Zuocheng Zhang*

School of Education
University of New England, Australia
zzhang26@une.edu.au

"SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE IS THE OPTIMAL BALANCE": A SUBJECT SPECIALIST NEGOTIATING BUSINESS AND LANGUAGE IN TEACHING BUSINESS WRITING

Abstract

This article reports on a case study of a subject specialist Business English teacher who was appointed to teach business writing at a Chinese university. It draws on a variety of data collected from the study participant, including his course syllabus and lecture notes, his feedback on student assignments, classroom observations, interviews and email exchanges with him, student evaluation of his teaching, and assessment of his students' assignments by other business professionals. A constant comparative thematic analysis of the data identifies six major themes regarding his approach to teaching business writing, including Gravitation Towards Business Skills, Instilling the Mind-sets and Attitudes, Incidental Teaching of Language, Classroom Management, Image of the Business World, and Positive Reception of his Teaching. These themes are discussed to illuminate several key issues in ESP instruction and teacher development, including content and language integrated learning, motivation, researcher-practitioner collaboration, and strategies for team teaching.

145

* Corresponding address: Zuocheng Zhang, School of Education, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia.

Sažetak

Rad se bavi primerom iz prakse nastavnika poslovnog engleskog jezika sa stručnim usmerenjem izabranim da predaje poslovno pisanje na jednom kineskom univerzitetu. Rad se zasniva na raznovrsnim podacima prikupljenim od učesnika u istraživanju, uključujući njegov program nastave i beleške s predavanja, komentare na studentske zadatke, posmatranje za vreme časa, intervjue i prepisku putem i-mejla sa njim, studentsku evaluaciju njegove nastave i ocenu zadataka njegovih studenata od strane drugih stručnjaka za poslovanje. Istrajnom komparativnom tematskom analizom tih podataka uočeno je šest glavnih tematskih celina u vezi s njegovim pristupom predavanju poslovnog pisanja, uključujući tendenciju ka poslovnim veštinama, postepeno formiranje načina razmišljanja i stavova, uzgredno predavanje jezika, upravljanje nastavom, stvaranje slike o poslovnom svetu i pozitivan prijem njegovih časova kod studenata. O ovim tematskim celinama se diskutuje u radu kako bi se stekao uvid u nekoliko ključnih pitanja u nastavi engleskog jezika struke (EJS) i razvoju nastavnika EJS, uključujući integrisano učenje predmetnog sadržaja i stranog jezika, motivaciju, saradnju između istraživača i nastavnika, kao i strategije za timsku nastavu.

Ključne reči

poslovni engleski, nastavnik EJS sa stručnim usmerenjem, nastavnik EJS sa jezičko-književnim usmerenjem, integrisano učenje predmetnog sadržaja i stranog jezika, razvoj nastavnika EJS.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This is a case study of a business specialist teaching business writing on an updated four-year English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programme at a prestigious university in China (hereafter IBSU as the pseudonym). Students admitted to the programme are from across the country through a competitive selection process and are categorised as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students majoring in Business English which is intended to prepare them for the world of international business. Their programme incorporates a range of English-medium courses in business disciplinary knowledge, business practice, and business discourse (see Bargiela-Chiappini & Zhang, 2013; Zhang, 2007, 2013b for more detail on Business English education in China). Business writing is classified as an ESP course and constitutes a part of the business discourse component of the programme. It is offered in Year 3 after students have taken a number of preliminary business

discipline courses taught in English or Chinese as well as language skills courses in their first two years of university and in tandem with several specialised business discipline courses such as economics, management, and business law. The business writing course is usually taught at the university by Chinese teachers with expertise in English language teaching and business discourse. For the new programme, it was assigned to a specially appointed new teacher who is a native-English-speaking business specialist with an MBA degree and 20 years of experience as a financial analyst at a major US auto manufacturing company.

ESP teaching necessarily involves two kinds of content, namely subject matter and language, which are sometimes referred to as the carrier content and the real content respectively (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Although the carrier content and real content are in a nexus relationship and inseparable in real life language use, they are often given different weighting in ESP teaching, ranging from the focus on subject matter to the preoccupation with language. The former end of this carrier and real content continuum is known as English-mediated instruction where the sole concern is with the subject matter and language is merely the medium of instruction (Airey, 2016). The other end of the continuum is language-focused ESP teaching. Language-focused ESP teaching is common among English language and literature-background teachers who typically align with the text-based pedagogy, as was true of the Chinese teachers at IBSU.

The text-based pedagogy is characterised by the teaching and learning cycle of teacher modelling and deconstructing sample texts of a certain genre, including the identification of textual features and analysis of contextual factors for such features; teacher and student co-constructing a text; and student independently constructing a text (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Feez, 2002). Although practitioners in ESP may not use this term to describe their approach, the way they teach often reflects the text-based pedagogy. For example, in teaching academic writing, research articles collected by students from their disciplines were jointly deconstructed by the students and their lecturer to discover the rhetorical organisation, the rhetorical context including the communicative purposes, and linguistic features represented in the exemplary texts, and to observe genre variation across disciplines (Cheng, 2011). This kind of teaching is valuable in that students are brought to awareness of the interaction between textual features and the context of text production and consumption. However, the text-based pedagogy approaches discursive practices such as writing and speaking from the end result, that is, the text. It may be useful to start from the subject matter and ask how it is construed through language to produce the text. As Bhatia (2004) argues, discursive practices need to be located in the context of both professional practices and disciplinary knowledge to promote professional expertise. Subject matter, which involves both disciplinary content and knowledge of professional practices, is a potentially useful starting point for exploring discursive practices such as business writing.

