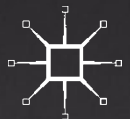# Learning Business English in China

The Construction of Professional Identity

Zuocheng Zhang

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Introduction

Dong (sounding frustrated): 一涉及自己专业方面的东西的时候, 自己就会感觉很怵, 就是听不懂, 看不懂!… 感觉就是也学了三年了, 学啥了? *[when it came to the technicalities in my area, I would feel really uneasy, I couldn't understand what I heard, I couldn't read. … I feel like it's been three years, but what have I learned?]. (Interview with Dong #6, 6 July 2010)*

1.1   Background to the Study

1.1.1 The Business English Programme

This book opens with the reflective question by Dong, an undergraduate student who was being interviewed about his experience of undertaking the four-year Business English programme at IBSU (a pseudonym), a prestigious university in Beijing, China. He was narrating his internship experience at an international financial institution in Year 3 and found himself afflicted with a sense of inadequacy. Dong's frustration resonates with a range of issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education in general and Business English teaching and learning in particular, for example transferability of ESP classroom learning to the workplace, antecedent genres in

new performance situations, professional identity construction, and ESP learning. Dong's experience, along with that of four of his Business English classmates, is examined in relation to these issues in this book.

Some background information on the Business English programme at IBSU is necessary to put the discussion in context. The programme was developed to align with a globalisation discourse and to provide Business English major students a process of professional socialisation (Zhang, 2015). According to the Academic Division of IBSU (2007), it consisted of a series of English-medium courses in business discipline, business practice, and business discourse. The courses teaching disciplinary knowledge included economics, management, and international business law and required the students to acquire fundamental business knowledge and become acquainted with disciplinary cultures including the ways of perceiving, structuring, questioning, and hypothesising in the business disciplines. The business practice courses covered practices in international business, international business culture, intercultural communication, and practices in international business communication to help them understand business operations, cultivate critical awareness of business practices, and prepare them for their future profession. The business discourse courses involved listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating in Business English. These courses made use of activities, topics, and genres typical of the business disciplines and business practices and were delivered by teachers with expertise in the business disciplines, business discourses, and professional practices. On top of these courses, the students were also required to undertake second-classroom (extracurricular) activities, internship experiences including a 200-hour practicum, and a graduation thesis.

1.1.2   Current Issues in Business English Education

The learning experiences of Dong and his classmates through the Business English programme intrigue us to examine several topical issues in Business English education, namely the transferability of ESP learning, the construction of professional identity, and the process of ESP learning. Although these issues are not brand new, they seem to have been under-researched or under-reported.

The first concerns the argument for the portability of ESP classroom learning to the workplace. Transferability of ESP education is often a default goal as ESP education is primarily concerned with preparing students to function competently in their target performance situations (Chambers, 1980; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Research on ESP students also provides evidence for the argument for possible transferability of ESP learning through the teaching of professional expertise and genres (Artemeva, 2009; Cheng, 2011; Smart & Brown, 2002; Zhang, 2013). Dong's frustration over his inadequate discursive competence during his internship, however, suggests that transferability of ESP learning is a complicated issue that compels further research, for example research into what is transferable and what conditions there are for transfer to occur.

The second issue is the construction of professional identity in Business English education. The concern with identity in language learning has been strong in applied linguistics research (e.g., Block, 2007, 2010; Gao, Cheng, Zhao, & Zhou, 2007; Ivanič, 1998; Kanno, 2003; Lillis, 2001; Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011; Norton, 2000, 2001; Norton Pierce, 1995; Ortega, 2009; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Underlying this interest are new insights into language, language learners, and language learning as Norton and Toohey (2004, p. 1) observe:

> [L]anguage is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future.

This position is supported by research in various educational contexts. For example, in their study of a group of tertiary English as a foreign language (EFL) students in China, Gao, Li, and Li (2002, p. 115) contend:

> EFL learning can go beyond the level of instrumental language skills and be part and parcel of students' self-identity construction.

While it has been well recognised in applied linguistics that learners are social beings whose identity investment plays an important role in their language learning (Ortega, 2009), it is only quite recently that ESP

researchers have begun to seriously consider ESP learner identity. Belcher and Lukkarila (2011), for example, call for putting identity centre stage in language teaching, in particular in ESP settings, and advise that the analysis of ESP learner needs should address "not just what learners want to be able to **do** in a language but also who they want to **become** through language" (p. 89, bold in original).

However, professional identity for ESP learners seems largely overlooked in research (Zhang, 2015). The term is often mentioned in passing or casually used in the literature without clarifying what it means. Several titles that do include some aspects of ESP learning and/or professional identity construction point us to gaps to fill in research. The most recent title co-authored by Nickerson and Planken (2015) covers the history of Business English, its characteristics, use, users, and teaching. Although it has a section on learners, teachers, and materials, it does not look particularly into ESP learning process itself. Tardy's (2009) volume investigates the experiences of a cohort of postgraduate students in the United States who were learning to write for academic purposes. It has an insightful account of the development of genre knowledge in these student writers and provides a comprehensive framework for categorising genre knowledge. However, its focus of investigation is not on professional identity construction. Zhu (2005) has highly relevant discussions of business genres in English and Chinese and insightful pedagogical recommendations for teaching intercultural generic competence. It does not deal with students' learning process itself or professional identity construction in detail. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) centre around ESP learning but do not look into the learning experiences of any particular ESP learner group in detail. Clarke's (2008) monograph addresses the formation of professional identity for a cohort of education students in the United Arab Emirates with reference to the way they constructed their community of practice, systems of knowledge and beliefs, interpersonal relations, and discourses of progressive education, which together impacted on their intrapersonal identity. Inspiring as this book is in many ways, for example, its highlighting of professional identity as learning in communities of practice and the manifestation of professional identity in certain discursive practices, it mainly draws on focus group interviews and online discussions as data without demonstrating how they would

enact their emerging professional identity in real-life scenarios, for example teaching a lesson or producing a lesson plan and considering the students' genre knowledge development in any systematic way, which could otherwise demonstrate an important dimension of their learning. Nor is there a validation of the students' emerging professional identity by their target community of practice. Richards's (2006) book illuminates the discursive construction of professional identity in collaborative interactions and the consequences of group talk for group viability or even demise. While this is a very interesting book with a convincing account of collaborative performance of a kind of professional identity in several workplace situations, it is not a study of the construction of professional identity by ESP students. Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, and Planken (2013) provide an excellent review of research and practice in business discourse, leaving it open how Business English students learn and make sense of such discourse on their learning journey.

Professional identity, nonetheless, is a very useful concept for studies of ESP learners. Wenger (1998, p. 215) views learning as a process of identity transformation as he writes:

> Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person.

In an ESP setting, learning the English language goes beyond acquiring the linguistic knowledge of English and involves learning to participate in English-mediated sociocultural practices and in such participation acquiring "knowledgeably skilled identities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55) as members of the academic, commercial, legal, or other professional communities. An important aspect of ESP learning is thus the acquiring, or taking up, of a professional identity. This is particularly true of Business English major students like Dong. They are different from pre-experience learners in the ESP literature (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) in that language or even performance in language is not the sole concern. Their ultimate goal is to become "composite-type English talents" equipped with the knowledge, skills, and language required for

the world of international business (Academic Division of IBSU, 2007, p. 109). Their Business English programme specifies a schematic approach to facilitating their professional identity construction. Dong's intriguing question of what he had learned after three years of study on his Business English programme is actually an articulation of his concern with his professional expertise and identity development. An investigation of the learning experiences of Dong and his Business English classmates may shed light on what professional identity emerged for them and how this emerging professional identity may be unpacked.

The third concern is the process of ESP learning. Dong's experience necessitates an investigation into ESP students' process of learning, which has been recognised as a complex area. For example, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) thoughtfully warn us that target needs do not equate with learning needs and that the "learners' motivation in the target situation will not necessarily carry over to the ESP classroom" (p. 61). As Belcher (2013) notes, what happens in ESP classrooms is often given inadequate attention in ESP research and the understanding of how ESP students learn is still limited due to the traditional focus of ESP research on learner needs analysis, course design, and materials development. A study of the Business English students' learning experiences would be a welcome addition to the literature. Business English major students represent a special type of pre-experience learners (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) in the ESP literature and are becoming an increasingly important group of ESP learners, in particular in East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (Nickerson & Planken, 2015). They are an interesting group also because of an inherent tension and complexity in their Business English programme, which is an autonomous undergraduate programme for language students where professional training is embedded in academic study (Zhang, 2007; Bargiela-Chiappini & Zhang, 2013). The students' experiences of living through the programme are virtually a process of resolving any potential tension. Dong's sense of inadequacy may well relate to his learning process, an investigation of which will throw light on how learners actually learn and what they may realistically achieve through ESP learning.

Related to the discussion of transferability, professional identity, and ESP learning is the issue of indexicality. Indexicality is identified in

sociolinguistics and linguistic ethnography as the mechanism underlying the link between the use of language and other semiotic resources and social meanings such as identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert, 2008). Indexicality has particular relevance to ESP learning. For Business English students, their learning through the Business English programme is arguably a process of learning to associate semiotic resources in the international business world to their social meanings such as professional identity, that is, acquiring indexicals (Davila, 2012) which are linguistic and other semiotic resources for pointing to or indexing their professional identity in the international business world. As indexicality is not a neutral operation but tends to be socioculturally afforded and constrained (Blommaert, 2005, 2010), it allows the complexity of ESP learning in specific sociocultural context to be accommodated in studies of ESP learning. Indexicality also relates to genre knowledge development and professional identity construction. Genre knowledge and professional identity are found to co-relate with each other in genre performance (Bhatia, 2004; Smart & Brown, 2002). Dressen-Hammouda (2008) illustrates how a student in the discipline of geology learned to become an expert member of his discipline from the perspective of genre knowledge development. As the student was acquiring the discipline's ways of knowing and being, his academic writing took on the linguistic features that reflected the discourse of his discipline. While he was learning to do this, he underwent a process of transformation from a novice to an expert participant. As will be shown in later chapters, genre knowledge is a key source of indexicality for professional identity and deployed by the Business English students in their discursive construction of their professional identity. Dong's frustration reflects a tension between his sense of professional identity as a Business English major and his unfamiliarity with the specialised genre knowledge circulating in the financial institution, which indexes a less than professional identity for Dong. His unease about his prior genre knowledge or antecedent genres (Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Devitt, 2004, p. 476) in the new situation also invites a consideration of how professional identity, genre knowledge, and indexicality may interplay with each other, for example a sense of professional identity facilitating or inhibiting the transfer of genre knowledge across contexts of language use.

The final issue is related to research methodology. Studies of learner identity in language learning typically draw on narrative analyses of self-reporting data, for example data generated from interviews with learners. There is the need to complement narrative analysis with a discourse analysis of students' actual writing in a variety of business genres. When discourse analysis includes both the students' deployment of genre knowledge in their writing and text-based interviews with them (Lillis, 2001) about their association of the genre knowledge with professional business practices, a way emerges of researching business genre knowledge and its role in indexing professional identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Another perspective on professional identity construction is the reception of the students' discursive construction of professional identity by a panel of international business practitioners, which may be a means of validating the students' professional identity construction.

1.2   Research Questions

This book focuses on Business English students' construction of professional identity by examining the lived experiences of the cohort of Business English majors at IBSU from the perspective of Lave and Wenger's (1991) social theory of learning. It explores how these students made sense of the international business world and of themselves in relation to this world and enacted professional identity in discursive practices. It aims to provide an in-depth and contextualised understanding of Business English learning by addressing the following specific questions:

1. What professional identity emerged for the Business English students?
2. How did their participation in various communities of practice impact on their emerging professional identity?
3. What was it that characterised their discursive construction of professional identity?
4. How was their discursive construction of professional identity received by international business professionals?

