

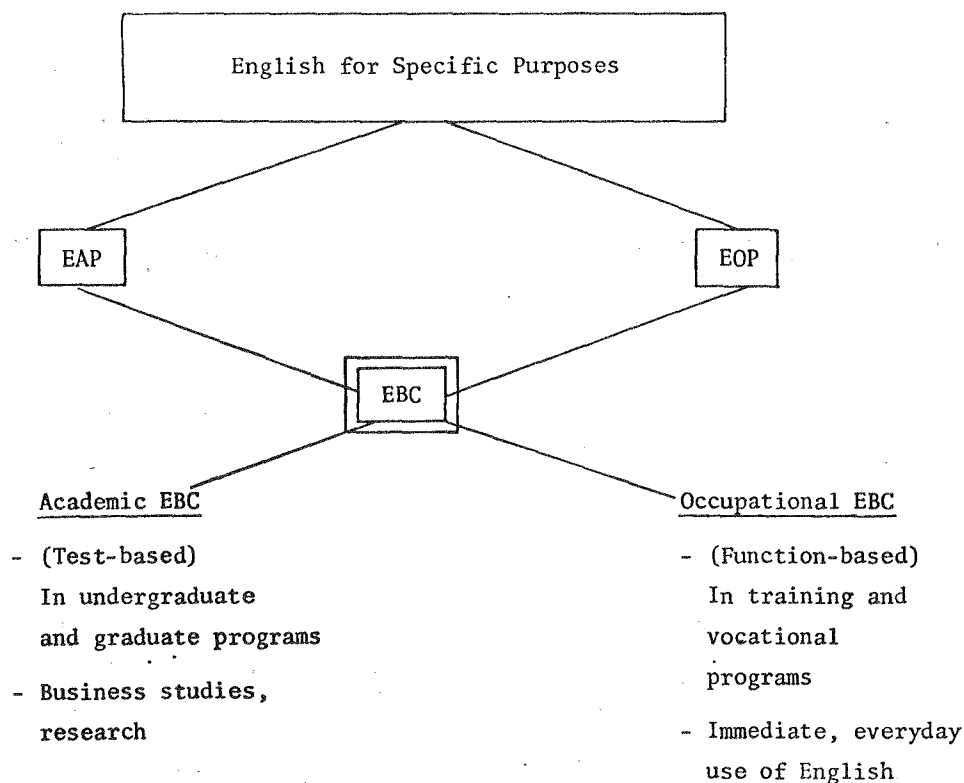
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Feature of English for Business Communication (EBC)
in Thailand

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Language teachers in some corners have pointed their fingers at business English condemning it as non-existent and being a myth rather than a reality. The criticism has grounds if we consider English as a living modern language serving communicative purposes within and without the English speaking communities. Therefore the English language is a language, a language and nothing else. Instead of regarding it as a species in and by itself, I should like to take the stand that business English is in fact English for business communication and that the communicative functions/purposes determine the features of language use. Stemming from English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Business Communication (EBC) is academic cum occupational. Academic EBC is what should be in an English syllabus at the undergraduate and graduate levels featuring English as a tool for furthering knowledge in business studies and research. Occupational EBC, on the other hand, is what should be in a syllabus for training courses for participants who are already in the business professions. Occupational EBC should also be included in programs in vocational schools or colleges which directly prepare their students as potential business professionals. The following diagram summarizes what has just been presented :

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In the past few years several pieces of research on EBC have been conducted by language researchers who were either graduate students fulfilling the requirements for their degrees or English lecturers concerned with the subject. This article will present the key findings of research work in EBC by, firstly, focussing on Academic EBC and then moving on to Occupational EBC.

In 1981 a group of teaching staff at CULI were appointed to conduct research on the features of English as needed by graduate students and faculty members in 12 fields of studies; among these was Business and Accountancy. It should be noted that 46.2% of the student subjects had work experience. Among the 26 subjects, only 2 were faculty members, the remaining 24 were graduate students in their first and second years of studies. Questionnaires and interviews were the means to obtain answers to the questions. The results are summarized below :

Academic EBC

General English (GE) for social purposes or purely EAP?

The majority (57.7%) needed both while 26.9% needed only EAP and the minority 11.5% only GE.

Which language skills should be practiced most?

The listing is in order of priority: translation, reading, writing, listening and speaking.

What are the features of translation skills?

Translation is to serve the following objectives: to communicate information to colleagues to report to superiors, to inform the mass media, and to publish. Regarding the sources of materials for practicing translation, it was believed that textbooks, news, article, reports, and letters should be practiced most.

What are the features of reading skills?

Reading skills should be practiced to serve the following objectives: to do job-related research, (to write critically or analytically), to prepare reports, to translate and to prepare summaries/conclusions. The sources of materials for practicing reading should come from textbooks, journals/magazines, newspapers, manuals and research reports.

What are the features of writing skills?

Writing skills should be practiced for the following objectives: to make business contacts, to relay academic information, to report, to propose, to instruct and to make orders. Regarding the types of language for practicing writing, it was believed that, report writing, notes and memos, business letters, and proposals should be emphasized.

The target receivers of the written messages are customers/parties concerned, related agencies, superiors and colleagues.

What are the features of listening skills?

