CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature includes three areas namely, (1) the nature of Business English and its definition in this study, the characteristics of Business English, and the classification of Business English; (2) different approaches to Business English course design; and (3) needs analysis and materials selection, which are the key components in a Business English course design.

2.1 The Nature of Business English

2.1.1 Definition of Business English

Although Business English has been taught worldwide, it is difficult to define and is limited in linguistic terms. Pickett (1986) calls Business English *ergolect* (work language). Picket explains the distinctive feature of Business English compared with other work language, thus:

> it is a mediating language between the technicalities of particular businesses . . . and the language of the general public. It is not purely for intra-group communication. This is not surprising since business and commerce are by definition an interface between the general public and the specialist producer . . . (p. 6).

In this definition, Pickett suggests that business communication takes place with the public and within a company or between companies. Business transactions are

likely to be similar whatever the nature of the particular business; however, the particular business will affect the content and lexis.

2.1.2 Characteristics of Business English

Business English differs from other varieties of ESP because it is a mix of specific content and general content. On the one hand, Business English relates to a particular job area or industry, such as sales, finance or technology in the office. On the other hand, it relates to the general ability to communicate more effectively in business situations.

Moreover, the language used in a business context has certain distinctive characteristics. Ellis and Johnson (1994) give three characteristics of business language. The most important characteristic, they say, is that business language has a sense of purpose. Business people speak English primarily so that they can achieve more in their jobs. Much of the language needed by business people is transactional: getting what they want, and persuading others to agree with the action they propose. Since business is competitive, the use of language has an implied element of risk. Any mistakes and misunderstandings could cost the company dearly. It therefore follows that accomplishment of these performance objectives would be the priority of the Business English courses.

A second characteristic is that business language has its social aspects. International business people have to be in contact with people they have never met before or know slightly. There is a need for communication in such a way so that people from other cultures can quickly feel comfortable with one another. Thus,

formal language is required in situations like greeting and introduction, recommending, and giving opinions. This style of language is generally short and direct.

Furthermore, as business people are always pressed for time, the information has to be conveyed clearly, logically and concisely. Certain familiar (frequently used) concepts may be expressed in word clusters to avoid circumlocution, such as, 'cash with order' and 'just in time delivery'. Many acronyms, such as CIF, MIS and the like, are used to save time in referring to familiar or commonly used concepts

2.1.3 Classification of Business English

Today there are many varieties of Business English, such as English for Business Purposes, Business English for Occupational Purposes, English for Banking, and so on. Based on the learners' purposes, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) distinguish Business English into two main areas: Business English for Academic Purposes (BEAP) and Business English for Occupational Purposes (EBOP). Their classification is presented in a tree diagram as in Figure 1 (p.11).

Figure 1: Business English Classification

Business English

Business English for
Academic Purposes

Business English for
Occupational Purposes

English for General
Business Purposes

English for
Specific Business
Purpose
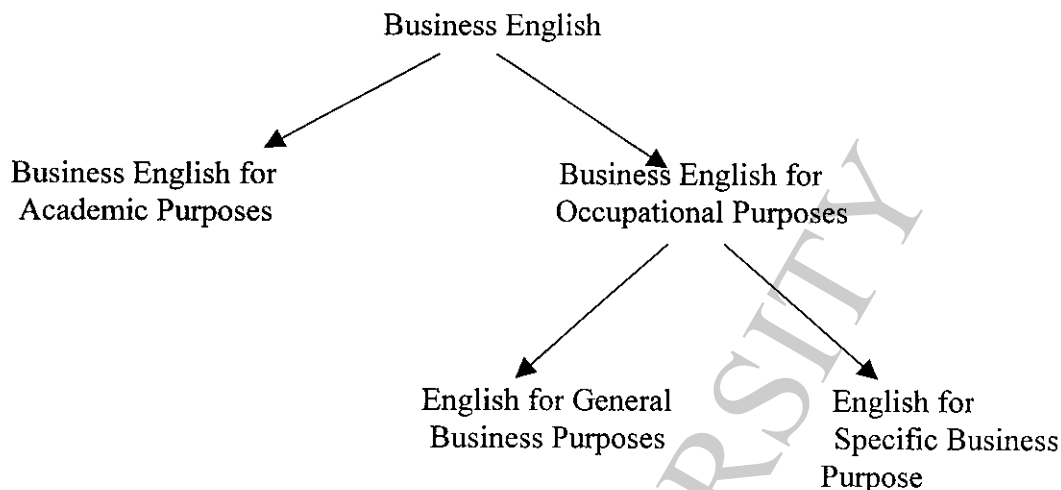
Business English for Academic Purposes needed by students must be related to their study objectives. Recently, the academic study of finance, banking, economics and accounting has become increasingly important, especially in the international Master in the Business Administration (MBA) program. The learners' present situation may require them to read textbooks in English or to follow lectures in English in order to gain the qualifications and skills needed in the field. The major components of BEAP training must therefore be the development of reading and listening skills with a strong emphasis on the subject vocabulary. In addition, the learners may have to attend seminars or write papers in their related subjects in English, therefore, speaking and writing will constitute important skill objectives for any language program the students attend.