Answers to these questions will illuminate the process of Business English learning and professional identity construction for Business English students, the complexity in participatory learning in ESP, the relationship between business genre knowledge and professional identity, and the portability of ESP education. The research will broaden understanding of ESP learners as whole and rounded learning persons whose identity investment plays a key role in their learning experiences. The findings expect to inform ESP course design, materials development, teaching and learning, and evaluation.

1.3   Preview of the Book

This book concerns the learning experiences of Business English students undertaking a four-year undergraduate programme at a Chinese university. It explores what professional identity was constructed by them through participatory learning in various communities of practice and how it was enacted in their writing in a variety of business genres. It provides a way of validating the students' emerging professional identity by inviting international business practitioners to review their writing in the business genres. It concludes with a model of learning Business English and professional identity construction to account for lived experiences of Business English major students in China and other similar settings.

The book falls into eight chapters. This chapter opens with an intriguing question asked by one of the Business English undergraduate students whose experience invokes several key issues in ESP education, including transferability of classroom learning to workplace settings, professional identity, indexicality and genre knowledge, and participatory learning in ESP. By relating these issues to current scholarship of language learning and identity, in particular in relation to ESP learning, the chapter identities several gaps in the literature and proposes four research questions along with a discussion of the significance of addressing them for ESP education.

Chapter 2 presents the conceptualisation of professional identity that will guide the study. The conceptual framework draws on research in

communities of practice, professional socialisation, discourse, identity, and indexicality, and business genre knowledge. Professional identity is viewed as emergent in participatory learning in various communities of practice and involving the dual process of acquiring semiotic resources and experiences for performing a social role as well as undergoing changes in perceptions of self in relation to the social role. It is described with reference to four constituting factors including professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence. It is enacted in discursive practices with genre knowledge as its indexing resource and co-constructed through the mediation of genre knowledge.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this study. It adopts a multiple-case study design for an in-depth and contextualised investigation of five focal student participants. The data include narratives generated from life story interviews with the five cases, student writing in eight business genres, text-based interviews on the students' writing, student journals, programme documents, notes taken during classroom observations, and comments on the students' writing by eight international business practitioners. A literature and research question-informed thematic analysis of the narratives was conducted to examine the students' emerging professional identity and the patterns of their participation in various communities of practice and the impact of these patterns on the students' emerging professional identity. The students' writing in the business genres was analysed to demonstrate how they enacted their professional identity. The professional participants' comments were examined to gauge the extent to which the students' discursively constructed professional identity was received or validated by experts in the students' target performance context. The role of the researcher and ethics are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively, address the four research questions by conducting a qualitative examination of the Business English students' emerging professional identity, their participation in various communities of practice, their discursive construction of professional identity in their writing in various business genres, and the reception of their professional identity by international business professionals. The research results indicate that professional identity had rich psychological

reality for the Business English students as the four factors constituting it were found to underlie the students' lived experiences and their conception of the international business world and of themselves in relation to it. Their participation in three salient and interlocking communities of practice—the mediating community of practice (the Business English programme), the transitory community of practice (student groups and associations), and the target community of practice (the companies or institutions in which they interned)—shaped their emerging professional identity, and the coordination of access and agency complicated their participatory learning and professional identity construction. The student participants demonstrated a considerable level of business genre knowledge which served to index their professional identity and was generally well received by the professional participants.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings in the preceding chapters in relation to professional identity construction, communities of practice building, and business genre knowledge and indexing competence development. It brings the threads together to formulate a model of learning Business English and the construction of professional identity. Several suggestions for further research are also proposed in this chapter, including ongoing tracking of professional identity construction, business genre knowledge development, and ESP course design and delivery.

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2

Conceptualising Professional Identity

This chapter reviews research that informs the exploration of professional identity construction by Business English students, including communities of practice, professional socialisation, discourse, identity, indexicality, and business genre knowledge. A working definition of professional identity is provided at the end of the chapter to guide the study this book reports on.

2.1   Learning In and Through Communities of Practice

The social theory of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) is highly relevant to the study of professional identity. In this theory, learning is viewed as participation in communities of practice where learning persons come as peripheral but legitimate participants and undergo identity formation and transformation. Lave and Wenger (1991) have this to say about learning and identity development in communities of practice:

> The *person* has been correspondingly transformed into a practitioner, a newcomer becoming an old-timer, whose changing knowledge, skill, and

discourse are part of a developing identity – in short, a member of a community of practice. (p. 122, italics in original)

In other words, learning is a socialisation process in which learning persons acquire and accumulate social resources such as the knowledge, skill, and discourse that characterise expert practices of the community of practice and develop a new identity. The theory also provides several tools useful for identifying communities of practice, describing the specifics of participation, and examining the process of identity formation.

2.1.1 Identifying Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice in terms of three components: the joint enterprise the community pursues, the mutual engagement which concerns the way members interact with each other, and the shared repertoire which is the cultural artefacts and tools, for example genres, that are used by community members in their pursuit of their joint enterprise. These three components are useful for identifying and describing communities of practice learning persons participate in.

2.1.2 Modes of Participation

Wenger (1998) also proposes three essential modes of belonging to a community of practice, namely engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement refers to direct involvement in the joint enterprise of the community of practice one is situated in. Imagination means going beyond one's time and space creating new images of the world, of possibilities, of the past and the future, and of oneself. Alignment concerns the coordination of one's energy and practice to fit within other communities of practice. These three modes of belonging may be usefully interpreted as three modes of participation in communities of practice for learning persons. Engagement is participation in their immediately accessible community of practice, while imagination and alignment are concerned with their participation in other, imagined or real, communities of practice. Imagination and alignment are particularly important for

learning persons. Kanno and Norton (2003) illustrate the significance of imagination for motivating learners of English as an additional language, for example, leading them to abandon their English language course that did not support their desired professional identity to a computer course perceived to be able to do so or providing them a strong sense of direction in their study of the target language. Through these two modes of participation, learning persons may cross the boundary of their immediate community of practice and access other communities of practice whose real or imagined cultural artefacts and tools are appropriated for their engagement in their immediate community of practice.

2.1.3 Identification and Negotiability

Wenger (1998) argues for a dual process of identification and negotiability in identity formation. Identification refers to "the process through which modes of belonging become constitutive of our identities by creating bonds or distinctions in which we become invested" (Wenger, 1998, p. 191). This aspect of identity formation stresses the acquisition of experiences and resources by which identities are constituted. The other aspect, negotiability, is defined as "the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration" (Wenger, 1998, p. 197). Negotiability thus recognises the individual take on or ownership of the social meaning in the community of practice. Both identification and negotiability also seem to involve learning persons attending to a certain norm that serves as the terms of reference for them when they navigate their community of practice.

2.1.4 Access and Agency

While Lave and Wenger's (1991) social theory of learning was proposed mainly to account for informal learning such as in an apprenticeship, it has been extended to a wide range of learning situations including formal schooling (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007; Stehlik & Carden, 2005) and underlies a number of empiri-

cal studies, for example Morita (2004), Li (2007), and Clarke (2008). Wenger (1998) himself applies the theory to educational design. When communities of practice as a concept is applied to formal schooling, however, several issues stand out among which are access and agency. As a formal schooling setting is characterised by specific sociocultural configurations, access to the community of practice as peripheral and legitimate participants may not be automatic or equally distributed among students. Haneda's (2006) review of second-language classroom research indicates that access in the form of participatory opportunities is constrained by multi-membership ascribed to learning persons or constructed by themselves in response to the classroom dynamics. Even the physical organisation of the classroom space may be a constraining factor for some participants in the classroom. Bell's (2003) study of a retraining programme shows how the model underpinning a community of practice may restrict access. Rather than adopting an apprentice model, the retraining programme was designed by following an academic model with the effect that the access to participatory opportunities and learning were remarkably compromised for trainees who possessed considerable job experience but lacked the language and literacy skills implicit in the academic model.

While agency is implied in the dual process of identification and negotiability, it is identified as one significant factor for gaining access to participatory learning in a number of studies adopting a communities of practice perspective. For example, the student Katrina in Norton's (1995) study of second-language classroom learning chose to invest in her imagined professional identity in her host country by switching to a computer course. Morita's (2004) female Japanese students doing a master's degree in Canada navigated academic discussions in their classrooms through negotiating their competences and multiple roles. Li's (2007) Chinese doctoral candidate learned to write for publication in international journals through engagement with various communities of practice. Clarke's (2008) book-length treatment of pre-service students learning to be education professionals demonstrates the students' agency as a cohort in constructing a community of practice which was characterised by their emerging systems of knowledge and beliefs, interpersonal relations, and intrapersonal identities. These studies concur that learning persons

may not be living the labels they take on or receive from others, such as apprentice, non-native speaker of English, student, and immigrant, but exercise their agency in situated learning. These studies therefore support Lave and Wenger's (1991) treatment of agency in terms of "whole persons" (p. 53) undertaking to maximise or even create access to participatory opportunities.

Communities of practice is the foundational concept for this study. It is a powerful lens through which we can explore the construction of professional identity by the Business English students. Their construction of professional identity may be viewed as participating in the dual process of acquiring knowledge, skill, and discourse of the community of practice of international business and negotiating a sense of self in relation to it. The kinds of community of practice accessible to them, their modes of participation, and their agency account for their identification and negotiability.

2.2 Professional Socialisation

Research in professional socialisation offers several insights into professional identity. One major insight is that professional identity derives from professional socialisation. This is stated by Scollon and Scollon (2001, p. 110) in their definition of socialisation as "learn membership and identity" in a community. Based on his study of black doctoral students of clinical psychology in the United States, Watts (1987) also proposes professional identity as one of the outcomes of professional socialisation.

Another important insight is the recognition of professional identity as the integration of social role and perception of self in relation to the role. Hall's (1976, 1987) research in career and socialisation articulates this point particularly well. He views socialisation in terms of the transition from an old role to a new one in social space where "person-role integration" occurs:

> To function effectively in a new role, a person must develop a way of viewing himself or herself in that role – a subidentity related to that role. The

role is the external or objective status, and the subidentity is the internal or subjective self-conception associated with that role. (1987, p. 302)

This view of socialisation in terms of the integration of a social role and the conception of self in relation to the role resonates with the dual process of identification and negotiability (Wenger, 1998) that underlies learning in and through communities of practice. Identification involves attending to the knowledge, skill, and discourse that characterise the social role relevant to the community of practice, and negotiability is the personal take on the social role. It follows that a study of identity formation and transformation for learning persons needs to consider both how they are moulded by the social role and how they position or reposition themselves in relation to it, which is the tack taken in the investigation of Business English students' construction of professional identity in this book.

One more important insight is that professional identity may be described with reference to a set of constituting factors. For example, Watts (1987) specifies his students' professional identity in terms of three interdependent components: career goals, theoretical perspectives on clinical psychology, and sociopolitical values that guide the theoretical perspective and the choice of career goals. Although he also nominates technical competences which refer to specific role-relevant experiences and behaviour along with professional identity as the outcome of professional socialisation, he does not address the relationship between them. This may be partly due to his main concern with the impact of the sociocultural features of the educational programme on the sociopolitical professional identity the students developed. Several studies, however, have addressed the relationship between technical competence and professional identity. For example, Bhatia's (2004, p. 131) conception of professional expertise in terms of disciplinary knowledge and discursive competence in the context of professional practice models technical competence, which contributes to professional identity when it is displayed as in writing in professional genres:

[M]ost genres reflect a kind of 'professional identity' that makes outsiders wonder why most professionals write specific genres more or less the same way, though with subtle variations within a small range!