147

The business specialist teaching business writing offers an opportunity to undertake this line of inquiry. As the carrier content and the real content are both integral parts of ESP teaching, it is useful to examine different approaches to handling them by different types of ESP teachers, for example, language and literature-background teachers following the text-based pedagogy and subject specialist ESP teachers. From a community of practice perspective (Wenger, 1998), a subject specialist ESP teacher may differ significantly from a language and literature-background ESP teacher in perceptions of the enterprise to pursue in ESP teaching and learning, patterns of engagement with students, and the use of the repertoire of the target community of practice. Such differences may impact on the ways to know, analyse, recognise, do, and see in teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). A study of subject specialists' experience of teaching ESP may thus shed light on alternative ways of handling the carrier content and real content. Their practices may also provide insights into possible collaboration between ESP teachers with different areas of expertise. One common difficulty language and literature-background ESP teachers face is the lack of expertise in the technicalities of specialist areas such as engineering, economics, commerce, and the law, which put them "in a strange and uncharted land" (Wu & Badger, 2009: 19). Research indicates that teacher beliefs of subject specialists about language and language use have substantial impacts on their teaching practice (Airey, 2012; Tan, 2011) and collaboration between language experts and subject specialists can be a tricky operation (Airey, 2016; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015).

This study also draws inspiration from the emerging approach of content and language integrated learning (CLIL). CLIL is defined as a "dual-focused educational approach" (Marsh & Martín, 2013: 1) which has developed in Europe to respond to the demand of bilingualism education and the crowded curriculum in the European Union with the focus of teaching on both disciplinary content and language even though language "is focused on when it is necessary and important for the understanding of a specific aspect of the content subject or the academic discipline" (Wolff, 2009: 547). Additionally, this approach recognises the synergy in the interaction between the learning of the subject matter and of language and its impact on the construction of new knowledge and promotion of higher-order thinking (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Marsh & Martín, 2013). Despite the on-going debate over CLIL (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Bruton, 2013; Hüttner & Smit, 2014), it is interesting to look into its relevance to ESP in generating learning in subject matter, language, and critical thinking in students.

This case study of a job-experienced business specialist appointed to teach English business writing at a Chinese university aims to gain insights into alternative ways of handling business content and language and collaboration in teaching the professional skill of business writing to Business English students.

2. THE CASE AND DATA

The case for this study is Leo (pseudonym), a native speaker of American English, an MBA degree holder, and a former financial analyst who had worked for a major US auto manufacturer for 20 years. Although he had no teacher qualifications, he had gone through a formal selection process at IBSU and been appointed to teach at IBSU shortly before he was assigned to teach the compulsory business writing course to the Year 3 Business English majors. The business writing course consisted of business letters writing for semester 1 (from September 2009 to January 2010) and business marketing writing for semester 2 (from February 2010 to July 2010). Leo had no training in language teaching and was new to the teaching profession at university, a fact he frankly acknowledged in front of his students when he used himself as an example of performing a SWOT (short form for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis (Observation #3, 24 May 2010). There were several parallel business writing classes for English language students majoring in other areas of language study at IBSU who were taught by Chinese teachers, including the researcher.

Apart from being provided with a prescribed textbook which largely follows a text-based approach to business writing, Leo was given no briefing on the course itself (Interview #2, 10 June 2010). Leo decided that he would not teach from the book and organised his own course syllabus based on a student writing survey he conducted at the beginning of semester 1.

Leo and the researcher were both colleagues teaching the same business writing course and the research participant and researcher in the research process. He was requested to provide his teaching notes, student writing survey results, and his feedback on his students' writing assignments. He was interviewed twice, including one initial informal interview about his philosophy of teaching and his view on the Business English major students and a follow-up semi-structured interview concerning his beliefs and teaching practice (Interview Schedule attached as Appendix). Six of his teaching sessions were observed by the researcher who acted as a non-participant observer and took verbatim notes of Leo's teaching. He was also contacted by email to clarify information or the rationale for the specifics of his teaching practice. The researcher and Leo developed a friendship which has led to continual email exchanges after the data collection was officially completed in July 2010. These extra emails were not counted as data for this article but reference will be made to Leo's current situation where necessary. These data provide rich information on Leo's approach to teaching business content and language and his rationale for his approach. The data collection was covered by ethics approval.

As the data were collected over a time span of nearly one year, they were prepared for analysis by first sorting them out in chronological order. They were then read through and put into three broad types including data related to Leo's classroom teaching such as his teaching notes, assignment tasks, and classroom

149

observation notes; data concerning his rationale for the practice such as email exchanges and interviews; and outcomes of his teaching such as student evaluation and business professionals' evaluation of his students' writing in business genres. The data and sources are summarised in Table 1.