The objectives of listening are to translate, to converse, to write reports, to take notes and to prepare for a critical speech. While lectures and articles should serve as the most frequent sources for practicing listening, also important are news, conversations, reports, instructions and meetings which should also be listened to in order to complete the actual language use spectrum. The media through which oral messages should be relayed for practicing purposes are composed of tape: real-life *conversants, addressers, radio and television.*

What are the features of speaking skills?

In Academic EBC, the main objectives of speaking are to seek and impart information, and to introduce oneself or other. The findings reveal that social-personal objectives of oral communication receive less emphasis than business/formal communication in which information giving/getting is most important. In view of the sources of messages for practicing the speaking skills, Academic EBC should involve conversations, lectures, discussions/speeches and interviews. Moreover, the target conversants should be superiors, colleagues, customers and subordinates.

The chart which follows illustrates the features of Academic EBC.

Academic EBC

Skills	Objectives	Sources	Channel	Receiver
Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report - Inform - Publish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Textbooks - News - Articles - Reports - Letters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mass-media - Publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Superiors/ Colleagues
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research - Critical-writing - Report-preparation - Translation - Summary/ Conclusion-preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Textbooks - Magazines/ Journals - Newspapers - Manuals - Research-reports 		
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contacts in business - Relay information - Report - Propose - Instruct - Make orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports - Memos/ Notes - Business letters - Proposals 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers/ Parties concerned - Related Agencies - Superiors - Colleagues
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translate - Converse - Write reports - Take notes - Prepare for a critical speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lectures - Articles - News - Conversations - Reports - Instructions - Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tape - Real-life conversants - Radio - T.V. - Addressers 	
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek/Impart Information - Introduce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conversations - Lectures - Discussions/ Speech - Interview 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Superiors - Colleagues - Customers - Subordinates

Occupational EBC

From 1980–1981 the National Educational Commission granted research funds to CULI to conduct a survey research on societal needs for English. The study was conducted within the business circles of Bangkok which were classified into 5 main categories as follows: manufacturers, commercials, banks, trusts, securities and insurance. The 389 companies were selected via systematic sampling of the 300 biggest companies in Thailand established by the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy of Thammasat University, and, afterwards via stratified random sampling of companies listed in the yellow-pages. Only 68 companies yielded complete survey results which were used in the analysis.

The research findings reveal that the use of English ranges from moderate to considerable. The extent to which the skills are used are ranked here in order of priority: writing, reading, listening, speaking and translation. It should be noted that Occupational EBC shows the least need for translation whereas in Academic EBC translation is the most important.

The Writing Skills in Occupational EBC

The following chart puts the writing skills needed and performed within the Bangkok business circles in a complete spectrum.

Writing

Objectives	Content Type	Receivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To make business contacts - To make orders - To report - To instruct - To offer opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business letters - Reports - Notes/Memos - Instructions - Proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers/Parties Involved - Superiors - Colleagues - Subordinates

Reading

Objectives	Content Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To seek job-related information - To make reports - To translate - To write summaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business letters - Instructions/Orders - Newspapers - Magazines/Journals - Job-related Texts

Listening

Objectives	Content Types	Channel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To converse - To take/follow orders - To write reports - To take notes - To translate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conversations - Instructions/orders - Reports - Meetings - Lectures/Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Telephone - Conversers - Meeting/Reports - Lectures - Radio - Tape - Television

Speaking

Objectives	Content Type	Receivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To give job-related Information - To offer services - To ask for information - To greet/take leave - To ask for advice - To give advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conversation - Interview/Lecture - Discussion/Speech - Debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers - Superiors - Colleagues - Subordinates - A group of people

Translation

Objective	Content Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To relay information to colleagues and superiors - To publish - To relay information to the mass media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Order letters - Orders/Instructions - Reports - Spoken Statements - Articles

From the findings it can be concluded that a continuity seems to exist between Academic EBC and Occupational EBC and that the tighter the link, the more realistic and socially oriented is the language syllabuses in Academic EBC.

To have a closer look at the featurers of Occupational EBC, another research conducted by Mrs. Nipa Sonsa-adjit, a co-researcher, will be discussed in this article. This survey dissected Thai business into 5 categories as in the main study presented in the first part of the article. The study looked carefully into the degrees to which each skill is being utilized in each business group. Following is a summary of the findings.

Manufacturing and Commercial

Reading 20%

Speaking, Listening, Writing, each 19.17%

Translation 18.33%

None 4.16%

Services

Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, each 20%

Translation 17.82%

None 2.18%

Trusts and Securities

Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, each 20%

Translation 18.89%

None 1.11%

Insurances

Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, each 20%

Translation 19.00%

None 1.00%

Commercial Banks

Reading, Writing, Speaking, each 20%

Listening 19.26%

Translation 17.78%

None 2.96%

This study confirmed the findings that translation is the skill least used in Thai business circles. While Academic EBC emphasizes translation, the Occupational EBC does not follow suit. This discrepancy should be scrutinized and adjusted so that the "academic" and the "occupational" needs do not clash, and so that the syllabuses serving graduate needs for EBC can, at the same time, be shaped to serve the actual needs in the Thai business world without losing its academic stamina.

One final remaining question *should* or *could* academic needs be molded into occupational needs? The solution, to me, requires both ethical and methodological underpinnings.

References

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