BOOK REVIEW

Title:	English for Business Communication
Author:	Mable Chan
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Books on English language business communication often emphasise practicality. While the range of tasks that such books equip learners for, have altered over the years (for example, Zoom and Skype video conversations have recently soared in popularity), their basic structure of vocabulary building with respect to communicative genres, organised around the specific duties of the workplace has not changed that much. What makes Chan's book distinctive is that it seeks to add to this model by being research-led, discussing our current understanding and theorisation of these distinct forms of communication.
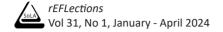
The 11 chapters cover all the typical genres of business communication (and a few less common ones like 'appraisal') and follow a similar structure. Each chapter's topic content is introduced with questions for reflection. Then, the significance in business of each mode of workplace communication is explored, and the mode is analysed to bring out generic elements of structure and content, drawing upon relevant research literature. Finally, real-world texts are provided and learners are then invited to complete post-reading tasks which deepen and extend their knowledge through reflection on practical work.

There are several types of readers who will find this textbook useful. The first of which are more advanced student learners with a good, committed business English teacher. Second, those teaching English communication for business and who have an existing background or at least an interest in applied linguistics, will be impressed by the way the textbook can extend their subject knowledge. For existing teachers of the subject who would like to know more of the contemporary research and theories that underpin their teaching strategies, it is a useful refresher course. It also works effectively as a thorough reference guide and a thought-provoking read for any committed learner or practitioner who wishes to avoid having to read numerous, specialised academic journal articles. The book therefore succeeds in its aim to be a research-informed business English book that nonetheless includes plenty of traditional practical examples, handy tips and suitable advice when discussing typical business and workplace scenarios.

Linguistic theory and accompanying specialised vocabulary aid in linking theory to practice. For example, Chapter 10 (Business Meetings and Negotiations) includes a discussion of the valuable role of 'vagueness', 'hedges' and 'deontic modality' (pp. 195-196) in typical business discussions. When linguistics terms are used, they are always well-defined. There are clear summaries of relevant research which will be of definite benefit to some readers. For example, Chan (p. 26) promises that the reader will "be aware of the latest findings concerning the features and format of email messages" in the chapter on e-mails and true enough, I learnt a great deal about emails and how they are used globally in her very thorough discussion. The explanations of key issues are very coherent and there is valuable enumeration delineating the salient features of written and spoken business language, together with sensible suggestions on how a learner can develop a more effective and appropriate speaking and writing style in different workplace situations (for instance, the value of 'plain English', of being concise and using positive language are endorsed). I also appreciated Chan's discussion of new messaging systems which are supplementing, if not replacing emails, such as (p. 2): 'instant messaging, wikis, social networking, blogging, micro-blogging, and desktop video-conferencing'.

Although it may not work so well for students hoping to learn business English using the book alone for self-study, and they would probably need a good teacher as a facilitator, it can still function as a book that learners can refer to for added depth on certain topics as their engagement with the subject deepens. While the reflective questions each chapter begins with are engaging and cogent, I thought the post-reading tasks might leave many a learner scratching their heads without suitable teacher assistance. In the useful Chapter 9 (Socialisation), the reflective questions include (p. 170): "How often do you conduct small talk in the workplace? What do you talk about? What do you think are the communicative purposes of small talk? Do you encounter any difficulties conducting small talk? What is the role played by non-verbal' communication?" These questions will stimulate learners. However, the post-reflection tasks for the chapter include (p. 185): "How are you going to send positive body language while having small talk with your boss? Note the non-verbal communication means that can help". The latter exercise seems daunting, even for a native speaker, as it is involves negotiating power-relations as well as non-verbal cues. To use the book purely for self-study, learners would have to be advanced in their English language skills and genuinely interested in both the subject and the application of linguistics (and its cognate terminology).

However, as a support for existing, more traditional business English course books, it will prove a beneficial and illuminating companion which will without doubt, improve both learning and teaching of the subject area. This textbook also remains relevant in 2024 as there is nothing else in the market that offers such a research-oriented model. One main area of improvement would be to shift its focus specifically towards the training of business English teachers (which has become a rising need in this market) by building further on the theoretical linguistic context provided, and by exploring the different pedagogic strategies available to teachers and evaluating their effectiveness. In short, there is certainly a gap in the market for such a textbook.

THE REVIEWER

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