DATA TYPES	DATA SOURCES	DATA CONTENT AND DATE OF COLLECTION (IN BRACKETS)
Leo's teaching practice	Course documents	Course outline for business marketing writing Lecture notes
	Assignment tasks	#1 Application: resume and covering letter (Oct. 2009) #2 Recruiting: request, job posting, offer, counteroffer, rejection (Dec. 2009) #3 Business plan (June 2010)
	Verbatim notes and PowerPoint slides	#1 (6 pages), #2 (8 pages), #3 (10 pages), #4 (7 pages), #5 (8 pages), #6 (5 pages) (25 Dec. 2009~23 June 2010)
	Leo's feedback on students' assignments	Comments on genre knowledge in students' assignments (Oct. 2009~June 2010)
Teaching outcomes	Student evaluation of teaching	Email (25 May 2010)
	Business professionals' assessment of students' assignments	Comments on various aspects of genre knowledge in students' assignments (Aug. 2010~Jan. 2011)
Rationale for teaching practice	Email exchanges	#1-20 for the formal data collection (27 Oct. 2009~6 July 2010) #21-31 after the data collection (May 2012~June 2014)
	Interviews	#1 (10 March 2010) #2 (10 June 2010)

Table 1. Data

The coding of the data was driven by the research concerns, namely what Leo attended to when teaching business writing, what rationale he provided for his approach, and what outcomes his teaching brought about. Each data source was read separately to generate relevant themes that may represent the data and the results of the initial coding were compared across the data sources. For example, the initial coding of Leo's lecture notes suggested two themes, including focus on teaching business content and unsystematic teaching of business language. These results were then compared with the initial coding of the verbatim observation notes and Leo's feedback on his students' assignments. Similarly, the resulting themes from coding the interviews – the changing nature of international business and attributes of inhabitants of the international business world – were compared with the results from coding the email exchanges. Through crosschecking the themes against the different sources, the validity of the coding was enhanced. No second coder was used because of the labour-intensive nature of the coding process. The scrutiny of the data went on until six generated themes were felt to represent the data. The wording of the themes was guided by Leo's own phrasing

or description where possible. For example, Leo described his approach to teaching business writing as gravitation towards business skills and concepts, which was taken up in naming the theme. It should be acknowledged that the researcher was a language and literature-background ESP teacher for 20 years and was teaching a parallel class business writing following a text-based approach. This background may have shaped the whole study including the data collection and interpretation that would reflect the researcher's concerns and perspectives derived from his training and experience. This will be discussed in Section 4.4.

3. FINDINGS

This section presents the six major themes derived from the data in relation to Leo's teaching of business writing to his pre-experience Business English major students, including Gravitation Towards Business Skills, Instilling the Mind-sets and Attitudes, Incidental Teaching of Language, Classroom Management, Image of the Business World, and Positive Reception of Leo's Teaching.

3.1. Gravitation towards business skills

Leo prioritised business concepts and skills in his teaching. This can be clearly observed in his lectures, assignment tasks, and feedback to his students' writing in business genres. He organised his teaching around business topics, concepts, and skills. For example, when he was discussing the job posting (Observation #1, 25 December 2009), he began with a comment on its promotional nature and prompted his students to think in the target role and come up with desired and required skills for inclusion in the text by asking them: 1) What's the goal for the business, long term and short term? 2) What do you want in a job posting? 3) What do managers want in their recruitees? 4) What is the skills set required? Another example is his discussion of the business plan. His teaching proceeded in a piecemeal fashion with each lecture focusing on one component of the document such as values and visions, marketing plan, and executive summary (Observation #6, 23 June 2010). Similar to his approach to teaching the job posting, he asked his students a series of questions from a business perspective and pressed them to be specific and exact when discussing business matters. For example, when a student nominated young people as his potential customers in his marketing plan, Leo followed up with the question "men or women?" and further asked "Are they naturally drawn [to your business], mostly men or women?" (Observation #3, 25 May 2010). These probing questions reflect Leo's focus on the business concept of market segmentation and his intention to teach business thinking.

    He assigned three major assignments: applying for employment by preparing a resume and covering letter; recruiting a new staff member for one's own

department by creating a job advertisement, making a request for posting the job advertisement, and writing a series of offer letter, counteroffer letter, and rejection letter; and starting up one's own company by producing a business plan. The focus of the tasks is on business concepts and skills. What makes the assignments most interesting is their authenticity in the sense that they were set in response to real-life scenarios. For example, when the students were assuming a manager's role in the recruitment for a new staff member, the potential candidates they would select from included graduate students of the same university as the student writers. As writing involves meeting the audience's expectations, the student writers were positioned to extrapolate their experiences at the university in their writing. This task is thus both familiar as it provided the students something they had some experience of, and unfamiliar because it required them to stretch themselves to enact managerial decision-making and action. The writing task thus goes beyond producing a textual product and is conducting business in and through English.

