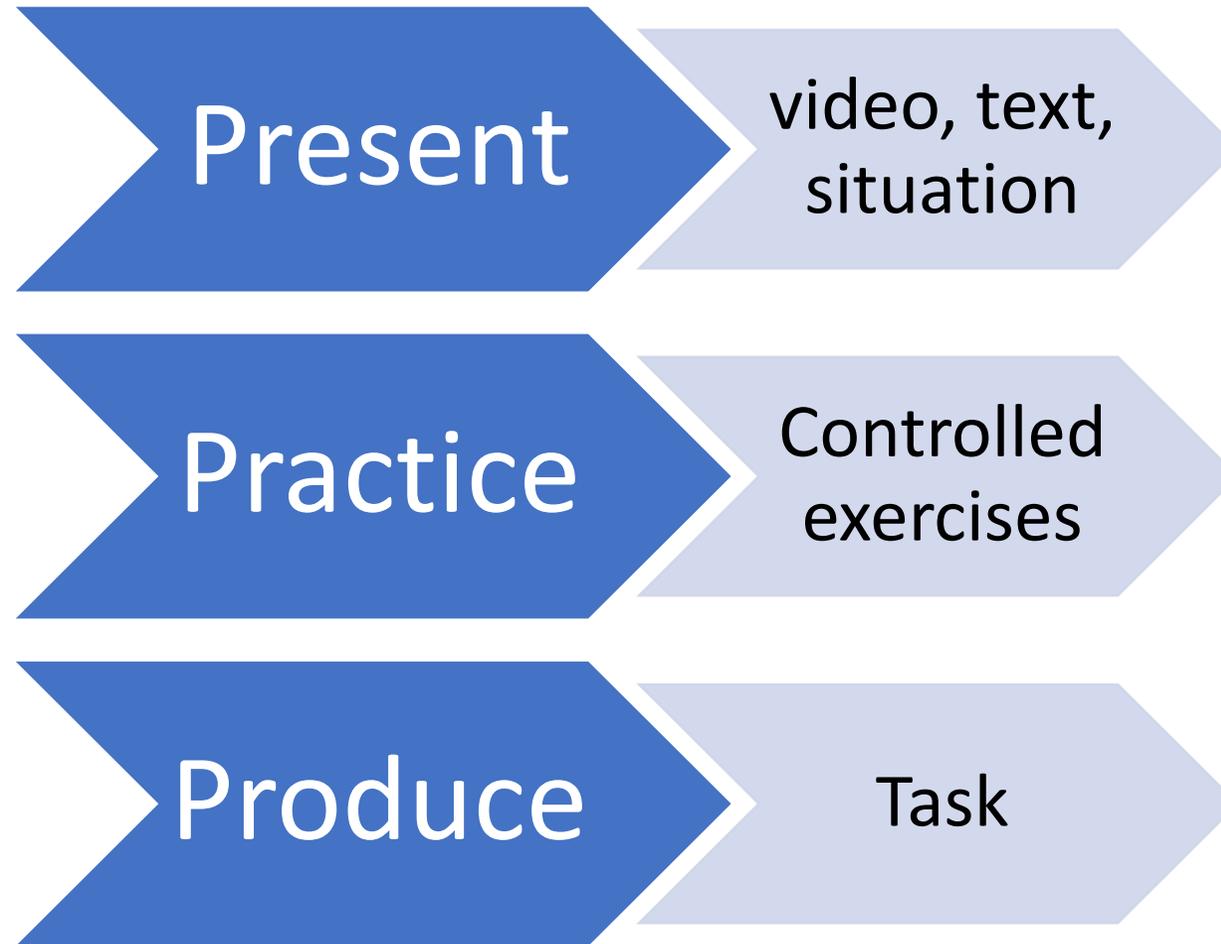
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graph TD; A[input] --> B[practice]; B --> C[motivation];
```

The diagram consists of three blue rounded rectangular boxes arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right. The top box contains the word 'input', the middle box contains 'practice', and the bottom box contains 'motivation'. A light blue arrow points downwards from the right side of the 'input' box to the right side of the 'practice' box. Another light blue arrow points downwards from the right side of the 'practice' box to the right side of the 'motivation' box.