Smart and Brown (2002) also report "the synergistic relationship between expertise and a sense of professional identity" (p. 135) in their professional writing students' transition from the classroom into the workplace. When the students felt a stronger sense of competence at handling professional tasks, their self-conception as professionals also grew. Role-relevant technical competence and professional identity are thus interdependent and inseparable.

These insights contribute tools for conceptualising professional identity by Business English students. Professional identity may be viewed in terms of four constituting factors: technical competence, which involves knowledge of relevant disciplines and of professional practices; discursive competence, which allows one to produce, distribute, and consume discourse; one's professional goal; and his or her values and perspective on the profession and its members. These four factors provide points to observe in examining Business English students' emerging professional identity.

2.3 Discourse, Identity, and Indexicality

While communities of practice and professional socialisation help to illuminate the formation of professional identity, research in discourse and identity demonstrates how it may be performed and indexed by language and other semiotic resources. An examination of discourse production, distribution, and consumption unveils the discursive construction of professional identity.

2.3.1 Identity as Performance

There is a consensus that identity is performed or enacted in situated discourse (Blommaert, 2005; Butler, 1990; de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006; Gee, 2011; Richards, 2006; Tann, 2010; van Dijk, 2009). Butler's (1990) conception of gender as a performative accomplishment is explicit about the performance feature of identity. Richards (2006) states that "[i]dentity, whether group or individual, is never merely a matter of

assuming or assigning a label; it is something that is formed and shaped through action" (p. 3). For Gee (2011), identities are situated in relation to the various activities as well as the agents involved in these activities because who and what we are depend largely on where we are and when we are doing what. As a result, identity categories are both enabling and constraining and should be invoked along with the context in studies of the performance of identities.

Identities are ever changing and multiple. Gee (2000) outlines a range of identities, for example N-identity created by natural forces (e.g., a twin by birth), I-identity that is institutionally granted identity (e.g., appointment as a professor by a university), D-identity that is discursively ascribed or achieved, and A-identity as a result of affiliating to a social and cultural group. The same piece of discourse may be performing several identities simultaneously, including "professional identities as members of a particular disciplinary community, organizational identities as members of specific organizations or institutions, social identities, as valued members of social groups, and of course individual identities as indications of self-expression" (Bhatia, 2002, pp. 51–52). This synchronous performance is achievable via the deployment of multimodal resources of communication (e.g., speech, gesture, facial expression, image) with some modes responsible for one identity and other modes for other identities (Norris, 2007; Zhang, 2015).

2.3.2   Co-construction of Identities

Identity is a two-way process. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) describe identity "in terms of *who people are to each other*" (p. 6, italics in original). This means that identity is not an individual act but involves social interaction with others. Blommaert (2005) also points out that "identity categories have to be enacted and performed in order to be socially salient … in order for an identity to be established, it has to be *recognised* by others" (p. 205, italics in original). This theoretical position has the support of empirical studies. For example, Casanave (1998) examines the transitional experiences of Japanese academics finding their way in the Japanese academic and international academic worlds. These

academics recognised that their professional identities were reflected in both how they perceived themselves and how they were perceived by others in the academic world. In his study concerning the formation of teacher identities for education students in the United Arab Emirates, Clarke (2008) illustrates how "identity references individuals' knowledge and naming of themselves, as well as others' recognition of them as a particular sort of person" (p. 8). The student teachers' perception and naming of themselves as progressive teachers were referenced by their knowledge of progressive educational discourse, skills, and beliefs on the one hand and ascribed as progressive teachers by their fellow education students at the university on the other. The students' emerging teacher identity may need to be validated, though, by the government school teachers, the target community of practice into which they were socialised. It is also contended that while identity is constructed dialogically in interaction, the "other" in the interaction may take the form of an individual person, an institution, or some mediating notion such as a genre (Bawarshi, 2003).

2.3.3 Indexicality

Although it is now established that identity is performed or constructed in discourse, the link between them is assumed and needs careful clarifying. Research in indexicality offers some clues. Identities are constructed by means of social language (Gee, 2008, 2011) or semiotic resources (Blommaert, 2005). Blommaert (2005) points out that:

> People construct identities out of specific configurations of semiotic resources. … The range of identities … depends on the range of available semiotic resources out of which recognisable identities can be constructed. (pp. 207–208)

The sociocultural linguistic research (Bucholtz, 2011; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) articulates the interrelationship between semiotic resources and identities through indexicality. There are two kinds of indexicality: direct indexing and indirect indexing. Direct indexing works through semantics.

For example, the word "cow" indexes a female animal directly because of the semantic feature of femaleness in the semantics of the word. Indirect indexing works through evoking associations (Ochs, 1993). A linguistic expression, for example "could you pass on the salt" uttered at the dinner table, indexes politeness, indirectly, because asking for the other person's ability to do something is conventionally associated with a polite way of realising the speech act of request in English. Linguistic features are indexical of social categories through "their associations with qualities and stances that enter into the construction of categories" (Eckert, 2008, p. 455). Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 593) thus regard indexicality as "the mechanism whereby identity is constituted." They further specify a wide range of its operations:

> Disparate indexical processes of labeling, implicature, stance taking, style marking, and code choice work to construct identities, both micro and macro, as well as those somewhere in between. (2005, p. 598)

Indexicality is crucial for exploring the construction of professional identity for Business English students as it provides an informed way of representing the students' emerging professional identity when it is enacted in discursive practices. As will be detailed in Chap. 6, the examination of student writing in business genres and the association they invoke between certain features of their writing and professional practices yield evidence for their dual process of identification and negotiability.

2.3.4   Genre Knowledge as Indexing Devices

As indexicality involves the association of semiotic resources with specific social meanings including professional identity, the construction of professional identity entails knowing and enacting the association in discourse production and consumption. For novices to a community of practice, the ability to index is acquired in the learning to become process. This process has been demonstrated in the learning of genres of communities of practice and social identities. Cain's (1991) study of alcoholics learning to be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) shows the

importance of storytelling in constructing identity as an AA member. To qualify for AA membership, the newcomer had to internalise the knowledge of AA and its way of telling stories and actually tell their own stories in a way that followed AA's storyline and exemplified AA's knowledge and beliefs. Tardy (2009) discusses the changed sense of self of her four student academic writers during the development of their genre knowledge. At an earlier stage, the writers felt pulled apart by the tension between what discursive identity they perceived to be rhetorically necessary to project (e.g., as an academic expert) and what they felt comfortable in presenting themselves as (e.g., a PhD student). Dressen-Hammouda (2008) studies the interplay between genre mastery and disciplinary or professional identities in the case of a geologist student. Through his academic training, the student acquired the implicit cues that would evoke in expert geologists the ways of thinking, being, and doing in field geology and by doing so, he displayed his professional identity. Cheng's (2007) research into the transference of generic features is another example. The awareness of generic features and the recontextualisation of the generic features went side by side with the student writer's increased sense of handling the writing like an expert in his profession. Erickson's (1999) study of a medical intern shows that the intern performed his professional identity as a medical professional by appropriating such discursive resources of competent physicians as informal register, ways of displaying collegiality, and commonly agreed on ways of discussing patients and their complaints when communicating with his supervising physician. Schryer and Spoel (2005) discuss the mediating role of genres such as case presentations and policy documents in the formation of professional identity in health-care settings. Christie's (2012) study charts Australian children's schooling progress through the evolution of their knowledge of various school genres. Genre knowledge is thus part of the cultural tools or artefacts of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) or symbolic constructs (Vygotsky, 1978) that mediate discursive practices and play indexing roles in identity construction. Identities including professional identity are thus observable and possible to operationalise in research through genre knowledge as a source of indexing devices.

Just as there are different traditions of genre research (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010), so do the accounts of what constitutes genre knowledge

(Artemeva, 2006, 2008, 2009; Artemeva & Fox, 2011; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993; Bhatia, 2004; Flowerdew, 2011; Miller, 1984; Paltridge, 2000; Schryer, 1993). Tardy (2009) provides a useful framework for breaking genre knowledge down into the formal dimension, process dimension, rhetorical dimension, and subject matter dimension. The formal dimension involves conventions of lexical and syntactic choices for the specific genre. It also involves structural features at the discourse level such as the set of moves and their content, the medium (e.g., speaking, writing, telephone, email), and mode (e.g., language, image, gesture, music) in which the genre is instantiated, and the linguistic code. The formal dimension mainly deals with the textual elements of the genre disregarding the rhetorical concerns. The process dimension is concerned with the processes in which the genre is produced, distributed, and received. Knowledge of the relationship between the genre and other genres, that is, intertextuality, is part of the process dimension of genre knowledge. The rhetorical dimension is concerned with the writer's knowledge of the task, purpose, and the power relationship between the writer and the reader the genre enacts, and the strategies that may be applied at the service of the rhetorical purposes. This dimension is materialised in the way the writer frames the writing activity and positions themselves in relation to the reader and reader expectations. The subject matter dimension is the disciplinary or professional knowledge that is required for the genre, that is, the information and message the genre is expected to convey. The features on the four dimensions are useful for this study where the display of genre knowledge is regarded as indexing professional identity.

2.4 Business Genre Knowledge

Research in professional discourses provides a rich description of the genre knowledge relevant to various professions. Business discourse scholarship, in particular, reveals the perspectives, resources, and strategies business professionals adopt in their daily transactions and activities (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009; Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2013). Scollon and Scollon (2001) contend that the international business community "has adopted a Utilitarian discourse system" (p. 261) and that the

Utilitarian ideology finds its expression in the "Clarity-Brevity-Sincerity" or C-B-S (Lanham, 1983, p. 10) style of writing which is advocated for professional communication. There is a variety of features that characterise business vocabulary (Cheng, 2009; Leech, 1966; Nelson, 2000, 2006; Pickett, 1989), thematisation (Forey, 2004; Planken, 2005), speech acts (Kong, 1998, 2006; Maier, 1992; Mulholland, 1991; Stalpers, 1995; Wang, 2010), cohesion (Ellis & Johnson, 1994), inductive and deductive strategies for introducing topics (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), and business genres (Bhatia, 1993; Charles, 1996; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). These features will be reviewed below in detail.

Pickett (1989) identifies one important feature of Business English vocabulary, that is, it is derived from general English vocabulary in a variety of ways. Nelson (2000, 2006) distinguishes business lexis from words in the life world. For example, nouns used in business represent business-related institutions, concepts, places, and activities. Adjectives tend to be positive and impersonal. Verbs are dynamic public verbs in that they denote public business activities. These words also tend to co-occur, resulting in quite stable multi-word units. For example, the word "money" typically co-occurs with "client," "market," and "laundering" in a financial services corpus rather than "spend" or "save" as is the case in a general English corpus (Cheng, 2009, pp. 489–490). Building on Hyland (1998), Nickerson (2000) illustrates a range of linguistic devices used for achieving interpersonal goals in business communication such as hedges (e.g., perhaps, might), passives (e.g., was delayed), emphatics (e.g., obviously), attributors (e.g., Organisation recommends), attitude markers (e.g., never, must), relational markers (e.g., As you might appreciate), and intertextual markers (e.g., In reply to your fax, as requested). From the hedges, emphatics, and attitude markers, a new category, boosters, may be derived as in this book to refer to words and expressions that project the communicator and their organisation in a positive light or place high requirements on their clients or business partners (cf: Hyland, 2004). As will be shown in Chaps. 6 and 7, boosters are highly relevant when examining the Business English students writing in the business genres.