Leo's assessment of his students is consistent with his teaching focus. For example, he made it clear to his students that he would not set the assessment criteria but would expect them to be the criteria for each other because in the business world "you're judged by your peers" in the sense that they compete with each other for excellence in performance (Observation #2, 10 May 2010). His assessment criteria are best articulated in his final reflection on his teaching:

> The students that really tried to accomplish something important with their submissions are the big winners… Their ability to grasp the concepts, apply them to a real life situation and write about the important aspects of the situation are far more important than their ability to spew lifeless, grammatically correct text. They were provided with a general framework to relay their understanding to me and succeeded. (Email #20, 6 July 2010)

3.2. Instilling the mind-sets and attitudes

If Leo's preoccupation with business concepts and skills reflects his background and understanding of the 'hard' requirements of the business world, his emphasis on instilling the mind-sets and attitudes is evidence of his awareness of and stance on the 'soft' skills. He took the cultivation of professionalism in his students and the nurturing of the mind-sets as his goals of teaching:

> [T]he mind-set is most important… You can teach employees specific skills, but attitude and caring can't be taught. I disagree about impossibilities, but significantly more effort is required to teach attitude and caring. That's what our goals as teachers should be attempting to instill as well as skills. (Email #18, 11 June 2010)

Leo constantly inscribed "thinking" as the core of the mind-sets. This is reflected in his lectures. When a student identified spicy flavour as the competitive advantage of her restaurant in her SWOT analysis, Leo commented that it could be a weakness, especially in hot summer. Instead of stopping the discussion there, he assured her by saying "that's OK as long as you know the fact" and then prompted her to draw on her knowledge of spicy food in her hometown until she made the argument that spicy food can be an additional flavour in summer. He commended this student on her argument because "[s]he defended her position with logic – That's what I want – she's thinking!" (Email #15, 24 May 2010). In his final lecture on the business plan, he stated that the business plan "is to show what you've learned for marketing... I give you the freedom to arrange your text the way you think is good" (Observation #6, 23 June 2010). His assessment criteria also aligned with his teaching philosophy as can be seen in how he marked student assignments: "If the writing was horrible, the students were marked down for bad grammar, but I did not judge their creativity" (Email #20, 6 July 2010).

Another aspect of Leo's elevation of the mind-sets is his insistence that the Business English students live their values in both their study and writing. He wanted his students to "have values and visions, and then bring these values and visions into their businesses" (Interview #1, 10 March 2010). His teaching was guided by the purpose of "developing people" in the sense that "I share experiences, strengths, hopes, and I am a testimony of someone who has experienced all that [business life]" (Interview #2, 10 June 2010). He urged his students to ask themselves "Did you push yourself to your limits?" in their study and to reflect on themselves by asking "What is your frame of mind, serving yourself or waiting for life to serve me?" and "[l]ook at yourself, are you living your words?" (Observation #5, 9 June 2010).

Leo also encouraged his students to inject personality into their writing and recognised the display of values and attitudes in their writing as in the telling example of his feedback on one student's recruitment writing:

> Don't listen to the grade – it reflects professionalism, not your personality. Keep your attitude – it defines you. You may not be ranked in grade, but #1 with an attitude for me! (Feedback #1, January 2010)

This aspect of the mind-sets is important as in Leo's view, great business leaders balance professionalism and personality on the job:

> Truly great leaders in the business world have their own personalities which they inject into their management styles. There are boundaries that the students must adhere to, but those boundaries are just a framework from which one begins. Just as there are infinite measures of length within a centimetre, there are infinite possibilities within the confines of the business writing structure. (Email #12, 28 December 2009)

153

3.3. Incidental teaching of language

Unlike his treatment of business concepts and skills, Leo did not foreground the teaching of language or set prior language learning goals. Although his assessment criteria included concerns with language, for example, marking his students down for "bad grammar" (Email #20, 6 July 2010), and he scaffolded the textual patterns of business genres such as rejection letters (Observation #1, 25 December 2009), he took a non-systematic and de-contextualised approach to language.

First, Leo did not have a language goal for his business writing teaching. He recognised this in his own email referring to his lesson plan on grammar as "'a fly by the seat of your pants' lesson plan that may indicate a lack of organizational skills" (Email #6, 31 October 2009). He did not discuss the set of linguistic features that characterise a business genre but would deal with them where relevant. The following are two examples:

1) I have some English skill, so I can do some interpreting or translating.
2) The culture is kind of strict due to the professionalism required to maintain business relationships with companies in the U.S.

Regarding Sentence 1) which is from a student's covering letter, Leo commented that it is not positive because of the two instances of "some" and suggested replacing the first with "excellent" (Observation #5, 9 June 2010). As for Sentence 2) from a student's job posting, Leo dismissed "kind of" as "not professional" (Feedback #2, January 2010). In his lectures he would display sample texts, for example, vision and mission statements of leading international companies, without analysing their linguistic features (Observation #4, 2 June 2010).

Second, language was taught free from its context of use. Leo learned from his student writing needs survey at the beginning of the term that the students had "several deficiencies that require immediate attention" including grammar, the executive summary structure, and insufficient writing practice (Email #6, 31 October 2009). In response, he devised several grammar refreshing sessions, but grammar was taught in isolation from the business writing tasks. This is most evident in his account of his teaching of business letter writing:

> I also ascertained that most of the students wanted to do resume and cover letters. That's just about over, and we'll move onto structure and grammar. We will apply these to business documents the last quarter of the term. (Email #8, 1 November 2009)

It seems that for Leo, structure and grammar are separable and independent of the content whereas in linguistics, in particular functional approaches to language, language and content are believed to be inseparable and linguistic choices are dependent on the context of use.

