

*Teaching  
English for the  
international  
workplace:  
meeting the  
challenges*

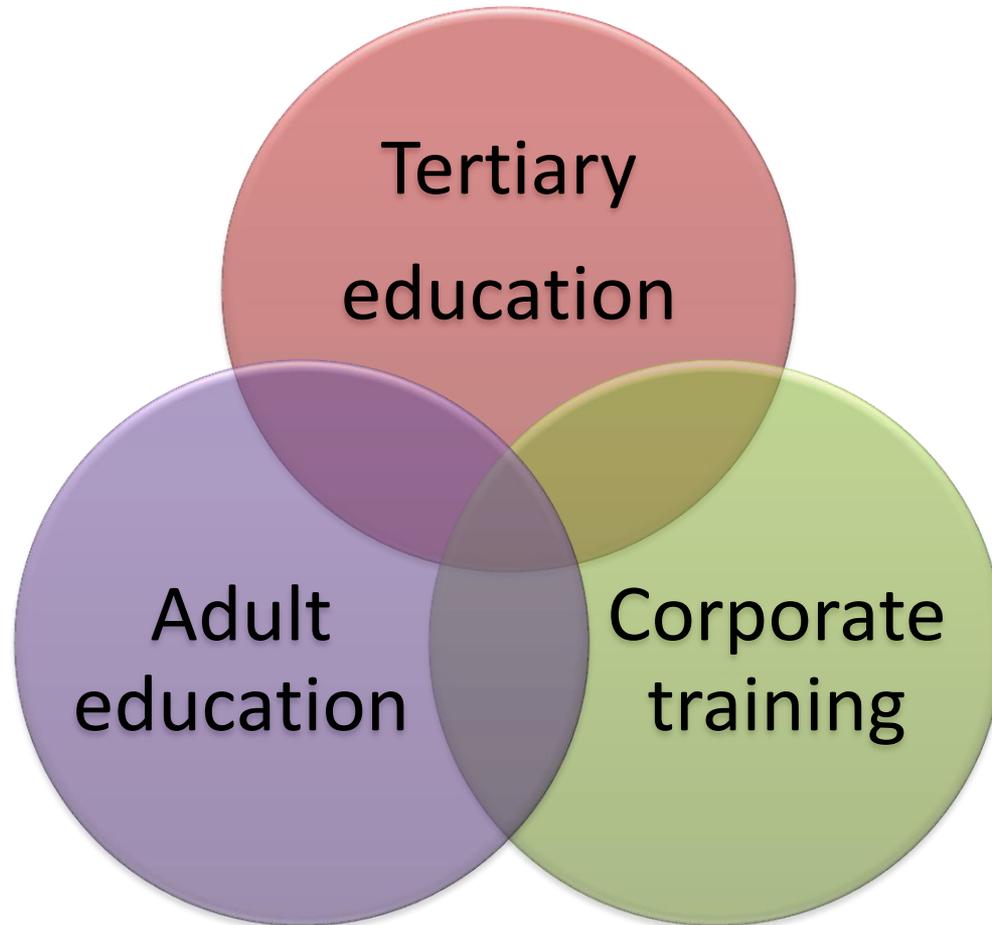
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What is the language of  
international business  
communication?