Thematisation concerns the choice of a certain element to begin a clause (Halliday, 1994). As what is put at the initial position of a clause imposes

a perspective on what comes next in the clause, thematisation serves to foreground a certain interpretation of the event that is represented by the clause (Brown & Yule, 1983; Halliday, 1994). This is a powerful device in constructing professional discourse. Iedema (2000, p. 50) proposes the term "demodalisation" to describe the linguistic-semiotic process whereby certain details of an institutional interaction are backgrounded through linguistic-semiotic devices. Demodalisation works, for example, when the human agents responsible for an event are replaced by institutional roles or entities and are thus backgrounded and neutralised. This concept proves helpful in investigating business texts where interpersonal relationship is pivotal in workplace interactions. For example, a business memo in which personal pronouns (human agents for an unpleasant situation) were thematised impressed the business professional and language teacher informants as less business-like than a version where institutional entities were thematised (Forey, 2004). Similarly, thematisation is found to be useful in business negotiation. In Planken's (2005) study, professional business negotiators thematised the first person plural "we" when uttering a disagreement while novice negotiators tended to choose the first person singular "I." Such research demonstrates part of the perspectives business professionals take on their business activities and events, which is a useful pointer for examining the Business English students' writing in business genres.

Research concerning speech acts in business discourse predominantly deals with politeness and strategies for performing such potentially face-threatening speech acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987) as request, complaint, and disagreement (Kong, 1998, 2006; Maier, 1992; Stalpers, 1995; Wang, 2010). Wang's (2010) study of university students in China and the US writing letters of complaint illustrates the use of direct and indirect strategies in performing speech acts. The Chinese students were found to be similar to the US students in directness when making their requests. For example, they used the imperative sentence structure, performative verbs such as "demand" and "am asking" with or with no hedging expressions, obligation statements such as "your company should," and want statements such as "I hope that you will" to make the requests. Kong's study of Chinese business letters indicates that requests in routine business correspondence were preceded by some justification (1998) and requests or

directives in internal emails were also accompanied by some justification (2006). Interestingly, requests or directives by managers to subordinates were justified more than those among peers, which Kong (2006) suggests was due to the dilemma of the modern workplace where workers were expected to achieve institutional goals and meanwhile were allowed autonomous operations. Maier's (1992) study of requests for a second opportunity for interview by native and non-native English writers shows that the native writers used more politeness strategies than the non-native writers. Another interesting finding is that the non-native writers included more personal details in their letters.

It is also relevant to consider the role of English as a lingua franca for international business (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Nickerson, 2005). Connor's (1999) study of fax exchanges between non-native English speakers in English demonstrates the use of the accommodation strategy of convergence. Her study demonstrates that people of different cultures do not necessarily adopt the English linguistic and cultural norms for business communication in English, hence the transactional function of Business English as a Lingua Franca, or BELF (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). However, it is also argued that there is a relational function for BELF (Koester, 2010).

Cohesion is essential for the texture of a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). As Ellis and Johnson (1994) note, logical relations in business texts are clearly signalled as a way of achieving "clear communication" (p. 9). For example, a causal relationship is explicitly indicated by words such as *for this reason.* This raises the question of where to put these conjunctions, for example, whether to choose them as textual themes which take the sentence-initial position (Halliday, 1994).

Business discourse and genres are social actions (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999). Business genres such as meetings, negotiations, letters, and reports have received considerable attention in business discourse studies and professional writing guidebooks. For example, there are studies of the generic structures of business genres such as cover letters. Bhatia (1993) describes cover letters for job application as performing a "clarificatory" rather than "descriptive" function (p. 67) with a seven-move structure: Establishing credentials, Introducing the candidature, Offering incentives, Enclosing documents, Using pressure tactics,

Soliciting response, and Ending politely. Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris's (1997) study of the discourse of corporate meetings provides a useful description of the move structures of business meetings in the United Kingdom and Italy.

These aspects of business genre knowledge reviewed so far may be grouped into the formal dimension according to Tardy's (2009) genre knowledge framework as they are essentially about textual features. There is also research into the process dimension of genre knowledge. Devitt (1991) identifies referential intertextuality which concerns the reference to other texts within one text, generic intertextuality which describes the typified responses to certain recurring social situations in texts of the same genre, and functional intertextuality which captures the interaction between the genres in use in the particular community. Referential intertextuality is of particular importance to this study because patterns of reference to other texts within one text may illuminate "the profession's activities and relationships" (p. 342).

Business genre knowledge is useful for this study as genre knowledge is viewed as a source of indexing devices for professional identity. Following the sociocultural theory of learning associated with Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Engeström (Artemeva, 2006, 2008; Deters, 2011; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011), business genre knowledge works as socioculturally and sociohistorically produced symbolic constructs (Vygotsky, 1978) in mediating the discursive practices of Business English students' writing in various business genres. The business genre knowledge that has been reviewed in this section will help with the interpretation of the Business English students' discursive practices by alerting the researcher to specific features in their writing for analysis.

2.5   Conceptual Framework for Professional Identity

Drawing on research into communities of practice, professional socialisation, discourse, identity, indexicality, and business genre knowledge, learning Business English can be conceptualised as a process where Business English students participate in various communities of practice

and experience the dual process of identification (i.e., learning to play the social role of international business professional by acquiring and accumulating resources and experiences relevant to the social role) and negotiability (i.e., developing a sense of self in relation to the social role of international business professional) through engagement, imagination, and alignment. As a result, they develop professional goals, values, and perspectives on international business professionals, and role-relevant behaviour in the form of technical competence (e.g., disciplinary knowledge and professional practices in international business) and discursive competence (e.g., competence in speaking, writing, and multimodal communication in international business), which together constitute their professional identity, and learn to index this identity via their business genre knowledge. This conceptual framework will guide the study of professional identity construction by the Business English students in this book.

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3

Methodology

This chapter deals with the research design, the process of data collection, and the procedures for analysing the data to answer the research questions proposed in Chap. 1. Ethical issues relevant to this study are also discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study may be described as a longitudinal multiple-case replication design, a research strategy that employs multiple rather than single cases in its design (Yin, 2009). This design was deemed appropriate for a number of reasons. First of all, a fine-grained study such as a case study is necessary to gain initial insights into the learning experiences of the cohort of Business English students this book is concerned with. Second, as professional identity involves changes in self-conception and is situated and context sensitive, a case study is the optimal approach to exploring it, as this approach has the advantage of allowing an in-depth investigation of individuals in naturalistic settings (Casanave, 2010; Duff, 2008; Starfield, 2010; Yin, 2009). Third, a multiple-case design covers different possible situations of the

phenomenon under question, and findings from these replications are more likely to enhance the theoretical propositions or theories of the study than a single-case design (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) compares multiple cases to multiple experiments in science, where researchers conduct a second, third, or even more experiments after their original experiment in order to verify their findings. The other experiments may duplicate the exact experimental conditions of the original one, that is, they are "literal replications" (p. 54), or may alter a few unimportant conditions, that is, they are "theoretical replications" (p. 54). If the same findings are obtained, the original propositions or theories are supported. Otherwise, the propositions or theories have to be revised or refuted. If both literal and theoretical replications point to the same results, the initial propositions or theories receive cogent support. Finally, replications are also a precaution against attrition of participants in a longitudinal study. With replication cases, there is a better chance of collecting adequate amounts and types of data for the study. The selection of cases and data collection and processing will be presented in the next section.

3.2   Data Collection

The data for this study came from three types of purposively selected participants: Business English students, their business writing instructor, and international business professionals. The selection of the students as cases and information on the professional participants will be reported first and then followed by the types of data collected from these participants.

3.2.1   Selection of the Cases

The data from the student participants were collected at IBSU from October 2009 to July 2010. The data collection focused on their third year of study. Year 3 was selected for several reasons. First, Year 3 was critical for these Business English students. They had been exposed to the basic knowledge of international business and business discourse in their reading, listening, and speaking courses in the first two years and were

starting to learn business discipline courses such as economics, management, and international business law and specialised courses in business communication, such as business writing. These courses would provide them with an in-depth study of the business disciplines and various business genres. In other words, the students of Year 3 would be receiving more specialised input of technical competence and discursive competence, two major constituting factors of professional identity, and may be reconfiguring themselves as a result of their learning. Second, they would be on campus most of the time during Year 3 and would be easier to contact for data collection. While there was a clear advantage to a longer-term longitudinal study of the students, for example, through their four-year Business English programme, it was found infeasible to include Year 4 because the students would then be spending the bulk of their time on internships and would thus be difficult to approach. Third, a study of English majors in China indicates that their English proficiency may peak in Year 3, at least in terms of their English as a foreign language (EFL) writing skills (Gao, 2008). It has to be conceded upfront that this study is able to provide just "snapshots" of the experiences of the Business English students in their construction of professional identity, given that identities are multiple in scope and evolving over time.

There were five focal students for this study after three rounds of selection. IBSU operates a student management system where students are ranked according to their academic grades and extracurricular activities. The ranking was felt to be a good indicator of each student's experience and achievement at the university. The first round began when the university was requested to recommend male and female students at high, middle, and bottom achievement levels. The names of 30 students (10 at each level) out of the total cohort of 57 were obtained. These students were then invited to participate in the study through a senior student. Twenty-seven of them signed consent and participated in the first life-story interview focusing on their Business English-learning experiences in their first two years of university. They were also requested to provide their assignments for the business writing courses and attend interviews about their writing. Six of them did not participate in the second life-story interview and were considered as attrition. From the remaining 21 participants, 10 students were selected for the second round during

which their assignments were sent to a group of international business professional participants for review. Among them were 5 (one male and four females) top-achievement-level students, 3 (one male and two females) middle-achievement-level students, and 2 (one male and one female) bottom-achievement-level students. From these 10 students, 5 were eventually selected as cases for this study. They will be referred to in the study as An, Dong, Mei, Nan, and Lan (pseudonyms). The choice of the five focal students took into account diversity in terms of student family background and pathway to the university, gender, achievement level, and the quality and quantities of data available for each student, in particular the comments on their writing by the professional participants.

An, an upper-middle achiever in her class, was the most conscientious participant in the research, providing the most varied set of data, including blog texts after the data collection was officially terminated. What made her a focal case for this research was her persistent effort to explore and give expression to her private intentions when she was writing in business genres. Dong was a top achiever. He was among the 20 high school graduates admitted to the Business English programme at IBSU through 保送 [a pathway to university in China for students with certain special skills or talent who are exempt from taking the national university entrance examinations] and was selected for this study because he narrated a variety of experiences and, notably, also reflected on these experiences in terms of their significance to his understanding of himself and of the business world. Like Dong, Nan was also directly admitted to the Business English programme as a graduate from a language high school. He stood out in his bottom-achievement tier in terms of the variety of his experiences and his articulate reflections on these experiences, and his writing in business genres received very detailed comments from the professional participants. Mei was from a metropolitan city in China and applied to IBSU selecting Business English as her priority major. She was unique among her classmates in that she cherished the consistent goals of going abroad to study marketing and getting a good job in a prestigious foreign company. She did not have the habit of putting her ideas down on paper, but she opened up in the interviews about her on-campus and off-campus experiences and thoughts. She was among the middle-achievement students in her class. Lan was another top achiever.

She was selected as a focal student for a number of reasons. First, she was brought up in a fairly remote region of the country. Second, she was reflective about herself and shared her inner feelings about not only the external world but also herself in the interviews and in her journals. Third, her recognition of herself as a useful and employable person came after she had experienced uncertainty, diffidence, and anxiety. Fourth, she discussed business professionals from a woman's point of view as she was thinking about the role of women in society and the workplace. In effect, she was concerned with business professionals as gender laden rather than gender neutral.