154

Leo's formalist approach to language is also evident even when he was addressing linguistic issues. For example, in his lecture on executive and company summary where he explicitly dealt with sentences, paragraphs, and the organisation of the whole document (Observation #5, 9 June 2010), he listed simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound complex sentences and discussed sentence length and readability. This discussion of grammar does not relate linguistic choices to their contexts of use or rhetorical functions and is thus a de-contextualised approach to language.

Leo's lack of focus on language may be due to his view that language is polished on the job with the help of coaches who advise on writing quality such as appropriate tones (Interview #2, 10 June 2010). In an email following an interview on what marketing writing should be like, he wrote:

> I don't want my students just to push paper, I want them to feel a purpose – an understanding that their actions are important to the success of an organization... The true miracle of life, and the most important asset of any business is its people. That's what we're cultivating – not written documents. (Email #15, 24 May 2010)

However, Leo came to realise the necessity of having language learning goals and taking a functional approach to language when he critiqued his own approach at the end of his first year of teaching business writing:

> We approach the subject of business discourse from two different cultures and from different bases of experience. We naturally gravitate to our are[a]s of comfort, and I gravitate towards business skills while you gravitate towards writing quality. Somewhere in the middle is the optimal balance for the students. (Email #20, 6 July 2010, "you" refers to the researcher)

3.4. Classroom management

Leo displayed a teacher-fronted style even though he initiated discussion topics and prompted his students to respond. While he offered himself as a resource for his students to use in their learning (Observation #5, 9 June 2010), Leo seemed to control the teaching sequence. The inconsistency between his beliefs and actual teaching practice was later acknowledged by Leo himself in his reflection (Email #27, 26 October 2013). There was infrequent in-depth engagement of students in business topics in the classroom interaction. In addition, the students did not always appear to be attracted by Leo's discussion of business skills in class. For example, a number of the students did not look up at Leo's PowerPoint slides even when he was presenting business knowledge or skills (Observation #4, 2 June 2010; Observation #5, 9 June 2010). This is surprising as business concepts and skills are what students would be expected to embrace and learn from the subject

specialist. It thus seems that the relevance of the material itself does not necessarily generate engaging teaching in ESP. It is what ESP learners perceive and can relate to that actually matters. Leo himself was puzzled by this lack of motivation but decided that he would just teach students showing the interest and passion to learn (Observation #5, 9 June 2010).

3.5. Image of the business world

Leo held a clear image of the business world and its inhabitants. Professionalism in business is not a stable concept as "[t]he business world changes very rapidly" (Email #20, 6 July 2010). For him, international business professionals are people and individuals embodying a set of skills and abilities (Interview #2, 10 June 2010). These include a good "core of strong business knowledge and skills" including "ICC [intercultural communication] skills" and "[t]he mind-sets that may be the most universal for successful intercultural (business) communication… a positive attitude, adaptability, effort, and assuming responsibility" (Email #18, 11 June 2010). He reminded his students that many global companies such as Coca Cola and P&G started as small businesses and were founded by young people just like themselves (Observation #4, 2 June 2010). They should be prepared for opportunities to lead as when they move up, they will need and have the freedom to bring their values and visions or personality into their business (Interview #1, 10 March 2010).

Leo also noted a "cultural obstacle" for his Business English students. He commented that the "students are building up to a norm assuming that something [the identity of international business professional] exists, they are projecting an image, while in the US students learn to be themselves" (Interview #2, 10 June 2010). In his criticism of students who took the business plan as just an assignment, he asserted that

> They are the biggest losers in the educational arena… Though their documents may have been written well and grammatically correct, they did not develop the skills that I intended them to develop and are necessary for success in the business world. I feel they are a byproduct of a system that views the requirements of an international business professional to be superficial acts of appearance, speaking and writing. I feel they will be quick to land a job, and quick to be defeated in the work environment by those who actually understand business concepts and that take the time to polish up their English skills while on the job. (Email #20, 6 July 2010)

This assertion clearly aligns with his view of the business world as a world of individuals embodying a repertoire of business and intercultural communication skills instead of merely (re)producing certain discursive practices (Interview #2, 10 June 2010).

3.6. Positive reception of Leo's teaching

Leo's teaching achieved positive outcomes in the eyes of both his students and peer professionals. His student's email to him is revealing:

> I have met several teachers and never before have I seen a kind of teaching method that is similar to yours. I appreciate it very much. To begin with, I think our teachers are lack of the attention of students' individualization. However, you pay more attention to it. You want us to think of our own business at the beginning of this semester, and keep on analysing our own company all through the semester. I think it is a pretty good idea in teaching, because all of us are doing different jobs, which we are fond of, and we can be interested in them. Moreover, this class is related to our future closely. I could not have imagined how marketing would have been related to myself before. I think your class is very useful for every student, if only they are serious about the homework you assigned. You make us think carefully about life, at least me. (Email #16, 25 May 2010).

