Business English Correspondence - Choosing the right register
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The objective of this workshop was to look at the relevance of register in the business world and then discuss the importance of not just teaching vocabulary and grammar to our Business English students, but making them aware of what is appropriate.

What is register?
The language that we use varies from one social context to another, depending on the situation and on our relationship to the people we are speaking/writing to. These factors influence the degree of formality we use, which in turn influences our word choice and syntax and - when we are speaking - even our pronunciation. This is what is understood by register.

Three questions can help students become aware of the way language is influenced.
1. How is the communication taking place? There is a difference between an email and a face to face meeting, between a quick exchange of information between colleagues in the lift and an official presentation.
2. What is the topic? There is a difference between selling a product and talking about a work process, between analysing the budget and creating a marketing slogan.
3. Who are we communicating with? There is a difference between explaining something to a colleague and reporting to one's manager, between talking to a machine operator on the factory floor and negotiating with a supplier. Furthermore, factors like age, corporate and cultural behaviour and a person's perception of the other person all play a role.

Just considering all these factors convincingly demonstrates the importance of choosing the right register. It is not at all unlikely that use of an incorrect register can slow down business, cause a misunderstanding or even lose a client.

The right register in business correspondence
One of our objectives as teachers is to help our students develop a certain sensitivity to the language they are learning. In business correspondence this means making them aware of the difference in formality between an email to a colleague and an email to a customer, even though the basic message may be the same. Consider the following areas:

Firstly, we need to move with the times and keep abreast of developments so that we teach our students expressions that are currently in use. Here is one example of the way language changes. An older student was really puzzled by the fact that the phrase: "I dwell in Leipzig", which he had learnt from an old English teacher back in school days, was no longer correct. His message was understandable, but the word "dwell" used in this sense was amusingly archaic. Language changes over the years and we as teachers constantly need to keep up to date with modern business communication.

Secondly, because Business English essentially uses different vocabulary to General English, we need to point out the differences to our learners. When teaching the word "purchase", why not compare it to the word "buy" and explain the appropriate usage? When introducing new vocabulary, I believe the teacher should point out words and phrases that are especially formal or informal and give examples of their usage.

Thirdly, tact and diplomacy are very important, especially in correspondence. Writing the following to a customer is just not polite: "You transferred the wrong amount, please rectify." Students need to learn that the *packaging* of a message is of vital importance and being less direct will often achieve better results. Furthermore, this packaging is influenced by intercultural factors and thus it is important that the sender considers the cultural

expectations of the receiver as far as possible. Lower level students do not have the language skills to be diplomatic but this can be expected of B2 students upwards.

Learning to use the right register
One way to help students develop a feeling for register is to give them examples of phrases for specific situations so that they can build up their own personal database on paper and in their heads. In the workshop it was suggested that there should be a clear distinction between formal, neutral and informal phrases. Then various exercises should be done to deepen the understanding and facilitate retention. One such exercise is to provide incorrect phrases or sentences, such as: "*Dear customer, we were thrilled to receive your order yesterday.*" The first step is for students to recognise that something is wrong, the next step is to analyse that "*thrilled*" is inappropriate. Another exercise is to give students sentences to analyse where various registers have been mixed or the wrong register used for a specific context or the formality overdone, for example: "*It was a delight to make your esteemed acquaintance yesterday.*"

Business English students may often be puzzled by the way people communicate in the English business world. Analysing real emails and talking about real experiences in class helps students identify the role register plays in their working life. Another exercise suggested in the workshop is for students to role play various situations using different kinds of formality.

Recognising the importance of using the correct register, the language test provider *telc* tests candidates' awareness of register in some of the items of a multiple choice exercise in Language Elements, Part 2 in the recently developed dual level language tests. In the last part of the workshop, we put theory into practice and looked at samples from the telc language tests English Business B1.B2 and English Business B2.C1. The workshop participants considered the role register played when deciding why only one of the three options offered was acceptable and discussed the relevance of such examples for teaching Business English.

Recommendation
In the business world, using the appropriate language is often the key to success. We, as teachers can increase our students' competence in Business English if we help them become aware of how specific contexts influence the register they should use and if we help them gain the confidence to communicate appropriately.

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