More details of each focal student will be introduced where appropriate in Chaps. 4, 5, 6, and 7. These five students may be regarded as theoretical replications (Yin, 2009). Table 3.1 is a summary of the cases. Although this study is based on the data of the five focal students, some data of the other students who consented to this study may also be cited where necessary.

There were eight professional participants in the study including seven international business practitioners and the business writing instructor. Table 3.2 is a summary of information on the professional participants. The writing instructor was a native speaker of American English and had worked as a financial analyst for a major US auto manufacturer for 20 years. He did not possess a teaching qualification, but he had an MBA degree and went through a formal selection procedure at IBSU before he was assigned to teach business writing to the cohort of Business English students. The practitioners were recruited through contacts in the field. They represented a diverse range of industries with a work experience ranging from 6 to 41 years. There were three Chinese, including one who had worked for a major Chinese import and export company and

Table 3.1 Information on the student participants

Name	Gender	Ranking at the time of participation
Dong	Male	Top-achievement level
Lan	Female	Top-achievement level
An	Female	Upper-middle-achievement level
Mei	Female	Middle-achievement level
Nan	Male	Upper-bottom-achievement level

Table 3.2 Information on the professional participants

Name	Gender	Language background	Professional field	Years in the profession
Sam	Male	American English	Insurance	18
Bill	Male	American English	Insurance	41
Rick	Male	American English	Insurance	20
Qiu	Female	Chinese	Insurance	6
Luo	Male	Chinese	Logistics	17
Qian	Female	Chinese	Manufacturing	25
Tim	Male	Australian English	Trade	18
Leo	Male	American English	Financial analysis	20
			Business writing	1

was working for a foreign logistics company at the time of research, one who had worked for a major Chinese import and export company and was running her own business in plastic cosmetics at the time of research, and one who was working for a US insurance company at the time of research. They were all fluent in English. Of the other four professional participants, one was Australian who traded with business partners across Asia and Europe and the three others were native speakers of American English working for a US insurance company operating in Beijing or other regions of Asia. These eight international business professionals represent the sectors and industries IBSU graduates typically apply to work for.

3.2.2   Data Types

As reviewed in Chap. 2, professional identity derives from participatory learning in communities of practice and is constructed in a two-way process including both one's performance of identity in discourse and others' recognition. The performance and recognition depend on the mechanism of indexicality in that identities as social meaning are associated with semiotic resources which are invoked by one (the indexer) and recognised by the other (the indexee) in discourse production and reception. To investigate how this conception of the construction of professional identity was instantiated by the Business English students, I felt it necessary to collect their experiences of learning Business English, information on their contexts of learning, their writing in business genres, and the responses

to their experiences and writing from expert members of the community of practice of international business. This thinking resulted in the collection of a diverse range of data including narratives, student writing in various business genres, classroom observations, text-based interviews, documents, student journals, and feedback from international business practitioners. Details of each type of data will be reported below.

3.2.2.1   Narratives

Narratives are highly relevant to the study of professional identity. Cortazzi (2001) writes that "[t]hrough life stories individuals and groups make sense of themselves; they tell what they are or what they wish to be, as they tell so they become, they *are* their stories" (p. 388, italics in original). A similar point is made by Polkinghorne (1988), who takes the position that "we achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" (p. 150). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) also state that "it is in *narrative* that we construct identities" (p. 130, italics in original). It follows from these understandings of narratives that when the Business English students tell their stories of learning Business English, they represent and reconstruct their experiences of professional socialisation into the community of practice of international business, which expects to include their take on professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence which are viewed as the four constituting factors for their professional identity. In other words, they narrate their professional identity.

This study follows Patterson (2008), who defines narratives broadly as "texts which bring stories of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience" (p. 37). It also acknowledges the distinction between narratives as representations of the realities of the narrators' life and narratives as the co-construction of experience, for example, between the narrator and the listener, including the interviewer (Squire, 2008). As a narrative generated from a research interview is "a collaborative conversational interaction" (Riessman, 2008, p. 31), it makes sense from a methodological

point of view for researchers to describe the interview context and their own role in the generation of the narrative. In this way, readers of the narrative analysis are reminded that the narrative is a co-construction by the narrator and the interviewer rather than the narrator's 'pure' representation. The contextual information which could have had some bearing on the data produced may include the setting (e.g., the time) of the data, the specific questions the interviewer asked the interviewee, their prompts or feedback to the interviewee, the language varieties used in the interview, and the linguistic (e.g., stress) and paralinguistic features (e.g., smiling, laughing, nodding) accompanying the interviewer's and/or the interviewee's utterances. Such provision of the contextual information may considerably address the concern that narratives are co-constructed (de Fina & Perrino, 2011; Pavlenko, 2007; Riessman, 2008).

McAdams (1993) provides a schematic way of obtaining narratives through interview. His procedures include asking interviewees about the major episodes, events, and significant people in their lives, their plans for the future, and their values and beliefs in life. His scheme was adapted in this study to help elicit narratives of the students learning Business English. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted, one at the beginning of Year 3 and the other at the end of Year 3. Similar questions were asked during both interviews, except that in the second interview the students were also asked to clarify certain issues or points. Six sets of questions were asked with each set focused on one area of the experiences of the Business English students. The first set concerned their motivations for learning Business English. The second set concerned their experiences of learning Business English, including positive experiences, difficulties, and cultural conflicts they had experienced, and their reflections on the meaning of the experiences to their understanding of international business professionals. The third set concerned significant people in their experiences of learning Business English and the influence the significant others had had on their understanding of international business professionals. The fourth set requested them to describe their understanding of international business and international business professionals. The fifth set was about their plans for the future, barriers they perceived to be preventing them from fulfilling their plans, and their initiatives in addressing the barriers. The last set of questions prompted

them to reflect on changes in themselves they perceived to have taken place in terms of understanding international business professionals and to make a summative statement about themselves. The interviews lasted from 35 minutes 28 seconds to 93 minutes 54 seconds. The interview schedule is given in Appendix 3.1.

3.2.2.2 Students' Texts

The student participants each provided a variety of texts they had written, including a cover letter and a resume for a job application, an order letter, a job posting, an offer letter, a counteroffer letter, a rejection letter, and a business plan. These texts were produced in their third year as assignments for their two compulsory business writing courses, *Business Letters Writing* (Semester 1/September 2009–January 2010) and *Business Marketing Writing* (Semester 2/February 2010–July 2010). For the cover letter and resume, the students were asked to apply for a real internship or part-time job of their own choosing. The order letter, job posting, offer letter, counteroffer letter, and rejection letter responded to a teacher-generated scenario in which the students functioned in the capacity of a senior manager in a 50-staff trading company (see Appendices 3.2 and 3.3, respectively, for the assignment and the lecture slides for instructions on the assignment). He or she needed to recruit an assistant to assist in handling a new US account. The senior manager made a job posting and wrote to a jobs website manager to post it. He or she had to select from two shortlisted candidates and write an offer letter to the one selected and a rejection letter to the unsuccessful candidate. As the successful applicant was unhappy with the pay and had asked for a 10% rise, the senior manager had to write a counteroffer letter declining the request and meanwhile trying to persuade the candidate to accept the original offer. The business plan was written for the student's own start-up company. These business texts can be said to belong to three genre sets (Bazerman, 2004; Devitt, 1991): the application genre set, which includes the cover letter and the resume; the recruitment genre set, which includes the order letter, job posting, offer letter, counteroffer letter, and rejection letter; and the business plan. The application genre set is promotional in nature

(Bhatia, 1993; Peagler & Yancy, 2005) in that it promotes the writer as one that has the qualifications for a particular job and has a desire to take the job. The recruitment genre set is concerned with the communication likely to happen in the workplace on a day-to-day basis, especially for managers or someone working in the human resources department. The business plan is also promotional as its goal is to sell a product or service or course of action as profitable or feasible to either the internal audience or the external audience (Doheny-Farina, 1991; Moorhead, 1989; Stewart & Stewart, 1992; Tebeaux & Dragga, 2010). The three writing tasks therefore position the student in different professional roles: a candidate applying for a job, a senior manager engaged in recruiting employees for his or her department, and an entrepreneur starting up a business. Arguably, these genres together represent part of the system of genres (Bazerman, 2004) the Business English students may expect to produce in the workplace.

The assignments were considerably scaffolded. The writing instructor discussed the business skills, business concepts, and, to a lesser extent, the language involved in the specific type of business text. For example, in the *Business Marketing Writing* course, he explained to the students various aspects of marketing and business plans such as vision and mission, SWOT (strengths–weaknesses–opportunities–threats) analysis, and the structure of business plans. The topics and issues covered in the course are reproduced in Appendix 3.4. Specimen texts were displayed and discussed in class, although there was no discussion of the generic structure from the perspective of genre. He also explained requirements for the assignment in the lectures (see Appendix 3.5 for one of the lecture slides discussing the business plan). Moreover, he gave the students a series of assignments covering various aspects of a business plan such as vision and mission statement, marketing mix, and SWOT analysis and made comments on each individual assignment. These prior individual texts were eventually put together into a complete business plan for submission at the end of the semester. In addition, he assigned two required readings for the course—R.I.B.E. II, which introduces advertising and marketing in business, and B.E.W., which focuses on business plan writing—and set a mid-term examination with questions based on these two readings. There was therefore sufficient scaffolding for the students, and their text

production can be said to be a "facilitated performance" (Freedman & Adam, 1996, p. 399). Their writing in these business genres may be considered as a site of their discursive construction of professional identity.

3.2.2.3 Text-Based Interviews

Text analysis is a common practice in studying student writing and identity, in particular in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts (e.g., Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2009). It is argued, however, that textual analysis alone is not sufficient for investigating writer identity. Ivanič (1998) identifies four essential aspects of writer identity: autobiographical self, discoursal self, self as author, and possibilities for self-hood. Autobiographical self emphasises the writer's sense of their roots and is the self that undertakes the process of producing the text. Discoursal self is the impression that is consciously or unconsciously conveyed of the writer in the particular text. Self as author emphasises the voice of the writer as author of the text, for example as the source of content and authorial presence. Possibilities for self-hood refer to the "abstract, prototypical identities available in the socio-cultural context of writing" (p. 23). These possibilities are the subject positions that are afforded by the sociocultural context and available for taking up by the writer. Ivanič notes that writers bring with them their "autobiographical self" (p. 24) as a result of their life histories and may thus experience anticipations, negotiations, frustrations, or compromises when they are producing a particular text. She goes on to write that "in most cases a reader or an analyst could not possibly recover these origins merely from the words on the page: they belong to the writers' private lives, preferences and practices, and could only be discovered through interviews" (p. 212). To give a finer-grained understanding of the identification of the Business English students with the community of practice of international business in their writing in business genres and also to verify the textual analysis, I conducted interviews with the student writers shortly after they had produced the texts. Lillis (2008) refers to such interviews as "talk around text" (p. 355) and considers it a valuable ethnographical research tool. The student writers were asked about their audience, the impressions they intended to convey to their audience, the

rationale for their choice of language and content, their consideration of the values and beliefs and practices of international business in producing the text, and their composing process including difficulties they had encountered and the revisions they had made (see Appendix 3.1 for the interview schedule). The interviews lasted from 18 minutes 28 seconds to 90 minutes 22 seconds. The student writing and the text-based interviews with them yielded valuable information on their understanding of indexicality, that is, the associations they were establishing between the business genre knowledge they deployed in their writing and professional identity in the international business world they wished to index through it.