Learning from and with Leo, the student was developing the ability to analyse, critique, evaluate, and create, which is the kind of higher-order processing (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) that is often claimed to be lacking in Chinese foreign language majors (Huang, 2010; Wen & Zhou, 2006). Leo's students were also developing portable skills. For example, Nan, one of Leo's students, was able to put himself in the shoes of his reader and speculate what the writing of a counter-offer letter should be like even though it was a new genre for him (see Zhang, 2015 for detail). He took ownership of his writing of a business plan in the way he responded to Leo's writing prompt as a businessperson rather than as a student merely completing an assignment for the course and used his teacher Leo as a resource or "someone to help me improve this business plan" (Interview with Nan #4, 4 July 2010). Leo's approach to pressing the students to think about business concepts, draw on their experience of the world, and inject their personality and values in their business writing seems to be valorised. As an aside, he was rated in the top 10% of the teachers twice in student evaluation of his teaching of intercultural business communication to later cohorts of students at IBSU (Email #26, 29 July 2013).

More importantly, Leo's students were positively evaluated by a panel of international business professionals who reviewed the students' writing in business genres and recognised them as considerably professional (see Zhang, 2013a for more detail). This recognition of his students by the target community of practice (Wenger, 1998) is further evidence for his successful teaching of English business writing.

157

4. DISCUSSION

The six themes above represent a substantial account of Leo's experience of teaching business writing on a Business English programme in China. While Leo is not intended to be the representative of subject specialists teaching business discourse, his experience sheds light on a range of issues related to handling content and language in ESP, in particular content and language integration, motivation, teacher beliefs, and collaboration between subject specialists and language experts.

4.1. Illustration of content and language integrated learning

Leo's approach to teaching English business writing provides one possible illustration of CLIL in an ESP setting. His teaching is focused on business concepts, skills, and the mind-sets and attitudes while language is only dealt with where it is deemed necessary. Business writing in various business genres means enacting business in and through language. This approach provides a broader scope of exploration and discovery for ESP students than would the text-based approach in ESP teaching, which usually puts emphasis on producing a text. In the exploring and discovering process, they act their target role, for example managers, under the guidance of their experienced teacher who provides the resources, a role model, framework, and scaffolding. They think and search for answers to their own questions and present their solutions, which contributes to the development of their higher-order thinking as articulated by the two students cited in Section 3.6. Business genres are learned in responding to real-life scenarios. Students are led to realise that there is no such thing as a monolithic international business professional identity and that business genres have boundaries as well as flexibility, which somewhat empowers them to inject some personality into their writing. Leo's approach recontextualises a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) where his Business English students were given the opportunity to interact with a teaching business professional. Learning business writing thus becomes a transformative process for the Business English students because of their growing awareness of language use for professional purposes, autonomy for learning, and their ability to relate to values, perspectives, and skills for the target business profession as a result of their participatory learning.

4.2. Impact of teacher beliefs on practice

Leo's experience testifies to the power of teacher beliefs. His perception of business professionals as individuals who share a set of characteristics, his objection to business professionals as an image, and his expectation of his students

as managers in the making who should live their values are reflected in his approach to cultivating a profesional identity in his students, introducing peer pressure, and assessing their assignments. In effect, he was providing an education experience for his students rather than training them in a set of skills.

Research in subject specialists teaching language indicates that teacher beliefs have an immense impact on teaching practice. For example, they may hold themselves as subject content teachers dismissing conscious language teaching (Airey, 2012; Tan, 2011). Although Leo did not trivialise language learning, he taught grammar only incidentally because of his beliefs that business language is ever changing and has the opportunity to be polished on the job. He seems to have overlooked the fact that the business disciplinary knowledge and professional practice underlying business discourse are enacted by language and/or other semiotic modes, which do not typically come naturally to novices but need to be painstakingly taught and learned.

4.3. Motivation in CLIL classes

Business concepts and skills as the content of the business writing course cater to Business English students' target needs. However, the observed lack of enthusiasm on the part of Leo's students suggests that target needs do not readily translate into learning motivation for Business English students in the classroom. Business-relevant information needs to be handled in an engaging way by the teacher and also interpreted by the students as relevant to their current study and future before it is motivating for them, as described earlier in the email of Leo's student who was appreciative of Leo's approach to teaching business marketing writing.

There may also be a gap between Leo's delivery and the students' expectations. Business letters writing and marketing writing are classified as belonging to the business discourse component of the Business English programme (Zhang, 2007; Zhang & Wang, 2011). By design, the business writing course builds on knowledge of business disciplines on the one hand and understanding of business practices on the other. Since the course comes after some preliminary business discipline and practice courses and in tandem with specialised disciplinary courses, there are considerable overlaps in carrier content across the various courses. When students have learned the knowledge of marketing from a prior or concurrrent course, it is understandably boring to students when they find their business writing teacher recycling marketing principles and concepts in class. What they would expect is an engaging discussion of the discursive practices in marketing, including the linguistic and multimodal processes that are relevant. In fact, when Leo was discussing the use of "some" in the students' presentation of their translation and interpretation capacity, most of the students did look up from their mobile phones and listen. One implication of this finding is that the role of the business discourse component in the Business

159

English curriculum needs to be reviewed with reference to overlaps that may exist among the different components and the briefing of staff necessary for their preparation.