practice

motivation

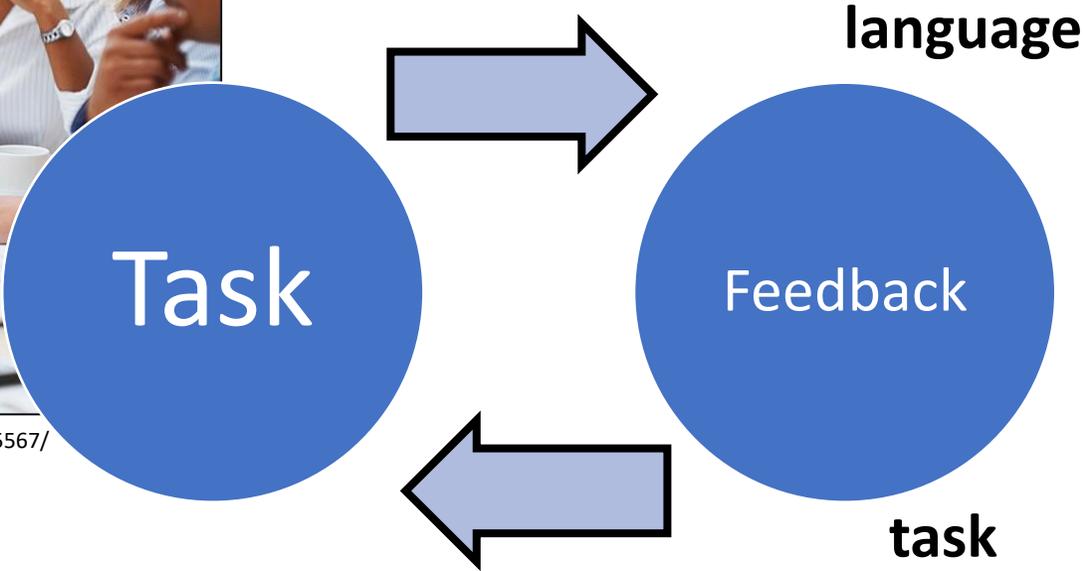
PPP



Task based learning



<https://pixabay.com/de/photos/gesch%C3%A4ftstreffen-treffen-gesch%C3%A4ft-5395567/>



Blended learning

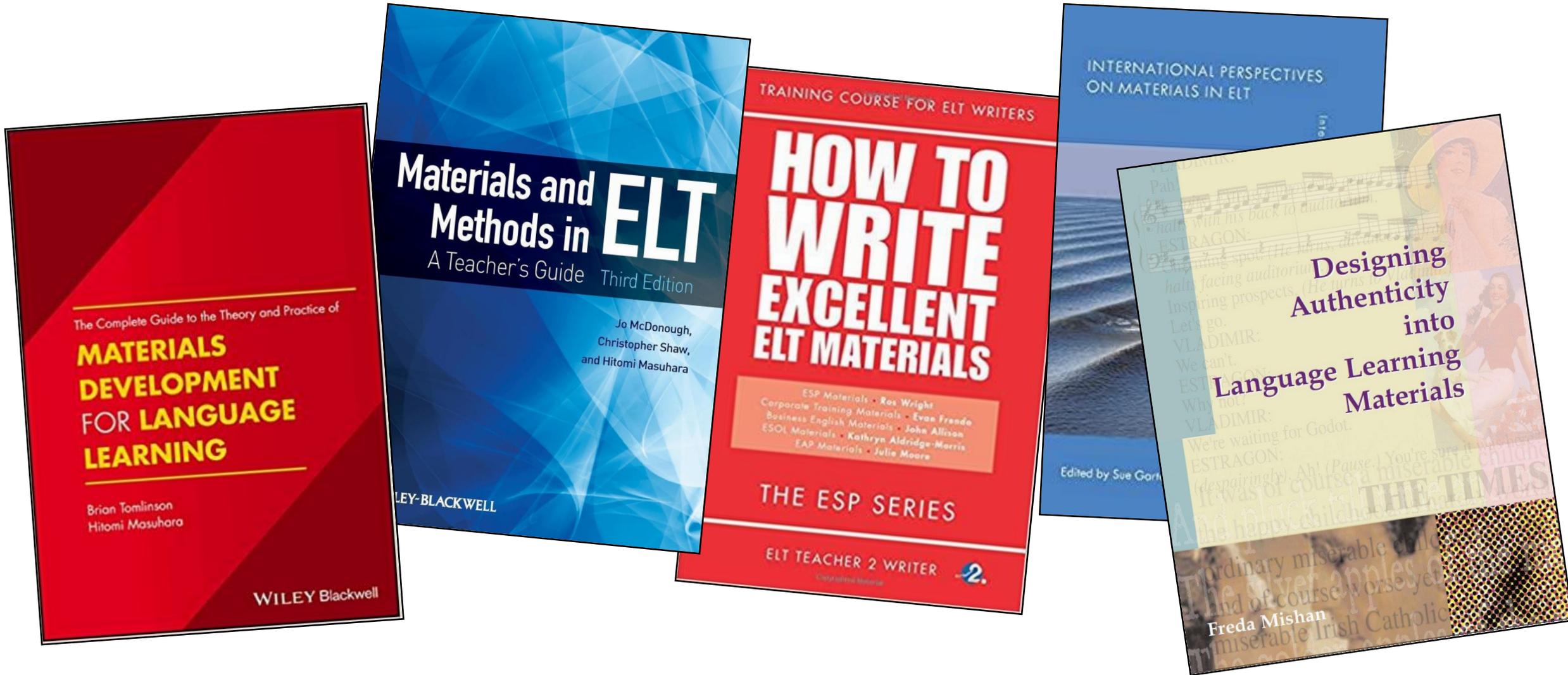




Checklist – key criteria



Checklist – key criteria





Checklist – key criteria

- Needs based
- Authentic language / genres
- Relevant business content
- Intertextuality / multimodality
- Appropriate methodology
- Flexibility
- Ease of use





Possible discrepancies

What does the learner need?

Language **about** business
or
doing business?

business studies

interviews with business people

management theory

current affairs articles

academic articles

watching the
financial news

Language of talking about business is different from the language of doing business.

socialising with foreign clients

small talk

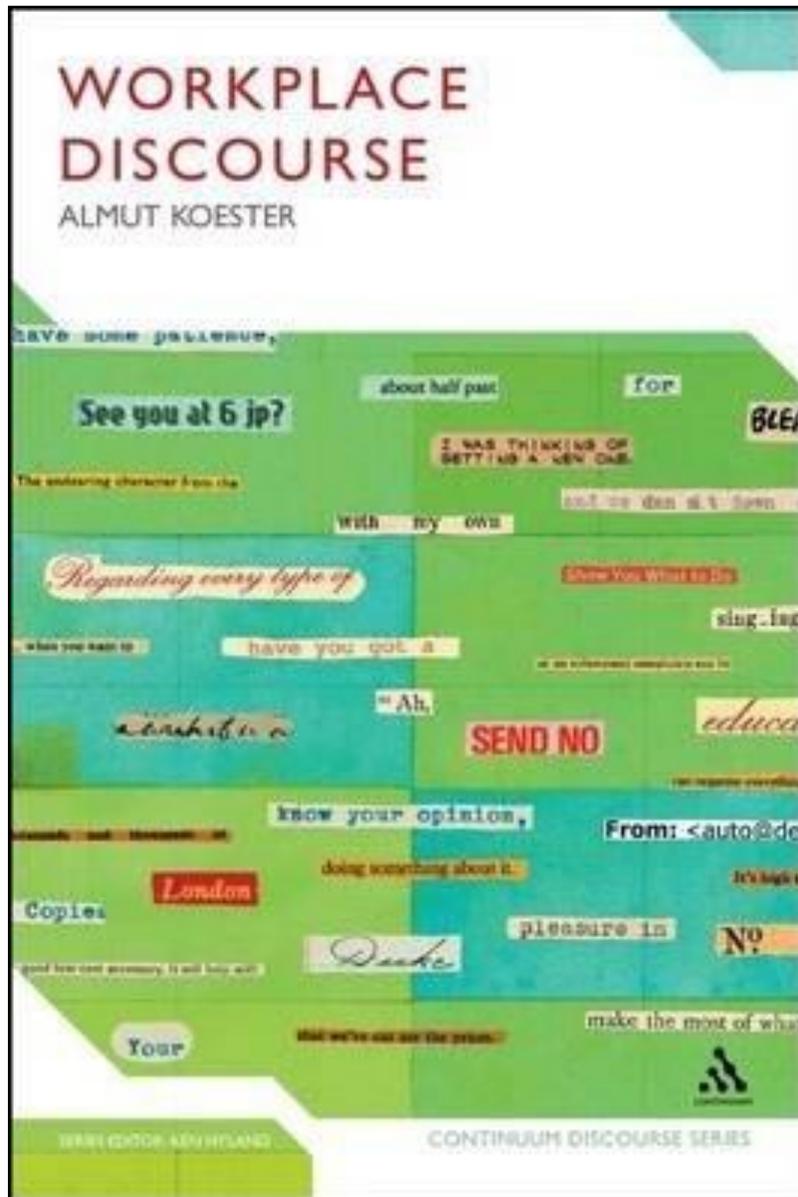
writing emails

meetings with suppliers

presentations

reading contracts

negotiations