Text-based interviews were also planned with the professional participants, the invoked audience (Ede & Lunsford, 1984) of the students' texts, and the other important party to the construction of professional identity (the indexee of professional identity). The extent to which the identity the students construct may match the expert practitioners' evaluation of the identity would provide insights into the two-way/co-construction of professional identity. Ivanič (1998, p. 334) suggests that it would be valuable to investigate "readers' impressions of the writers whose texts they have read," that is, whether readers construct the same impressions from reading the texts as the writers thought they conveyed. Hatch, Hill, and Hayes (1993) support the idea that readers do form impressions of the writers' personalities through their reading of the texts. However, no interview with the eight professional participants except Qiu was conducted for logistic reasons. Instead, they made written comments on the students' texts with reference to the guiding questions in Appendix 3.1. The questions included their impression of the text, their assessment of whether the text reads like professional writing, the rationale for their impression with regard to the language and content in the text, and their suggestions for revision and the rationale for their suggestions. The writing instructor made written comments on all the assignments of all five focal students, which were collected from the students or their school. The other seven professional participants reviewed all or part of the assignments of the five focal students. Details of their feedback will be provided in Chap. 7.

Lillis (2001) draws on Fairclough (1989) and Bakhtin (1986) in discussing student academic writing as meaning making in the context of situation and the context of culture. The context of situation refers to the

immediate context in which academic writing is produced and is rep-
resented by the tutor. The context of culture refers to the values, expec-
tations, and practices of higher education in general. Following Lillis
(2001), the Business English students were writing in response to the
writing instructor who represented part of the context of situation in
that while producing the texts, the student writers were addressing what
they thought the instructor valued, preferred, or dis-preferred. They were
also addressing the context of culture as represented by the professional
participants because they were positioned to write in business genres for
business purposes.

3.2.2.4   Observations

More information on the context of situation was collected from class-
room observations and documents. There were six non-participant class-
room observations of the writing courses from December 2009 to June
2010, including four 90-minute lecture sessions and two special term-
end sessions where the writing instructor discussed requirements for the
assignments. The students and the writing instructor were requested
beforehand to consent to my sitting in their class and making observa-
tions without interfering with their teaching and learning in any way
(hence non-participant observation). The classroom observations focused
on what the writing instructor discussed in class; what activities he organ-
ised; what professional values, beliefs, and practices he emphasised in
his instruction; what questions he was asked by the students; and what
feedback he provided. Field notes were taken verbatim on these aspects of
the classes during the observations. The writing instructor was contacted
by email or in person to clarify certain field notes.

3.2.2.5   Documents

The documents included the Business English undergraduate programme
provided by IBSU. Particular reference was made to the programme goals,
objectives, curriculum, and requirements for extracurricular activities
and practicum or internships as specified in the programme. The writing
instructor conducted a business writing needs survey at the beginning of

Year 3 and provided me the results of the survey (student profile). In the survey, the students reported their career aspirations, their expectations of the writing course in terms of the types of business writing to be included in the course, their difficulties in writing, and their preferred methodology for teaching and learning business writing. The writing instructor also provided his lecture slides and general summaries of his comments on the student assignments. He occasionally forwarded his email exchanges with his students as justification for his teaching.

3.2.2.6   Students' Journals and Other Texts

The student participants were requested by me to keep journals throughout Year 3. No strict form was imposed on them other than asking them to record on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis any activities they deemed relevant to learning Business English as well as their reflections on how such activities impacted their perceptions of international business and of themselves. An kept her diary on a weekly basis, with 26 journal entries covering various topics including her study at university, internships, and other extracurricular activities. She also provided copies of her research reports and blog texts, which provided further information on her activities of learning Business English. Lan produced five journal entries mainly on her internship experiences. Nan recorded explicitly in six consecutive journal entries his buying and selling of stocks in China along with his reflections on this experience. Dong and Mei did not submit any diary entry but reported in detail their experiences of academic and extracurricular activities during the two life-story interviews. The five students also provided essays written during Year 3 on a variety of issues such as their personal niche. The quantity and quality of the journals were one selection criterion for the focal students.

The journals, unlike other texts they produced, were private in the sense that they were written in their leisure with no excessive external pressure as in their assignments. As they were writing to themselves at least at the time of writing (they provided their journals at the end of the data collection), the journals may be an interestingly different site of identity formation and transformation, as in Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman

([2011](#)), or a space of exploring and rehearsing their identities similar to the sketch drawing of architecture students in Medway's ([2002](#)) study.

Eventually, a wide variety of data was collected including interview-generated narratives of the students, student writing in a variety of business genres, text-based interviews with the students, comments on their texts by the international business professionals, documents related to the Business English programme, observations of the business writing classes, and student journals and their other texts. The data are summarised in Table [3.3](#). The diversity of the sources of data contributed to data triangulation. These data complemented and/or confirmed each

Table 3.3 Summary of data

Sources/methods	Data collection period	Data content
Student participants		
Life-story interviews	Beginning Year 3 (November–December 2009)	Experiences of learning Business English in the past two years at university
	End Year 3 (June–July 2010)	Experiences of learning Business English in the past three years at university
Assignments	October 2009–July 2010	Cover letter, resume, order letter, job posting, offer, counteroffer, rejection, business plan
Other texts	October 2009–July 2010	Essays, journal entries, research report, drafts of assignments, blog entries
Teacher participant		
Course materials	October 2009–July 2010	Student profile (business writing needs survey), lecture slides, emails, comments on assignments
Non-participant observations	December 2009–June 2010	Four 90-minute lectures, two special term-end lectures for discussing assignments
Professional participants		
	August 2010–January 2011	Written feedback on assignments, telephone interview
IBSU		
Documents	October 2009	Undergraduate programme for Business English majors

other in various ways. An example of confirmatory data is the case of An, who in the life-story interviews presented a view of herself which was echoed in her journal entries, essays, blog texts, and student profile. The data together can thus be said to provide a panoramic view on the five focal students' experiences of learning Business English, their wants, necessities, lacks, what they thought they were, and what they aspired to be and become while learning Business English, and the contexts where all this took place. The different approaches to the analysis of the data in response to the research questions, as will be presented in the next section, triangulated the analysis. The multiple-case replication design and triangulation employed in the study provided both varied data and the opportunity for data comparison and analysis that enhanced the credibility and dependability of the study.

3.3   Data Processing Procedures

The analysis of the various data was an interactive process informed by relevant literature and the research questions proposed in Chap. 1. This section presents the procedures for processing the data related to each research question.

3.3.1   Data Analysis Related to Question 1

Question 1 is about the "what" question: What professional identity emerged for the Business English students? The narrative dataset including the life-story interviews, student journals, essays, and student profile was the most relevant to this question. In their narratives, the student participants related their experiences of learning Business English in the three years at IBSU, which shed light on their perception of the role of international business professionals (identification) and their self-conception in relation to the role (negotiability).

   The methods for narrative data analysis are as diverse as there are definitions of narratives. Riessman (2008) identifies four approaches: thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic or performance analysis, and

visual analysis. Riessman compares thematic analysis to interrogating what is spoken by the narrator, structural analysis to interrogating how it is spoken, and dialogic or performance analysis to interrogating whom the narration may be for and when and why it is narrated. Visual analysis involves images alongside the image-maker's words as data for analysis. Riessman discusses four features of narrative analysis: prior theories or concepts are used as guidance; the whole episode or story is used to bear out themes; a narrative account should be historicised by attending to the time and place of the narration; and narrative study is case centred rather than intended to generate theories across cases.

As the first research question is concerned with the emerging professional identity for the Business English students, what they said about their experiences of learning Business English rather than how they said it is important to answering the question, although the study recognises that narratives are themselves genres with their conventions (Linde, 1993) and thus lend to structural analysis. This study conducted a thematic analysis of the narratives. Narratives relevant to each of the four constituting factors for professional identity, that is, professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence, were identified and then coded. In the words of Duff (2008), the factors would be described as "a priori codes" (p. 160) or codes that are anticipated before the data analysis. The coding took several rounds. During the first round, I transcribed the life-story interviews verbatim (see Appendix 3.6 for the transcription notations), identified the narratives that bore out the four constituting factors for professional identity, and generated a catalogue of discrete codes. Then links were sought between the codes, and, in this process, themes emerged. The linking of the codes was also literature informed and verified by the focal students. For example, the codes of professional goal, values and perspective on being international business professionals, discursive competence, and technical competence were grouped under the theme of emerging professional identity partly as a result of the conceptualisation of professional identity based on the research literature and partly because they were invoked by the students in their conception of professional identity in the international business world. The second round of data analysis started after rereading relevant literature and

checking the transcripts against the audio recordings, and proceeded in the form of reviewing the transcript and coding to ensure that the codes and themes accurately represent the data. Where new connections and insights emerged, adjustments to the coding were made until it was felt that no relevant data were left out of scrutiny. There was a generally high consistency in the two rounds of data processing, or a high intra-coder consistency (Deters, 2011; Duff, 2008). A third round was conducted by cross-referring to other data in the narrative dataset, including the student profile, student essays, and student journals. There was little inconsistency between the life-story interviews and the other types of narrative data as the multiple sources of data generally overlapped regarding professional goal, needs, values, and perspectives. Partly for this reason, no member check for validating the analysis (Duff, 2008) was sought.

It should be noted that the basic principle of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was followed to the extent that the prior/preset codes (factors for professional identity) were used as guiding devices and were borne out by the data. Where the data suggested new codes, they were treated as equally valid information on professional identity. For example, the conceptual framework for professional identity in Chap. 2 did not foresee an interrelationship among the four factors other than listing them as 'separable' components. The data analysis demonstrated, however, that there were intricate patterns of interaction among them, resulting in different manifestations of professional identity for the Business English students. The patterns of interaction were then coded as the theme of characteristics of emerging professional identity.

3.3.2   Data Analysis Related to Question 2

Question 2 is, "How did their participation in various communities of practice impact on their emerging professional identity?" This study follows Wenger's (1998) argument that participation in communities of practice is the source of identity. The Business English students' emerging professional identity was related to their modes of participation in various communities of practice. The data relevant to this question included the life-story interviews, the Business English programme, the field notes

taken during the classroom observations, email exchanges with the writing instructor, and the student journals. The analysis of these data followed a similar procedure as described in the data analysis for the first research question. The difference lies in that the focus now shifted to the various communities of practice the students identified as relevant to their experiences, access, agency, and modes of participation including engagement (what they actually did in a particular community of practice), imagination (what they imagined themselves to be or to be doing in a community of practice), and alignment (what they identified with about a community of practice beyond the one they were immediately situated in). Narratives that represent these concerns were identified and coded. Patterns of participation in each community of practice were then summarised as themes.

3.3.3   Data Analysis Related to Question 3

Question 3—What was it that characterised their discursive construction of professional identity?—is concerned with how the Business English students enacted their emerging professional identity in writing in business genres. While narrative analysis is widely adopted in the study of identities, it is criticised for being partly unnatural. For example, Hyland (2010, p. 162, italics in original) comments:

> Most of the time, however, we are not performing identity work by narrating stories of ourselves but claiming identities while engaged in doing something else. If identity is really a *performance* and not simply an *interpretive recounting* then we need to find ways of capturing what people routinely do with language that is similar or different from what others do with it.