EGBP courses are usually for pre-experience learners or those at the very early stage of their careers. These learners need to prepare for their future working life in

business. Such courses usually emphasize on the traditional four skills plus specific grammar and vocabulary development through business settings, such as social interaction, making arrangements, business correspondence, meeting or presenting information. Typical business topics include organization charts, marketing, branding, advertisements and product development.

Conversely, ESBP courses are taught to job-experienced learners, who are from companies or other business institutions. For job-experienced learners, the practical use of language will be more important than theoretical knowledge. Such courses are carefully tailored to specific situations or communicative business events, and likely to focus on one or two language skills. Settings and topics are mainly taken from the learner's own business context.

2.2 Approaches to Course Design

As Business English is viewed as a sub-category of ESP, it is reasonable that the approaches to a course design of Business English follow that of ESP. There are probably as many different approaches to ESP course design, as there are course designers. However, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify three main types of approaches to ESP course design: (1) Language-centered, (2) Skill-centered, and (3) Learning-centered.

Language-centered Approach relates the content of the ESP courses primarily to the analysis of the target situation. In this approach, the target situation will determine the whole process of course design. The course design process starts with identifying the learner's target situation and selected theoretical view of language,
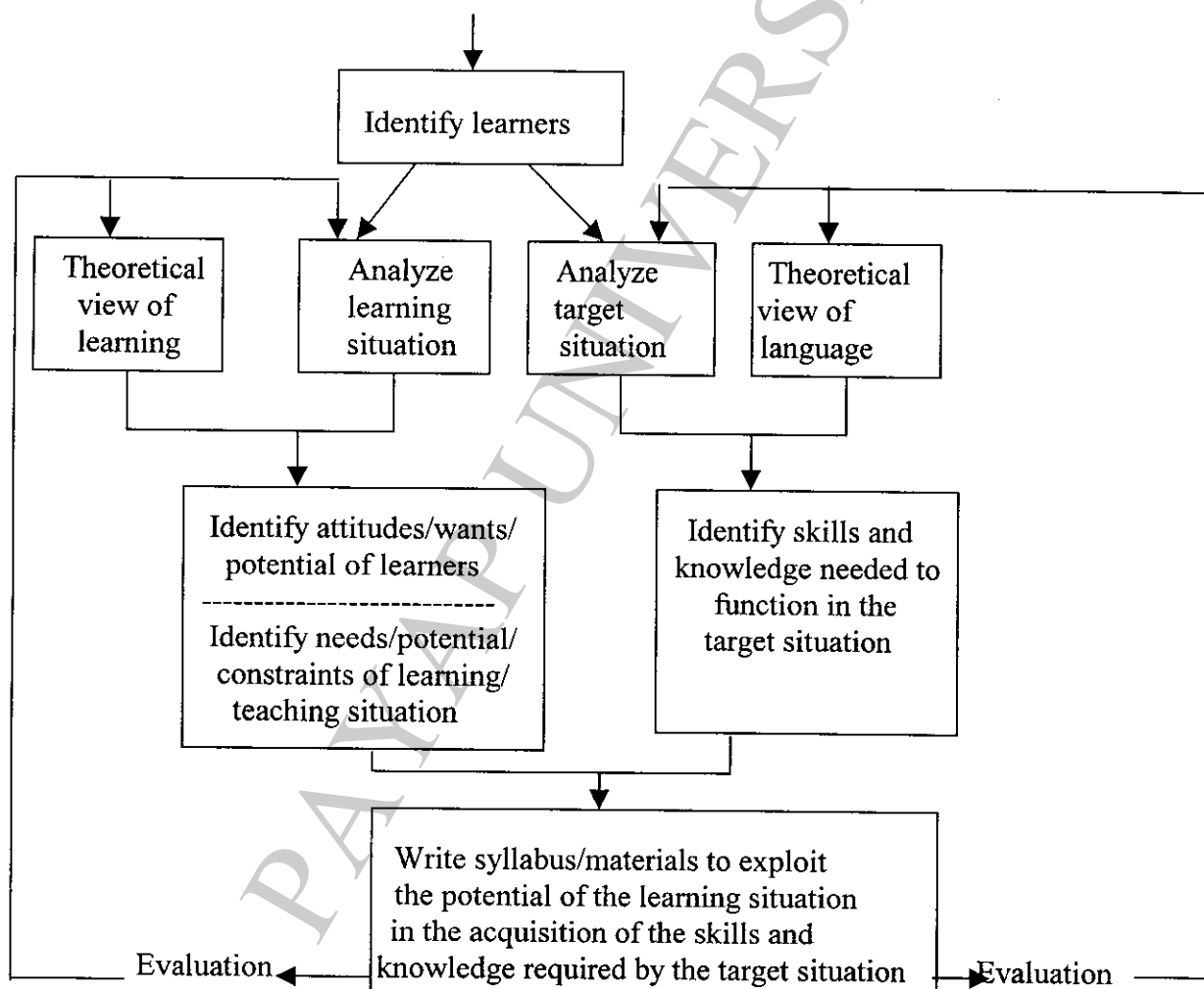
proceeds through various stage of analysis to syllabus creation, then to material design and finally to the evaluation of mastery of the syllabus items. The learner, in this approach, is used merely as a mean to identify the target situation. Furthermore, as the target situation analysis has determined the development of syllabus, materials, methodology and tests, the process is static and inflexible . . . . it fails to recognize the fact that learners being people, learning is not a straightforward, logical process" (p.68).