‘in writing or talking about business (usually for public consumption), the emphasis will often be on successes and positive developments, whereas when actually engaged in doing business, the focus is often on problem solving of some kind’
(p. 51)

English as a
lingua
franca



Accommodation skills?
Code-switching?
Error correction?

Language
model?



Or context
specific?



Relevant business content

- Increasing employability?
- Hard skills, the “B” in BELF



<https://pixabay.com/vectors/glue-tube-isolated-sticky-adhesive-304256/>

“Business Knowledge ... an integral component of the concept of BELF and the glue that ties the members of the business community of practice (CoP) together”.

Authentic language

How common is the first conditional (If + present simple, will)?

A Not common

B Quite common

C Very common

Write your choice in the chat window.



PERGAMON

English for Specific Purposes 20 (2001) 61–82

www.elsevier.com/locate/esp

ENGLISH FOR
SPECIFIC
PURPOSES

If you pop over there: a corpus-based study of conditionals in medical discourse

Gibson Ferguson*

University of Edinburgh, Institute for Applied Language Studies, 21 Hill Place, Edinburgh EH8 9DP, UK

'Sorry, but if he comes, I go': teaching conditionals

David Maule

This article looks at the rather restricted selection of conditional sentences which tends to be presented to students. It cites one case of the damage to a student's natural development which this might cause and, on the basis of a

fairly small sample of these which is grammatically

Conditionals revisited

Glenn Fulcher

If only it were true: the problem with the four conditionals

Christian Jones and Daniel Waller

Many researchers have found that the first conditional is actually quite rare.

Using a reasonable technique, this study of conditionals and conditionals should be included in the study of English. The results are restricted in application and may benefit from a study using a much more precise definition of text-type.

...acknowledging that certain aspects of the results are restricted in application and may benefit from a study using a much more precise definition of text-type.