It is also pointed out that sources of codes and themes in narrative analysis are often left implicit (e.g., Block, 2010; Pavlenko, 2007). These criticisms of narrative analysis were addressed in this study, in particular when the third research question was handled. The concern with language and identities boils down to the relationship between semiotic resources

and the social meaning they index. The students' writing in the business genres, their various drafts, other texts they produced and took as having a business purpose, and the text-based interviews on their writing were used to respond to this question. This study drew on Tardy's (2009) four-dimension framework for genre knowledge because the framework itself was derived from ethnographical studies of student writers learning to write for their disciplines. In the analysis, features of the Business English students' genre knowledge on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions were noted with the guidance of the literature on business genre knowledge and validated with the students in the text-based interviews. In the interviews about their texts, shortly after their completion the students were called on to discuss features in their writing and the rationale for deploying those features, which would exemplify their consciousness of and application of genre knowledge of the community of practice of international business. As indexicals (Davila, 2012) for professional identity in this study refer to aspects of business genre knowledge that are associated with international business practices and the identity of international business professionals, the students' deployment of specific business genre knowledge features and their rationale for using those features made it possible to examine the link the students made between genre knowledge and professional identity. This examination of the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity may thus be said to complement the study of the students' emerging professional identity in that it is concerned with their professional identity in action.

3.3.4   Data Analysis Related to Question 4

Question 4—How was their discursive construction of professional identity received by international business professionals?—is about the reception of the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity by international business professionals. The written comments by the professional participants, all in English, were the main data. There were 1043 comments on the five focal cases' texts made by the eight professional participants. This count did not include the nearly 50 holistic evaluative remarks such as "100%" or "Great/Excellent work."

These comments were first grouped into four general categories representing Tardy's (2009) formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions of genre knowledge. Then individual comments were heuristically coded as subcategories under each general category by making reference to research in business genre knowledge. For example, the syntactic structure *would you please* was coded as the subcategory of linguistic realisation of the speech act of request/instruction (Brown & Levinson, 1987) under the general category of formal dimension. The strategic pattern of organisation with the main point stated first and followed by supporting details was coded as the subcategory of politeness via deductive versus inductive strategies (Scollon & Scollon, 2001) under the general category of rhetorical dimension. As the professional participants often explained their comments, the validity of the coding was remarkably enhanced. The categories and subcategories that were generated would reflect the professional participants' reaction to the indexing devices for professional identity in the students' writing and form the basis of answering the fourth research question.

As Tardy (2009) concedes, there is possible overlapping between the formal, process, and rhetorical dimensions of genre knowledge. For example, the rhetorical strategy of politeness via deductive versus inductive organisation is realised as a textual feature and would qualify for the formal dimension of genre knowledge. Coding it as a rhetorical dimension feature may thus appear arbitrary. However, it was coded as a subcategory of the rhetorical dimension because it was felt to be addressing power relations between the writer and the audience (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Conversely, politeness in speech acts was coded as a formal rather than rhetorical dimension feature because it was considered as a textual feature of linguistic realisation. The same criteria for coding were consistently applied to all the comments. Each comment was assigned only one subcategory.

3.3.5   Cross-Case Analysis

The five focal cases were processed in a way that the four research questions were answered in each individual case. Each case—the student's emerging professional identity, participation in their communities of

practice and the impact of their participatory learning on the emerging professional identity, discursive construction of professional identity, and the reception of the discursive construction of professional identity by the professional participants—was analysed individually and written up as case study reports. On this basis, inter-case analyses were conducted to identify overarching trends, address theoretical issues concerning professional identity construction, and generate a model of learning Business English and professional identity construction for Business English students in tertiary ESP settings.

3.4   Ethical Considerations

This study involved selecting, interviewing, and observing adult human participants, including university students, their writing instructor, and international business professionals. Ethics approval was obtained before the data collection. The ethics protocol was followed during the data collection. It should be acknowledged that during and after the data collection the student participants offered extra data, such as personal blogs by An, and the writing instructor provided his reflections on business writing and his students, which are noted where relevant in this book.

As the data collection progressed, I was approached by the students and writing instructor not just as a researcher but somehow as a consultant. The student participants asked me for comments on their assignments before submission to the instructor. I avoided leading the students by just providing general comments or asking them general questions. However, this might have had an effect on their final writing text, as in the case of Dong. The writing instructor was invited to clarify his views on teaching and the students with me. This might also have unwittingly influenced his teaching. In an email to me, he critically reflected on his focus on business concepts in teaching business writing by acknowledging the value of business discourse (Leo, Personal Communication, July 6, 2010).

Researchers following a qualitative paradigm are encouraged to be self-reflective to address possible biases in their research (Duff, 2008). In my case as a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese and an applied linguist

conversant with functional approaches to language studies, in particular the Systemic Functional Linguistics, ESP, and business discourse and communication, I developed certain conceptions of business and business communication, which may have predisposed me to notice certain things and be insensitive to others in the data. For example, I was concerned more with linguistic aspects of the students' writing until it was brought home to me that business concepts and skills are often more important to business communication as demonstrated in the comments by the professional participants. This brings up a key issue in ESP research concerning the expertise or technical knowledge of the researcher in handling specialist discourses which are necessarily an integration of both language and the specialised subject matter. To address the criticism about qualitative research such as narrative analysis (e.g., Block, 2010; Pavlenko, 2007), I based my investigation of the features of genre knowledge on research in business discourse and made explicit the theories and literature that were drawn on in the data collection, interpretation, and coding to facilitate external examination and possible replication. I was also aware of the possible impact of language on the interviews, for example, on the content and form of the interview (Pavlenko, 2007). As the student participants were Year 3 Business English majors, they were expected to communicate their experiences effectively in English, albeit their second language. As a precaution, however, before each interview, I would explain to the students that the questions would be asked in English but they were free to choose English or Chinese, their first language, in answering the questions. I also switched to Chinese when there was a need to clarify certain points the students made. Most of the students chose to speak in English and were generally able to express their experiences fluently, a sign that speaking in a foreign language about their experiences was not an apparent burden. When they did have difficulty articulating certain ideas in English during the interviews, they seemed to be comfortable switching from English to Chinese. Another issue concerning language was the translation of data. When Chinese to English translation of the data was required, I generally made a literal translation of the original utterances of the students with the translations provided in brackets immediately after the original data unless otherwise indicated. For occasions of ellipsis in the utterances of the students, the contexts of the utterances were

examined to recover the otherwise full utterances, which were then translated. Where cultural concepts were involved, for example, the concept of monitor as a student leader with special responsibilities at Chinese universities, they were glossed with explanations provided in brackets. But it should be mentioned that the analysis was based on the original data rather than the translation.

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4

Emerging Professional Identity

This chapter concerns the professional identity that emerged for the Business English students. The five focal students' narratives of their Business English learning experiences indicate that professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence were underlying their understanding of international business professionals as well as their evaluation of themselves and therefore were constituting factors for their professional identity. Each of them also developed a unique configuration of these four factors manifesting their emerging professional identity in distinct ways, which illustrates the dual process of identification and negotiability in their professional identity development. These results will be reported case by case and then discussed with reference to several relevant discourses at work in the students' learning environment.

4.1   Nan: I Have Passed the Threshold … In the Field of Business

Nan came from a family of merchants. His father owned over 20 boats and ships, and "each day he eats out trying to find insurers" for them (Interview #5, 7 July 2010). Upon graduation from a language high school in a metropolitan city in South China, he was offered two choices: to study 小语种 [foreign languages other than English] at another prestigious university in Beijing or to study Business English at IBSU. He opted for Business English as he thought the major had the advantage of versatility:

> When I try to try to get a job em I can do something only about business, yeah, and I also em just to try to translate em be a translator, yeah, and also to deal with the cases to em with the international people. (Interview #1, 27 November 2009)

When he began his study at IBSU, he felt confused as he found no difference between Business English and the English he learned at high school. It was not until his second year that he came to realise that the Business English programme educates composite-type talents who learn business and are also good at English (Interview #1, 27 November 2009).

Nan joined the student union and another student association, in both of which he acted as the liaison officer. He was a volunteer for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and subsequently interned at an insurance agency, a consultation agency, and an international bank. He tried his luck buying and selling stocks. He also took specialised examinations such as the Business English Certificate (BEC) Higher and qualifying examinations to obtain the certificates required of practitioners in the securities and banking sectors. Three years into the Business English programme, he felt that he had acquired the qualifications necessary for the banking and securities profession (Interview #5, 4 July 2010).

Nan's learning outcome therefore well matches the goal of professional identity construction for Business English students as specified in their Business English programme. His emerging professional identity will be profiled in the next section (also see Zhang, 2015) in terms of the four

constituting factors—professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence.

4.1.1 Professional Goal

Nan chose to work in the financial sector. He described his professional goal thus:

> 因为我学 Business English 吗, 我就想以后做证券呀、基金呀、银行啊、保险啊这一块, 当然能做得好一点就往投行啊、咨询公司啊这样的, 这种这种地方发展 [because I learn Business English, I want to work in securities, funds, banks, insurance, and if possible it'll certainly be better to work in investment banks, consultancy firms, and the like]. (Interview #5, 4 July 2010)

He was drawn to investment and consultancy due to his discovery of the challenging nature of the profession and the match of the profession to his character (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). When he compared working in financial investment with being a translator, he stated that it would be 绝对受不了 [absolutely unbearable] because he 心里没有激情 [has no passion] for translation (Interview #5, 4 July 2010).

4.1.2 Values and Perspective on International Business Professionals

Nan viewed international business professionals in a generally positive light. He prioritised modesty and 善于学习 [good at learning] as qualities for international business professionals because he realised that business was complex and deep and one should constantly enrich oneself (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). His understanding of international business involved business activities and exchanges between different countries under the principles of 诚信 [integrity] and 互利 [mutual benefit] (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). Honesty meant making a profit without infringing on the interests of the majority of the public or violating the law or 打擦边球 [operating in the grey areas], and 信用

[trustworthiness] referred to being punctual for appointments, avoiding giving unwarranted information, and keeping one's word (Interview #1, 27 November 2009).

Nan took an accommodationist (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) stance on the international business world. While he was an intern as secretary to a manager at an insurance agency, he was impressed by the two sides of business professionals: capable of handling business tasks and worldly, the latter of which Nan claimed that he did not judge in positive or negative terms (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). He also saw the hierarchy of businesspeople at three levels: those at the lower ladder who were engaged in mere commercial operations, at the middle ladder who were good at English and engaged in international trade, and at the top ladder who excelled in English, had relevant skills, and were good at mathematics (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). Where he was experiencing moral difficulties, for example the unequal access to information in the financial market in China which he found was favourable to the rich (Journal Entry #6, 31 June 2010), he would reconcile himself to practices in the business world as he said he would 让自己成长得更适合这个社会 [grow to suit the society better] (Interview #1, 27 November 2009).

4.1.3   Technical Competence

According to Nan, international business professionals possessed good interpersonal skills, had vision and sensitivity to changes in government policies and economic situations, and were capable (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). He described their technical competence with reference to several core capabilities and skills (Zhang, 2013, p. 32):

> 首先他能经营好这个公司, 能经营好他的 business, 然后有自己独到的 creative 的 ideas, 无论是关于治理一个公司还是关于公司的发展前景, 然后这些 ideas 能结合这个市场的变化, 能结合政策方面, 一些国际关系的变化, 因为是 international trade 吗, 然后还有嗯就是怎么说呢还有应该是一个处事比较圆滑的人, 能够处理好各方面的人事, 有自己的 social network [first he **can manage** his company well,

can run his business well, then he **has his own** unique creative ideas, whether about corporate governance or about corporate vision, then these ideas **can be considered** along with changes in the market, he **can consider** policies, changes in international relations, because it is international trade, then em how to say it he **must be** tactful, **able to manage** his various relations well, he **has** his social network]. (Bold font added for emphasis; Interview #5, 4 July 2010)

Clearly, these capabilities and skills were not abstract notions but meant specific things for Nan. Capabilities referred to the abilities and skills in operating a business. Interpersonal skills were important to an international business professional as he perceived business as a brokering activity and all about dealing with people of different industries and professions:

> Business 这种东西我觉得就是人和人打交道 … 作为 business professional 他要和各行各业的人打交道 [business to me means dealing with people. … As a business professional, he needs to deal with people of all industries and professions]. (Interview #1, 27 November 2009)

4.1.4 Discursive Competence

Nan realised that the business world had its ways of talking and writing (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). To him, talking skills were important because business professionals need to communicate with their clients and persuade them to accept their professional view and analysis. Although he felt writing was less important than speaking, he was aware of differences between business writing and writing in daily life, for example in the format and the use of business terminology (Interview #1, 27 November 2009).