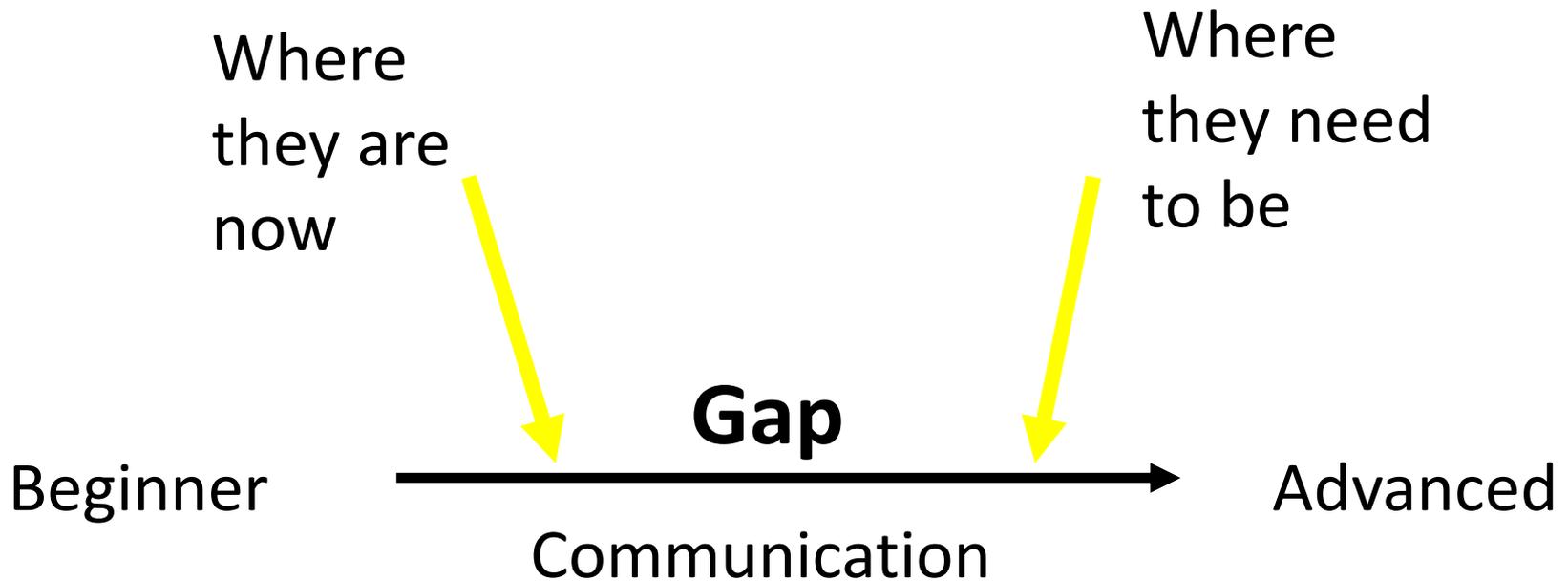
# Teaching contexts



# What does a BE teacher need to know?

- How to do a needs analysis

# Needs analysis



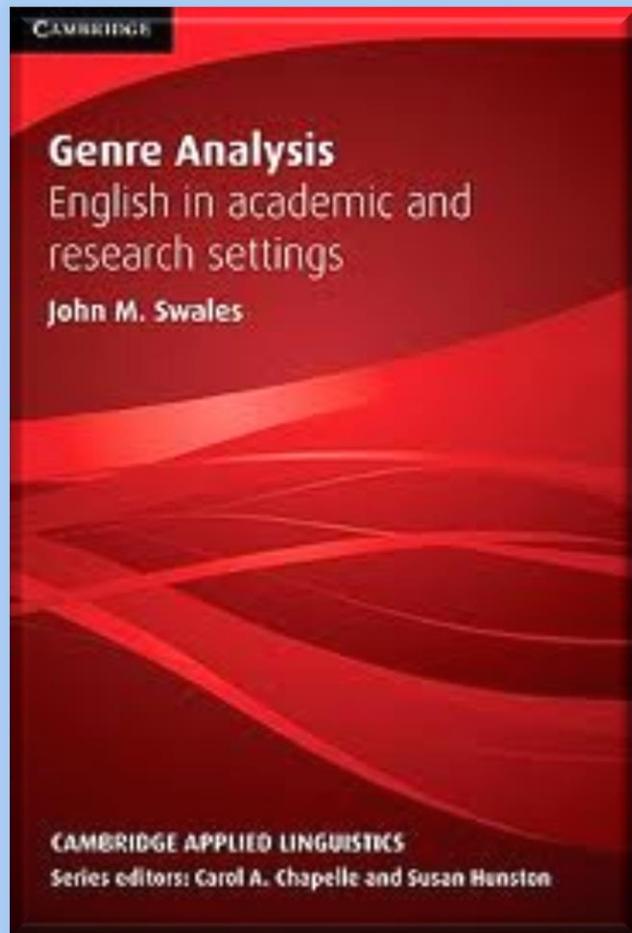
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- How language and communication work

# Discourse communities



- Common goals
- Mechanisms of communication
- Requires participation
- Genres
- Specific lexis
- Expertise required

# Spoken workplace genres



## **Unidirectional**

- Briefing
- Service encounters
- Procedural and directive discourse
- Requesting
- Reporting

## **Collaborative**

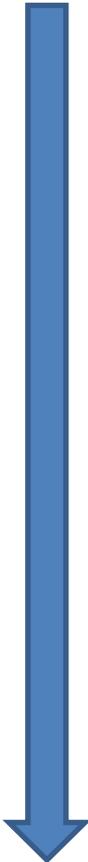
- Arrangements
- Decision-making
- Discussing and evaluating
- Liminal talk