Skill-centered Approach is designed to help the learner to develop skills and strategies, which will continue to develop after the completion of the ESP course. Two fundamental principles have contributed to the development of this approach. One principle is that underlying any language are certain skills and strategies which the learner masters to produce or comprehend discourse. The other is that an ESP course should emphasize not only on achieving a particular set of goals but also on enabling the learners to achieve what they can with the given constraints. The process of skill-centered approach is similar to the language-centered approach, with one important distinction, and that is the role of the needs analysis. Firstly, needs analysis provides a basis for discovering the underlying competence that enables learners to perform in the target situation. Secondly, needs analysis enables the course designer to discover the potential knowledge and abilities that the learners bring to the ESP classroom. In addition, materials design focus on skills and strategies suggested in the syllabus, and the evaluation. The skill-centered approach focuses more on the learners. However, it still approaches the learner as a user of language rather than as a learner of language. It therefore " . . . does not fully take the learner into account

because it still makes the ESP learning situation too dependent on the target situation"

(p.72)

Learning-centered approach views learning in the context in which it takes place, and that the learner is not the only factor which influences learning. Factors involved in learning must be considered at all stages of the designing process. The approach process is shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Learning-centered Course Design Framework
(Adapted from Hutchinson and Waters, 1987. p. 74)

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                              │
                  ┌───────────▼────────────┐
                  │    Identify learners    │
                  └─────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│         │              │              │               │               │
│  ┌──────▼─────┐  ┌──────▼─────┐  ┌─────▼──────┐  ┌─────▼──────┐        │
│  │Theoretical │  │  Analyze   │  │  Analyze   │  │Theoretical │        │
│  │  view of   │  │  learning  │  │  target    │  │  view of   │        │
│  │  learning  │  │  situation │  │  situation │  │  language  │        │
│  └──────┬─────┘  └──────┬─────┘  └─────┬──────┘  └─────┬──────┘        │
│         └───────────────┤              └───────────────┤               │
│              ┌──────────▼──────────┐    ┌──────────────▼────────────┐  │
│              │Identify attitudes/  │    │  Identify skills and      │  │
│              │wants/potential of   │    │  knowledge needed to      │  │
│              │learners             │    │  function in the          │  │
│              │---------------------│    │  target situation         │  │
│              │Identify needs/      │    │                           │  │
│              │potential/constraints│    └──────────────┬────────────┘  │
│              │of learning/teaching │                   │               │
│              │situation            │                   │               │
│              └──────────┬──────────┘                   │               │
│                         └───────────┬──────────────────┘               │
│                          ┌──────────▼──────────────────────────┐       │
│                          │ Write syllabus/materials to exploit  │       │
│ Evaluation ◄─────────────│ the potential of the learning        │──► Evaluation ─┐
└──────────────────────────│ situation in the acquisition of the  │───────────────┘
                           │ skills and knowledge required by the │
                           │ target situation                     │
                           └──────────────────────────────────────┘
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As the figure shows, the learner is taken into account at every stage. The course design process does not move in a linear fashion. No single factor is the sole determinant of the content of the course. Each of the components will influence and be influenced by others. It is more of an interactive and dynamic process.