4.4. Researcher-practitioner interaction and strategies for collaboration between subject specialists and language experts

It has been argued that ESP teachers do not have to be subject specialists and may actually collaborate with them in various forms (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Leo's experience suggests possible ways of collaboration between the researcher and practitioner and between ESP teachers and subject specialists in organising ESP teaching.

Leo's experience highlights the benefits of researcher-practitioner interaction. It has benefited this researcher, who played dual roles in the research: researcher as well as colleague who was teaching a parallel business writing class at the same university. As a language and literature-background ESP teacher, the researcher used to follow the text-based approach by treating business writing as learning business discourse, in particular textual features at lexical, syntactic, discoursal, and rhetorical levels. Through investigating Leo's teaching he was exposed to an approach that took business writing as not projecting an image but as a transformative process of developing people and articulating values, vision, personality, and attitude in and through writing. Leo as the researched also acknowledged gains from the interaction when he made the conclusive remark about the need to find a balance between his approach and the text-based approach in teaching business writing. He eventually realised that business writing teaching needs to consider both business content and language to achieve an optimal outcome for students.

Team teaching with subject specialists is recommended as a way of addressing the inadequacy of language and literature-background ESP teachers in the area of subject content. This study provides some clues to implementing team teaching. For example, subject specialist teachers may be consulted on the methodology of the discipline or profession. Teaching by following the disciplinary or professional methodology is recognised in ESP teaching (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) and found productive (Bruce, 2002; Flowerdew, 2010). Language and literature-background ESP teachers may emulate subject specialists like Leo by preparing themselves to ask questions oriented to business practices in lectures, using disciplinary or professional practices in assessing student learning, and assigning authentic tasks that both draw on students' knowledge and experience and stretch them to a reasonable extent.

Conversely, in a CLIL setting, language and literature-background ESP teachers may advise subject specialist teachers on issues such as identifying the disciplinary literacy demands (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia, 2011), setting

160

coherent and appropriate language learning goals, and assisting in striking the optimal balance. For subject specialist teachers, professional actions such as professional writing or speaking may be so automatic that they forget that these practices are operations that need to be painstakingly learned step by step by novices to their profession such as ESP students (Leont'ev, 1981). Leo's teaching obviously gravitated towards disciplinary knowledge and professional practice and undermined discursive competence when he was trying to apprentice his students into the community of practice of international business, until his language awareness was raised as a result of the interaction with the language teaching expert (see Airey, 2012; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Bruce, 2002; Tan, 2011 for discussions of raising subject specialists' language awareness).

Language goals in CLIL can be set with reference to language of learning, language for learning, and language through learning, each of which would benefit from the input of language and literature-background ESP teachers. According to Coyle and associates (2010), language of learning refers to the language that is part of the knowledge to learn, for example, the lexicogrammatical features of an economics text that is being studied, while language for learning refers to the language necessary for learning something else, for example, the language for questioning, agreeing, and disagreeing that is necessary for discussing the economics text, and language through learning concerns language whose need emerges only while the learning is taking place, for example, vocabulary or grammar items that are required for summarising the discussion of the economics text. As language and literature-background ESP teachers are specialised in the linguistic analysis of language use in these three scenarios and have a rich tradition of learner needs analysis and course design at their disposal, they are well positioned to contribute to the identification of the language features to teach and the approach to teaching them. In this way, the "optimal balance" suggested by Leo becomes a realistic goal. In this process, language teaching experts are playing a remarkably autonomous professional role in addition to the often ascribed or even self-claimed ancillary role. Apart from the five roles of teacher, course designer and materials provider, collaborator, researcher, and evaluator (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), they may contribute to the transformation of the students who are learning from and with them, acting in business roles, experiencing business thinking, and reflecting on their learning in relation to their life. In this sense, ESP teachers may be more than merely engaged in a "service industry for other specialisms" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 164).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Leo illustrates an approach to teaching English business writing by focusing on business concepts and skills rather than textual features of business genres. This approach complements the text-based approach and can be effective in promoting

the learning of language, subject matter, and higher-order thinking. Leo's case invites a careful investigation into a set of key issues in ESP education, for example, the development of people as a goal of teaching, participatory learning as the mechanism for bridging the gap between the classroom and the workplace, strategies for team teaching between subject specialists and ESP teachers, and the importance of setting explicit language learning goals in CLIL. Language and literature-background ESP teachers would benefit from these insights and enrich their teaching by learning to ask the type of questions subject specialists like Leo would ask, and base their lectures and assessment on disciplinary and professional practices. By collaborating with researchers and language teaching experts, subject specialists would extend their teaching toolkit, in particular the techniques and strategies for teaching language use specific to their subject. Given that Leo was new to the teaching profession, further research could be conducted on business specialists with considerable experience of language teaching to validate the findings.

[Paper submitted 30 Jun 2016]
[Revised version received 11 Nov 2016]
[Revised version accepted for publication 15 Nov 2016]

Acknowledgements

References

Airey, J. (2012). "I don't teach language." The linguistic attitudes of physics lecturers in Sweden. *AILA Review*, *25*, 64-79.