## **Non-transactional**

- Office gossip
- Small talk

# Written genres - emails

D  
I  
S  
C  
O  
U  
R  
S  
E  
  
F  
L  
O  
W



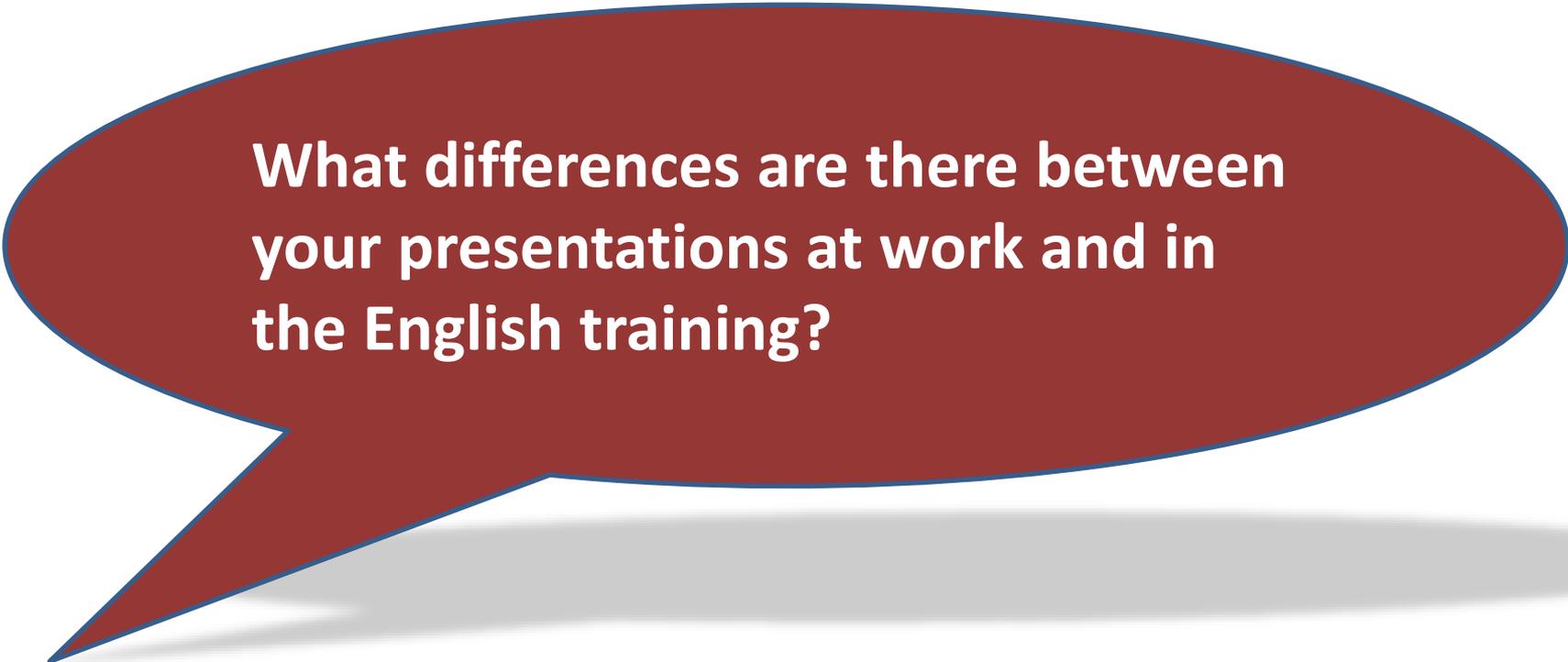
Hello Tim. My accounting group in Boston has informed me that the \$100k consulting invoice dated June 4 remains outstanding. I'd appreciate your following up to find out status. Thanks in advance. John.

*I will check into this. I am really sorry. if it hasn't been paid we'll fix it immediately. tim*

*Not a problem, I'm sure it was just an oversight. Your assistant left a msg on Friday asking me to forward another copy of invoice. I don't have electronic copy but can fax hard copy to you. Plse advise fax number.*

# Understanding the genre





**What differences are there between your presentations at work and in the English training?**

As we go through the interview, think about how the training might be improved.

Quite a few. For example, no-one tells me the topic or the time I have. If I have to do a presentation they, I mean the boss, will ask me how long I need. Not you have ten minutes, and someone sits there with a watch. And my presentations are normally in a meeting. With colleagues. So I never stand – always sit. And it's normally about a technical problem, not selling something ...