2.3 Needs Analysis in Course Design

In each type of approach to course design, the needs analysis is the starting point. This is also true in all ELT course designs (Richards, 1984; Jordan, 1997). Needs analysis may be even more significant in Business English, as learners' needs can be quite varied and the spectrum of language skills less predictable (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

The approaches to needs analysis depend on the situation and context. Pilbeam (1979) suggests that needs analysts include both target situation and present situation analysis. In other words, the needs analysis should identify the actual activities that the participants have to carry out, and the participants' proficiency in these activities is evaluated as well.

Briefer (1997) suggests that needs analysis for Business English identify the range of general and specialist language knowledge required, along with general and professional communication skills.

Ellis and Johnson (1994) make a distinction between the approach used for job-experienced learners and that for the pre-experienced learners. For job-experienced learners, needs will be assessed in relation to specific jobs. Information such as the

learner's job, the learner's communication needs, and the environment in which the communication occurs should be obtained.

On the other hand, for pre-experienced learners, needs will be assessed in general language terms. Pre-experienced learners have at least two sets of needs: those relating to the academic situation and those relating to their future jobs. They need practical skills which will be related to their professional objectives. For example, giving presentations, writing letters and telephoning. In addition, they need other skills related more specifically to their present course of study, for example, reading to extract the main points from an academic text or following and taking notes on a lecture.

For both categories, Ellis and Johnson suggest some key features that are important in assessing the learning purpose: the activities and tasks the learner has to do in English, the roles the learner plays in communication, the topics of communication, the attitudes and tones the learner will likely express, the ways of interaction the learner employs, and the settings where the communication takes place.

2.4 Material Development for Business English Course

Having thoroughly analyzed the needs of the learner and having set the precise objectives for the course, the next step of a course design is materials development. Usually, there are three ways of developing materials: selecting existing materials, writing materials, and adapting existing materials. In a situation where English is a foreign language, the Business English classroom may be almost the only source of

English. Materials then play a crucial role in exposing learners to the language.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out that the ESP teachers mainly select

materials rather than write course materials.

The Business English literature indicates that two types of materials are

commonly used in teaching Business English: textbooks, and authentic materials.

Textbook

There are a very large number of textbooks available on the market. One main

category of textbooks focuses on a comprehensive course in itself. It teaches

common core as well as some work-related vocabulary, and offers opportunity to

practice all four skills. The target audience is often both practicing business people

and students of business. Such books or packages often consist of a book plus a audio

cassette or a book plus a video. Examples are Greenall's (1986) *Business English*,

Knowles, and Bailey's (1987) *Functioning in Business*, and Hollett's (1991) *Business*

Objectives.

The other category of textbooks provides language practice within a defined job

context such as banking, import-export, secretarial and so on. The textbooks usually

cover specialist vocabulary and provide one or two language skills practice in a

relevant context. Some of the examples are Lees' (1983) *Negotiate in English*,

McComas and Satterwhite's (1993) *Modern Business Correspondence,* and Stillman

and Gordon's (1986) *English for Banking and Finance*.

Authentic Materials

Apart from textbooks, authentic materials have been used increasingly in teaching Business English. Robinson (1991) calls materials like print, audio, video, and pictorials taken from the real world and not specifically created for the purpose of language teaching "authentic materials." In the case of teaching Business English, Ellis and Johnson (1994) suggests that the most useful authentic materials are those produced by companies. Company specific materials include: the annual reports, product information, newsletters and magazines, or other print materials, company video, correspondence, other reports and memos, minutes of meetings, contracts and manuals and written instructions.

In addition, materials for public consumption but that relate to a business context could also be used, such as journals, newspapers and off-air transmissions, such as the Internet or other computer mediated interactions.

Recently, there are many on-line Business English courses, along with good materials offered in the Internet. Whether Internet materials belong to authentic or published materials, no literature has mentioned. Nonetheless, the Internet has become a good source for searching teaching materials.

Although there are now a great deal of teaching materials for the Business English teacher to choose from, choosing appropriate materials can still be a difficult task. The problem is that none of the available materials exactly meet the needs of a particular learner or group. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) suggest that when developing teaching materials, the ESP teacher select appropriately from what is

available, be creative with what is available, modify activities to suit learners' needs and provide supplements.