Airey, J. (2016). EAP, EMI or CLIL? In K. Hyland, & P. Shaw (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of English for specific purposes* (pp. 71-83). New York: Routledge.

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.) (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

Arnó-Macià, E., & Mancho-Barés, G. (2015). The role of content and language in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) at university: Challenges and implications for ESP. *English for Specific Purposes*, *37*, 63-73.

Bargiela-Chiappini, F., & Zhang, Z. C. (2013). Business English. In B. Paltridge, & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The handbook of English for specific purposes* (pp. 193-211). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view*. London: Continuum.

Bruce, N. J. (2002). Dovetailing language and content: Teaching balanced argument in legal problem answer writing. *English for Specific Purposes*, *21*, 321-345.

Bruton, A. (2013). CLIL: Some of the reasons why … and why not. *System*, *41*, 587-597.

Cheng, A. (2011). ESP classroom research: Basic considerations and future research questions. In D. Belcher, A. M. Johns, & B. Paltridge (Eds.), *New directions in English for specific purposes* (pp. 44-72). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *Content and language integrated learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Derewianke, B., & Jones, P. (2016). *Teaching language in context* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multidisciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Feez, S. (2002). Heritage and innovation in second language education. In A. M. Johns (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 43-69). New York: Routledge.

Flowerdew, L. (2010). Devising and implementing a business proposal module: Constraints and compromises. *English for Specific Purposes*, *29*, 108-120.

Huang, Y. S. (2010). Yingyuzhuanyekechengbixuchedigaige [The overhall of the curriculum for English majors]. *waiyujie [Foreign Language World], 136,* 11-16.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hüttner, J., & Smit, U. (2014). CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning): The bigger picture. A response to: A. Bruton. 2013. *System*, *44*, 160-167.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. London: Routledge.

Leont'ev, A. N. (1981). The problem of activity in psychology. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 37-71). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Marsh, D., & Martín, M. J. F. (2013). Content and language integrated learning. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Shanahan, C., Shanahan, T., & Misischia, C. (2011). Analysis of expert readers in three disciplines: History, mathematics, and chemistry. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *43*, 393-429.

Tan, M. (2011). Mathematics and science teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of language in content learning. *Language Teaching Research*, *15*, 325-342.

Wen, Q. F., & Zhou, Y. (2006). pingshuwaiyuzhuanyexueshengsiweinenglidefazhan [Review of the development of thinking in foreign languages majors]. *waiyuxuekan [Foreign Language Research]*, *5*, 76-80.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wolff, D. (2009). Content and language integrated learning. In K. Knapp, & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Handbook of foreign language communication and learning* (pp. 545-572). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Wu, H., & Badger, R. G. (2009). In a strange and uncharted land: ESP teachers' strategies for dealing with unpredicted problems in subject knowledge during class. *English for Specific Purposes*, *28*, 19-32.

Zhang, Z. C. (2007). Towards an integrated approach to teaching Business English: A Chinese experience. *English for Specific Purposes*, *26*, 399-410.

163

Zhang, Z. C. (2013a). Business English students learning to write for international business: What do international business practitioners have to say about their texts? *English for Specific Purposes*, *32*, 144-156.

Zhang, Z. C. (2013b). Teaching business English. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Zhang, Z. C. (2015). Unpacking professional identities for Business English students. In D. Djenar, A. Mahboob, & K. Cruickshank (Eds.), *Language and identity across modes of communication* (pp. 291-311). Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter.

Zhang, Z. C., & Wang, L. F. (2011). Curriculum development for business English students in China: The case of UIBE. *Asian ESP Journal*, *7*, 10-27.

ZUOCHENG ZHANG is Senior Lecturer in TESOL education at the University of New England, Australia. His research interests include Business English, multimodality, professional discourses and identities, and study abroad and intercultural learning. He has published extensively on these topics, including in *English for Specific Purposes*, *International Journal of Business Communication*, *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes* (2013, Wiley-Blackwell), and *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (2013, Wiley-Blackwell).

Appendix

Interview schedule

164

Date: 10 June 2010 9:45am~12:00 noon
Venue: Office 1307

1. What is the image of international business professionals in your mind? Describe.

2. How near/far away do you think your students are to/from international business professionals?

3. You use success, making money, and such expressions in your class frequently. What do you intend to get across to your students?

4. I see you emphasise thinking, mindset, succeeding, etc. for you and your students. What role do you see yourself playing in class, in the programme?

5. You say you are preparing your students to be managers. Your background is an analyst as you once said to me. This sounds to me like a professional rather than a managerial experience. Do you see any gap between your experience and your goal of helping your students?

6. What do you think your students should learn to be international business professionals?

7. Your students want to think and act like international business professionals, they have tried, but they are uncertain about things they say and write – whether they are what practitioners say and do. What to do?

8. You emphasise that your students should use common sense. When you say that, do you mean that international business professionals don't have their special conceptual things?

9. You present lots of examples of the business world, not theories, these examples represent best practice, so do you think they are what your students should learn, but where's the place of theories?

10. Marketing writing involves knowledge and skills of marketing AND language, how to practise both in class?