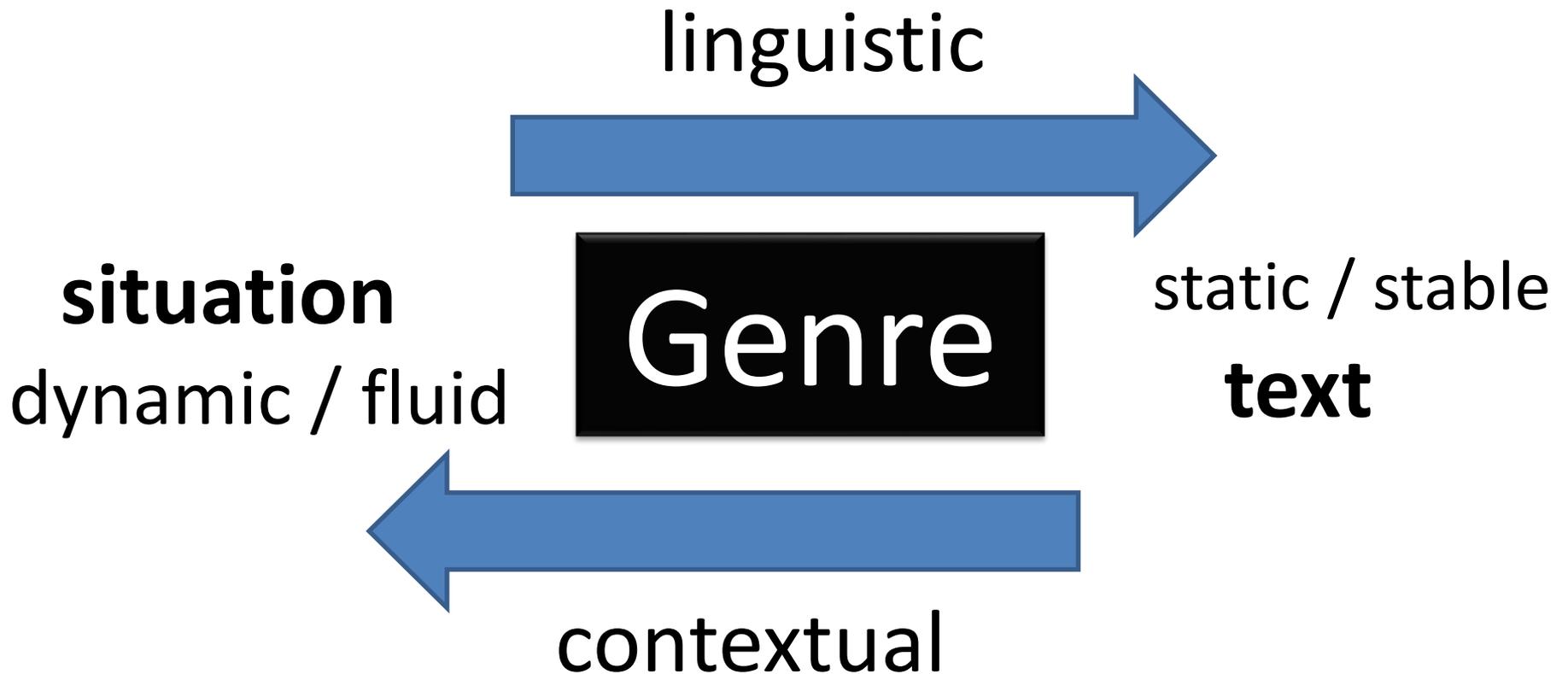
... the topic is normally technical, to do with my job. Everyone in the room understands what I am talking about. Good content is more important than no grammar mistakes. In the English class the teacher is normally the only one who doesn't know about the topic, so the focus is not on the content. The teacher says I should not use jargon, but it's the words of my job.

**Do you expect your teacher to know about this stuff?**

Well, somehow not at school. But here, in the company, yes. I think company training should be different from school, and the trainer should know more about our jobs.

**Anything else?**

Maybe the biggest difference is there is no rule like “English only” at work. We change from language to language all the time, and we translate for each other. Translation is a way of helping understanding too, but the English teacher doesn’t like us doing this. Yes we do it to learn English, but ...