our main types (zero, first, second, and third). Unfortunately, the awareness that these patterns in actual usage has not been reflected in EFL coursebooks. This article re-examines the arguments for a description of conditional patterns which reflects actual usage and uses corpus data to demonstrate the kind of patterns in frequent use. It then suggests two teaching approaches that may help teachers to tackle a variety of conditional patterns in the classroom.

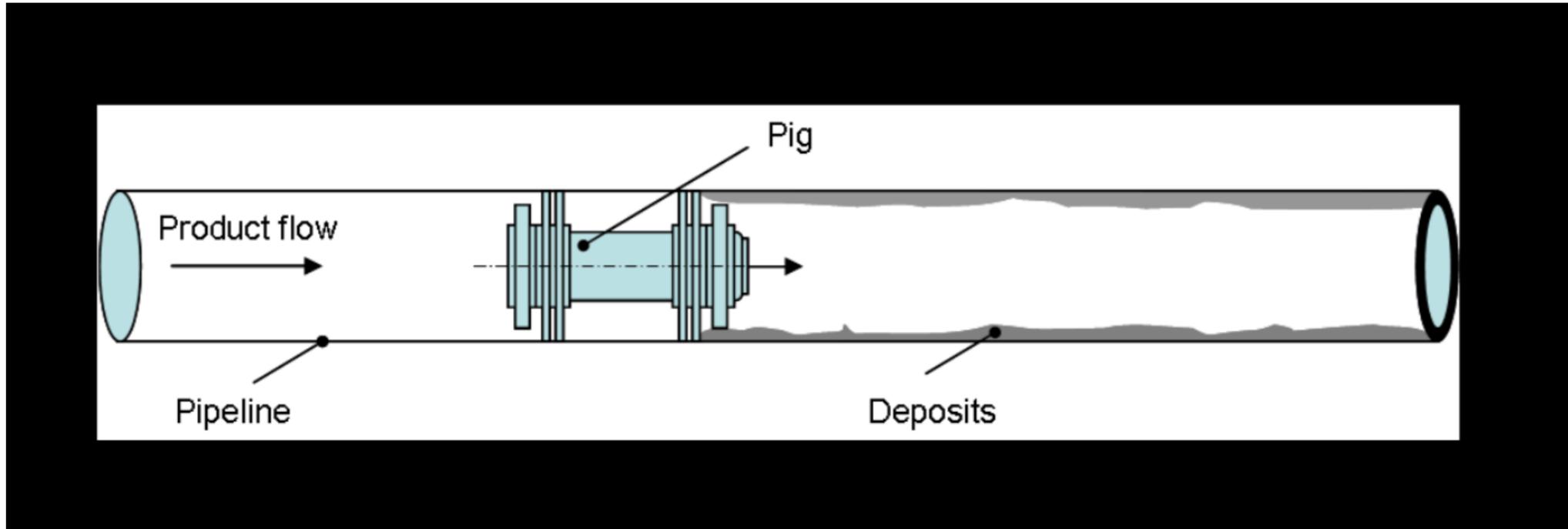
PARSNIPS

- Politics
- Alcohol
- Religion
- Sex
- Narcotics
- -isms
- Pork



<https://pixabay.com/de/photos/pastinaken-gem%C3%BCse-zutat-pastinaca-74305/>

PARSNIPS



Where are we now?

- In-company and tertiary in one pack
- Coursebooks as package
- Fewer ESP books
- Some publishers going for adult market rather than BE

Publisher-driven resource

-
- Blended learning / online delivery / flipped classroom
 - Big data / learning analytics
 - Automatic assessment / adaptive learning

Technology playing an increasingly important role

Where are we now?

- Retail, finance, healthcare, government, tourism, education and research
- “Pepper can speak up to 15 languages and provide translation via Cloud services”



Teaching assistant

- Information
- Routine tasks
- Testing
- Patient?







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