# Challenges

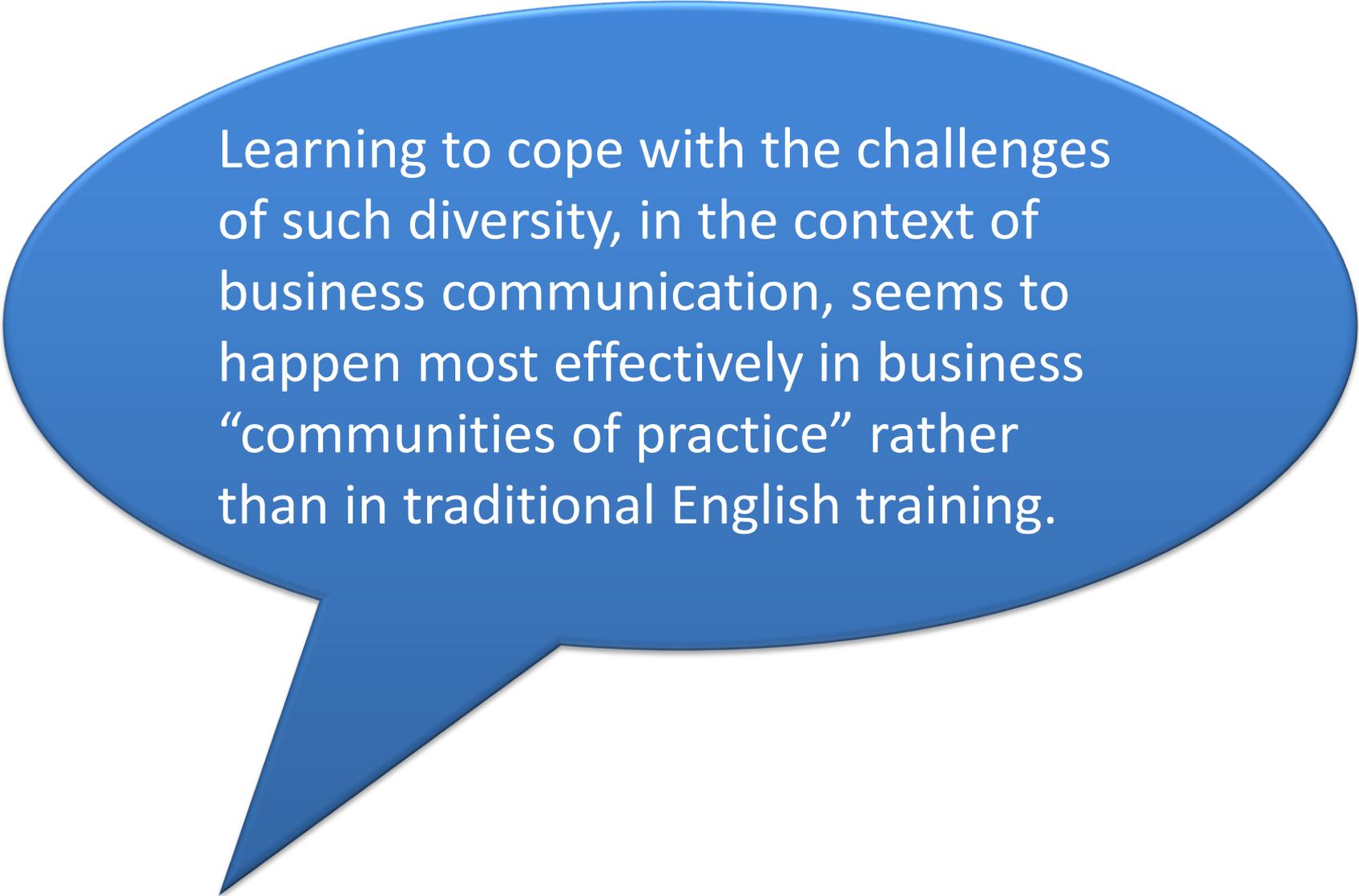
“Someone participating in a genre who does not have a command of these specific patterns and the limits to their possible variability is quickly recognized as either incompetent or an outsider”

Flowerdew, 2011:124

# Community of practice

“A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour ... practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour.”

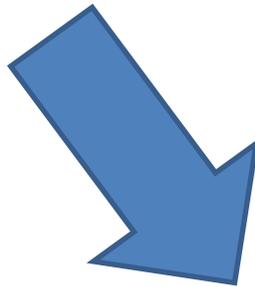
...the most important issue in business is not language ability, but the experience and ability to dynamically manoeuvre within the communities of practice which business people inhabit.

A blue speech bubble with a white border and a drop shadow, containing white text. The bubble is oriented horizontally and has a tail pointing towards the bottom-left corner.

Learning to cope with the challenges of such diversity, in the context of business communication, seems to happen most effectively in business “communities of practice” rather than in traditional English training.

How is it that a person who doesn't speak  
“good” English can still be successful  
internationally?

Business English as a lingua franca (BELF)



English as a business lingua franca



# Features of a business lingua franca

- Mutual intelligibility, not rules of the native speaker
- Aim is to get the job done, not meet “theoretical” linguistic standards
- Problems caused not by inadequate language skills, but by inadequate business communication skills
- Culture is not dominated by the “native speaker” national culture, but by a mix of business cultures / speakers’ cultures

# Co-construction

Brazilian: how long do you need to get there?

Japanese: how long?

Correct “standard”  
form, not  
understood

Brazilian: how long time do you need to get there?

Non-standard form,  
understood

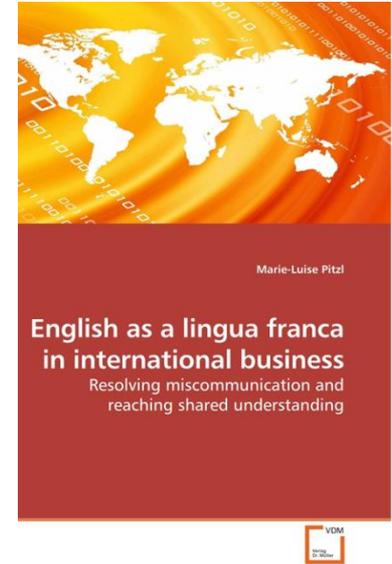
Japanese: ah (.) it takes about 12 hours

(Dewey, 2011:210)

# Miscommunication

non-understanding

“Non-understanding relating to the level of lexis or grammar were very scarce” (p. 133)



misunderstanding

- Ellipsis
- Global
- Strategic

# What causes problems?

Business Spotlight Survey, 2007

	With native speakers	With non-native speakers
They speak too fast	86%	10%
They use unknown expressions	60%	10%
They use too much idiomatic language	57%	3%
They use difficult words	56%	11%
They don't speak clearly enough	56%	61%
They have a heavy accent	45%	58%
I can't make myself understood	16%	24%
They talk too much	13%	5%
They make grammar mistakes	2%	53%

# How is the language of the workplace different?

asymmetrical

genre-based

soft skills

specific lexis

context specific

goal-oriented

lingua franca

requires

expertise

work-related + social/ personal

intercultural

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- How language and communication work
- Experience of the workplace
  - Communication skills (meetings, documentation etc)
  - Business / professional content
- How to teach adults and use their expertise
- How to adapt to various contexts



# Teaching options

First big decision

Language **about** business

or

**doing** business?

Interviews with business people      management theory

academic articles

business studies

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 other words ...

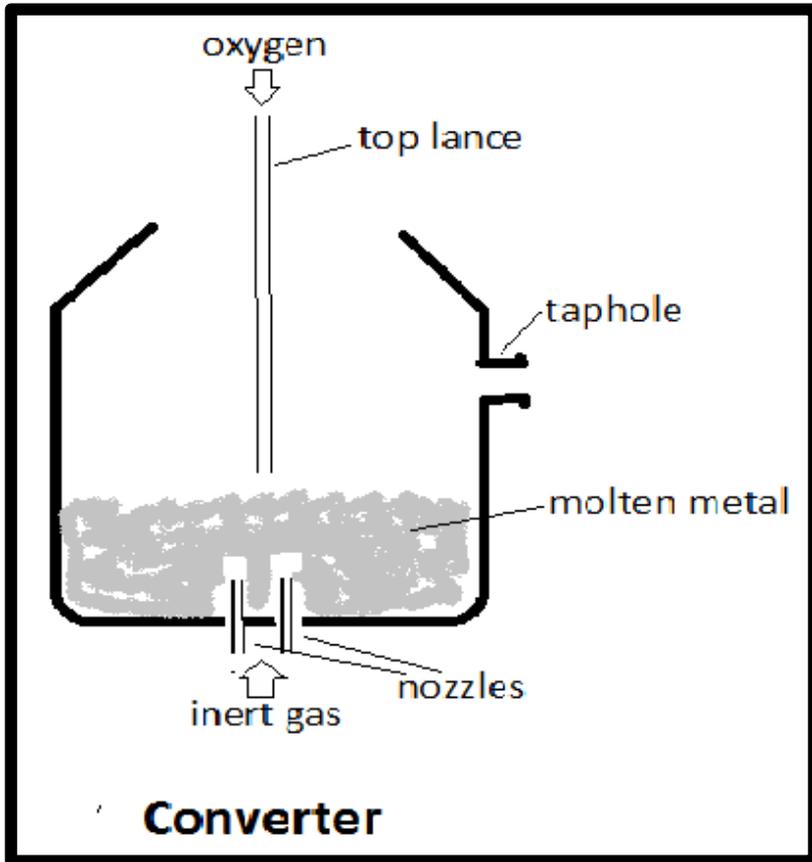
Business English for **academic  
purposes?**

or

Business English for **business  
communication?**

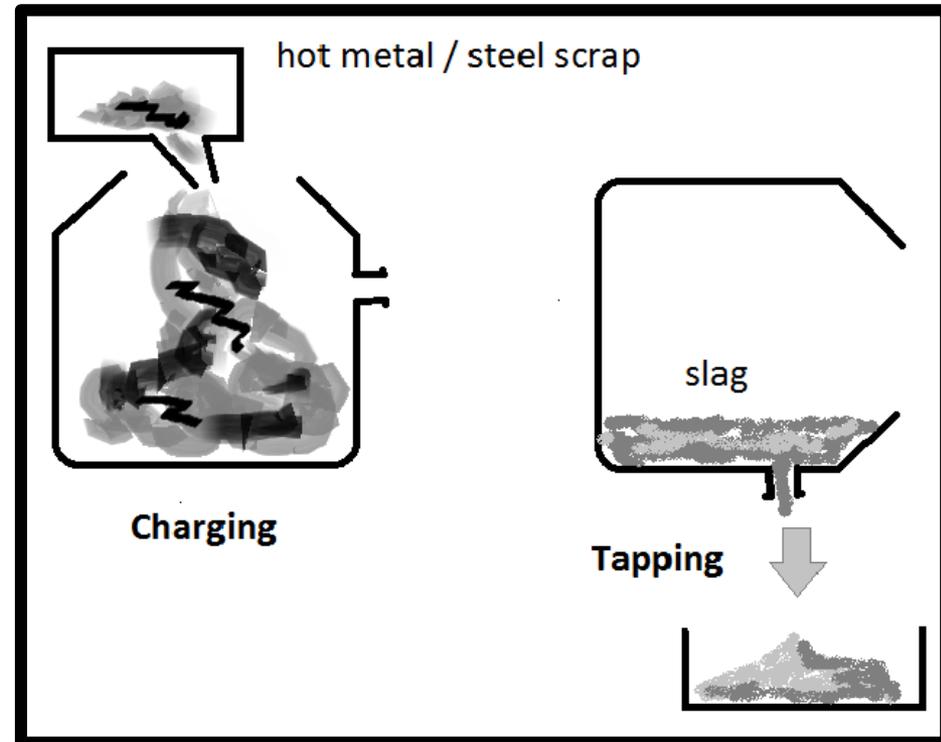
# Working with materials





IT company – these materials were developed for a group of German programmers working on software for a steel mill in Korea.

Here are some in-house materials I designed – can you guess the type of company the students came from?



# Gathering evidence

- Corpus analysis techniques

# Corpus analysis

N	Key word	Freq.	Texts	Keyness
1	RECYCLING	2626	45	25819.40
2	#	18915	47	22274.84
3	PLASTICS	1481	34	14904.22
4	WASTE	1410	37	8781.81
5	AUTOMOTIVE	834	37	8769.72
6	MATERIALS	1313	43	7976.17
7	PLASTIC	1007	37	6612.75
8	VEHICLE	1004	39	6489.24
9	RECYCLED	688	44	6377.07
10	VEHICLES	926	37	6356.35
11	AUTOMOBILE	550	27	5362.35
12	MATERIAL	1057	39	4686.52
13	PET	601	11	4477.67
14	SHREDDER	359	24	3953.85
15	ENVIRONMENTAL	777	36	3662.98
16	ELV	281	20	3206.90
17	SCRAP	409	31	3143.28
18	AUTO	339	34	3079.29
19	RECOVERY	548	36	3031.23
20	ELVS	250	16	2874.25

to be recycled.

## 2 Match the collocations. Use the text to check your work.

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1 end-of-life | a substances |
| 2 quantified  | b exemptions |
| 3 hazardous   | c reviews    |
| 4 specific    | d targets    |
| 5 regular     | e vehicles   |

## 3 Here are three words which are often found in texts about recycling. Match the words to their definitions. Then underline the words in the text.

- 1 reusability
- 2 recyclability
- 3 recoverability

- a The ability of a material to be converted or turned into something new.
- b The ability of a material to be put to a purpose repeatedly, rather than being discarded or disposed of.
- c The ability of a material to be picked out or separated from other materials.

# Gathering evidence

- Corpus analysis techniques
- Interviews / discussions

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- Interviews / discussions
- Observations / field notes / recordings

# A telephone call

Chinese (A) /  
German (B)

A call to discuss  
a possible  
meeting in  
Shanghai



A: yea that's the idea so here [phone rings] oh just moment

B: no problem

A:[Conversation in Chinese] sorry er so here now ummm [1] hello? can you hear me now?

B: yes, yes I'm here perfect yep very good connection

A: so recently since the er company has been bought by the [Company Name]

B: yes

A: er you know there is the guy who names Michael Chan from the [Company Name] er Kenneth er he has been here

B: yes

A: once and another guy er remember two guy two young guy guys from [Company Name] during Shanghai meeting

B: yes

A: they will come again

B: oh ok

A: for visit in August they will like to attend to develop their business in Wuhan next year as er important areas they want to devoted to

B: yes I see that's that's David Simon is the one in Hong Kong? Right?

A: Yes Simon is the person in Hong Kong you met him

B: yes the tall one? in Shanghai?

A: not not so tall

B: and then there was a very young guy with him right? I think

A: yea, yea yea yea yea the young guy is the tall young guy that's not working in for China the other department or something like that

B: ah ok ok

A: ah production or something like that

B: right ok ah ah

A: and I was told Tim's office has been moved to the er [Company Name] offices in in Singapore

B: in Singapore yea

A: and I met Sophie Cho you know Sophie Cho?

B: I know Sophie Cho yea

A: yea yea yea in Singapore they will have a meeting er in the next months during the next months

B: yes

A: they will have a meeting about talking about how combine those two groups

B: yes

A: people from [Company Name] and even maybe the other people appeared in the coming year

B: I see yes yes

# Discussion afterwards with German

Comment	So what?
Typical that business partners in China are less competent English speakers	Materials may need to reflect this
Accent can be a problem	Materials may need to include audio / video with Chinese speakers
Different communication styles	Materials may need to include activities about communication styles
German carried on with other work during the phone call – apparently he often does this	Materials may need to include activities about communication styles

# Gathering evidence

- Corpus analysis techniques
- Interviews / discussions
- Observations / field notes / recordings
- Stakeholder / expert insider feedback

*As mentioned this presentation sometimes also works as a project document so it has to be a bit in detail ... this document will also be used by the team members in the future to look at the details they need.*

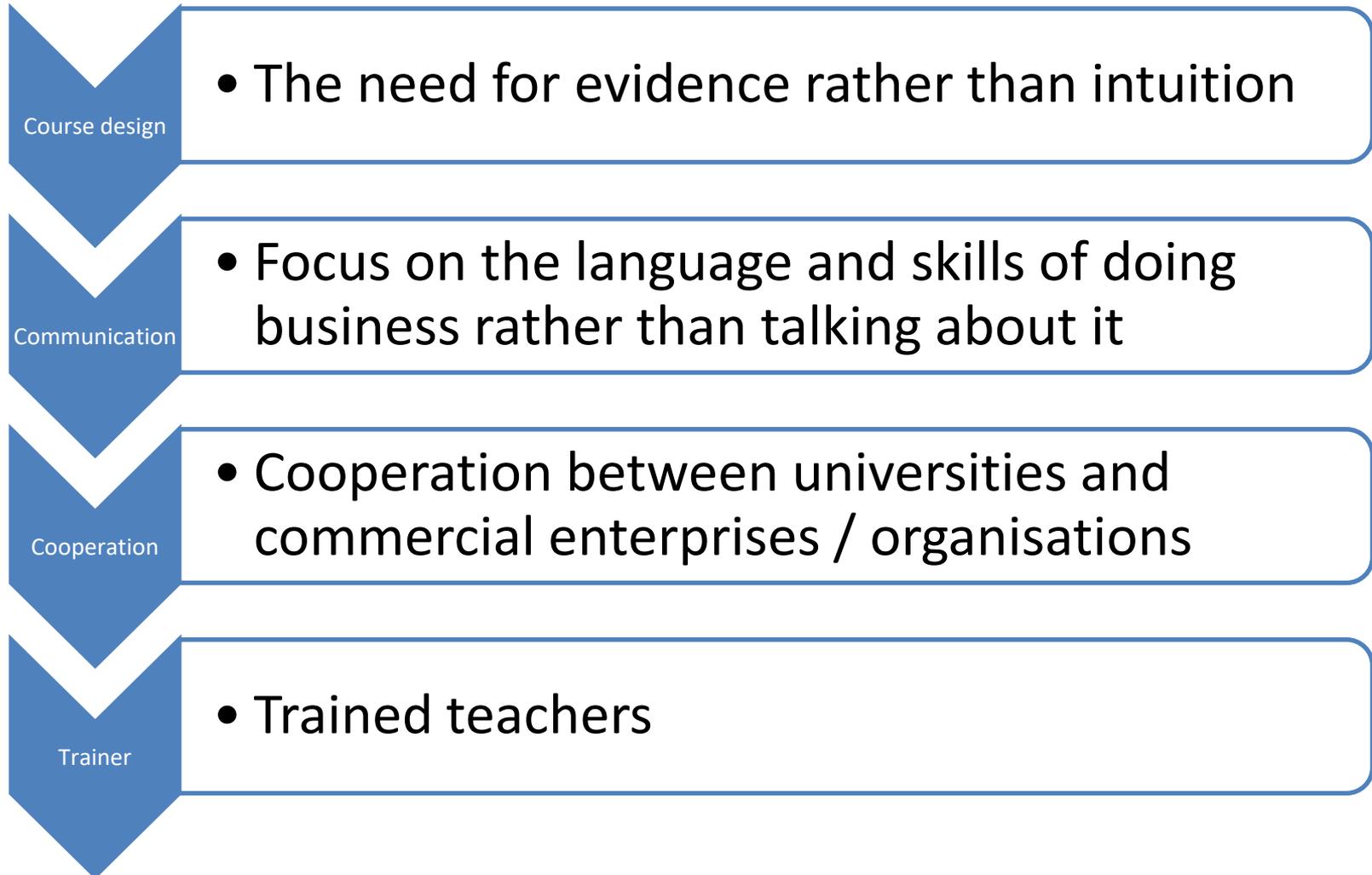
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- Published research

# The challenge of technology



# Critical success factors – meeting the challenges



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