4.1.5 Characteristics of Nan's Emerging Professional Identity

A professional identity was emerging for Nan. When he was concluding what he had become in the second life-history interview (Interview

5, 4 July 2010), he reported that 我现在算是初步地入门了吧, 嗯, 就是在 business 这一块 [I have passed the threshold, um, it will be the field of business]. He went on to elaborate on this conclusion by reporting that 我有自己的 ambition, 有一些未来的 plan, 嗯, 包括 找实习, 嗯, 做一些相关的活动呀, 还有, 现在在准备的证券从业 资格证书呀 [I have my ambition, I have my plan for the future, um, including seeking for internships, um, doing activities relevant, and now preparing for the Securities Profession Qualifications Certificate]. This evaluation of himself included his professional goal (the field of business) and followed the three criteria for the technical competence of international business professionals as discussed in Sect. 4.1.3: vision (he had the ambition and plan), capability (he was preparing to obtain relevant certificates), and relationship building (he was searching for internships and engaging in relevant activities). He was also able to apply these criteria to his analysis of international business operations, for example the acquisition of the laptop business of IBM by Lenovo, a Chinese high-tech enterprise:

> 这体现了很多的方面, 首先他们能把那个给买下来, 就能体现出他 对于各方面这种公关做得很不错 … 然后还有自己确实一上手以后 就做得不错, 至少没让就像在中国本土至少没让那个就是以前的 IBM 那个占的市场份额极速地下降, 还是稳定在一个区间内, 而且 现在好像又慢慢地就是掌握了市场主动, 好像市场份额又上升了, 这也就体现了公司治理, 治理公司的能力呀, 还有各方面对于公司 的定位什么有一个比较明确的认知, 有一个比较好的来操作, 然后 还有就是有自己的 ambition 呀, 就是国内市场要做好, 还要进军国 际市场 [this is indicative of a number of things, first of all, **it was able to** acquire IBM, this shows that it **did a good job** in public relations with various parties … then **the company operated well** immediately after the acquisition, at least the market share of IBM in the Chinese domestic market did not plummet but remained relatively stable, and now it seems to **be in control of the market momentum**, the market share seems to be rising again, this is a reflection of corporate governance, **its capability of corporate governance**, then all parties seem to **have a clear cognition** of the company positioning, **have good operations**, and also **have an ambition**, that is to do well in the domestic market and also go global]. (Interview #5, 4 July 2010)

Note the several keywords and phrases highlighted in bold font. They resonate with Nan's criteria for identifying international business professional identity: handling relationship networks, capability, and vision. In this way he externalised the values, practices, and beliefs which he perceived to have currency in the contemporary business world and offered himself as its member.

Nan's emerging professional identity is rather technical than sociopolitical in that he was not deterred by either the challenging career or the status quo of injustice and inequality in the financial market in China but complied with the values of international business professionals. There exists a synergy in his experience of identification (developing his perception of the role of international business professionals) and of negotiability (fitting himself into the role).

4.2   An: It's Not Just What I Want to Do in This Stage You Know!

This utterance was made when An was arguing for her own way of writing a business plan for her start-up business instead of following her business writing teacher's instructions. Unlike Nan whose professional identity was apparently firming up, An was exploring various possibilities and struggling to discover an ideal profession that would match her personality and competence.

She was brought up in a small town in Mid-west China. Her family had been farmers for generations. As the first in town to be admitted to a prestigious university in Beijing, she had applied to the French-language programme at IBSU as she felt bored with English after six years of learning it in secondary school and wanted to learn something new. She also felt that there was little room for improvement in her English whatever effort she put into it. However, she was allocated to the programme of Business English. She felt unfortunate until a few months later when she began to like Business English, acknowledging English as a useful "tool" and the fundamental knowledge of business as the door to "various worlds" (Interview #1, 10 November 2009).

4.2.1 Professional Goal

An's professional goal changed with time. She claimed as her objective "to act as a bridge in effective communication for a business operating in a Chinese environment" (Essay #1, November 2009). She would start her career as a translator or interpreter as a way of gaining entry into a company (Student Profile, November 2009). She had the bigger plan of doing "something related to management" or "human resources" (Interview #1, 10 November 2009). Yet after she had interned at a translation agency and the human resources department of a huge corporation, she found neither of them appealing any more. She described being a translator as "stay at the computer the whole day, look at the words and think about the words, the using of the words, translate and correct, rethink," which she did not want to pursue as a lifetime career (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). Being a human resources professional was similarly dismaying because it "needs a lot of work beside the computer" (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). Near the end of Year 3, she was thinking of marketing and sales as possible fields for her career, but she was reserved about these options as she said:

> At this time I'm thinking about marketing, yeah, but I'm still not sure because because marketing and sales I think maybe is challenging and exciting but after a long time you'll be tired and it's not quite suitable for a girl or a person who may want a stable life, after years, I'm not sure of it yet, so I'm still anxious a little. (Interview #4, 12 June 2010)

An apparently bought into the gendered discourses (Mullany, 2009; Sunderland, 2004) that impact on socially sanctioned female career choices. Due to these multiple factors, she negated the professional goal she had set one after another until she felt a sense of anxiety. Yet she was still exploring the possibility of an ideal match between her interest and skills and the job:

> I know I'm a person who wants a more challenging job, a more interesting job, and may be good at that … I'm not just you know looking for a job that will make a decent salary, but I really I really like it, so but you know

today's job market is very competitive, it's very hard to find a job that can suit all kinds of requirements of you. (Interview #4, 12 June 2010)

4.2.2   Values and Perspective on International Business Professionals

An's view of an international business professional may be characterised by three aspects of understanding which came through in her first life-story interview (Interview #1, 10 November 2009). First, she thought that they were normal people. In response to the question "What is an international businessperson like?" she said, "He's also a normal person, but he appears more professional." They appeared more professional to her in the sense that they dressed formally, behaved differently (e.g., going to expensive cafés and making friends with professionals, celebrities, and well-educated people), and combined English and Chinese in their talk. But there were no special values for them:

> Businessperson have the values that people value much in the daily life, it's I don't think it's special or it's a special requirement for a businessman because as a common person, we should be honest, be friendly, something like that, I think a businessperson should also do that, I don't think it's that special.

Second, international business professionals were motivated to make money not just for living a better life but also for self-realisation. They were bound by their common interest based on mutual needs or the supply and demand mechanism. Exchange was important for them as, with exchange, both parties were better off.

Third, the world of business that may have appeared complicated initially would turn out to be simple. When she was describing changes in her views of international business professionals, she said:

> When I'm a child, I just viewed a businessman just like a wholesaler or a shopholder, just like because erm what the people I met is like the people who's owning a small shop, something like that, I think business is like

that, it's just to have some input of some goods and sell to the customers, yeah, when I grew up and to take a course like this, and to get some international perspective, I know that, wow, business world is so complicated, yeah, that involves so much things, yeah, the procedures can be so complex, just like what is involved in the international trade, wow, the items of the shipment, and payment payment ways, wow, so complicated, yeah, so uh I think uh when I learned more, uh I I come to know that to be a business professional requires more, but I think that after years maybe if I become old, I become an old woman, then I view uh when I view back, then the things will become simple.

Therefore, international business professionals were not a special group of people high and above to An. She was not glorifying them. Although she acknowledged that learning in international business was an "endless process," she reiterated the belief that becoming a professional was a matter of time as she said in her second life-story interview:

It may take years to be a professional in my area. (Interview #4, 12 June 2010)

4.2.3   Technical Competence

An provided a list of qualities for international business professionals which may represent her understanding of their technical competence. The qualities included profound knowledge, consideration, communication skills, good English, and professional experience. She attached particular importance to consideration and regarded it as reflecting business sense and strategy rather than as merely a rhetorical tactic:

When I say consideration I mean the uh I mean to understand, but not just to think about yourself because business is to make profit, in the first place, uh but when you're thinking about the profit, you can't just think only about the profit uh because if you want to get profit, you have to think for others sometimes uh because it's them uh it's they they provide they give

you money uh and your purpose is to make them willing to give you money, but how? That is to consider for them, what's their want, because people in business they are not foolish, yeah, when you when they give you something at the same time they ask you for something, yeah, it's the demand and the supply, you have demand and I can, you can demand and I have the supply, so at the time we have the exchange, we have communication, and we have a match for our needs, yeah, and so we have exchange and we are all better off, yeah, so in the process consideration is very important. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

Her understanding of technical competence for international business professionals was also reflected in her insight into their job and their expertise in dealing with their clients and colleagues. Their job "involves the contact with international persons" and "involves money and profits" (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). They were responsive to changes in the market and flexible in handling their customers:

If I am a seller uh the goods I have is very popular and uh suppose I am monopoly, or I'm the only one or two producer in this industry, so I am in a position that is of great advantage, and you are the buyer, and maybe the relation between us I don't have to be very you know do something uh do a lot of things to adapt to you, uh, you make more adjustments than me, but when the situation changes uh if my products I've many things in stock, the product is now it's the demand for the products is very becoming less and less, I will do some things to make you happy, to buy my goods. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

An international business professional was also specialised in a certain field and "can do well in his own area, in his own position" (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). This recognition of specialisation signifies An's ongoing reconciliation with her craving for "a versatile person" and her desire for the ideal job (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). It is clear that An was able to draw on basic economics concepts such as monopoly and demand and supply in her portrayal of the business professionals' technical competence and was mediated by scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1978) in her thinking about international business professionals.

4.2.4   Discursive Competence

An's understanding of discursive competence for international business professionals was shown in her representation of their ways of writing and speaking (Zhang, 2013, p. 33):

> What is a little special is the time is very important to a businessman, yeah, they want to save time, they know the other side doesn't have much time to read your email, they don't like emails between friends, in emails maybe to friends we talk about the much tiny things that happen in daily life, we tell our emotions, but in business letter you have to tell what you say, you want to say, in some, the words you use should be as less as possible, and usually you should state your purpose at the first sentence, yes, it is also called consideration, when you are writing, you think from their position, and make the letters or something the compositions as clear as possible. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

This insight into the features of discursive practices in business, such as pressure of time, brevity (economical with words), clarity, directness (stating the purpose at the beginning of the document), and considerateness (thinking from the position of the business partner) is in line with the C-B-S style of business communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). She also developed an insight into intercultural communication:

> I don't think intercultural communication is that difficult thing because at first place uh if you have solved the problem in language, we are all human being, yeah, people can expre can feel your honesty, your enthusiasm, from not only your language, if you can express you clearly in language, then there are not much problem in communication I think, in my opinion, yeah, from your body language sometimes, yeah, there exist some misunderstanding in communication, but I don't think that's a very big problem. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

An did not realise, though, that intercultural communication requires more than the goodwill and a shared linguistic code among

communicators in intercultural settings. The rules for interaction and norms of interpretation (Saville-Troike, 1989) which are often tacit for in-group members may, unknowingly, cause communication break-down when the norms and rules are not shared information for out-group members. An apparently simple question "Did you have a good week-end?" asked on Monday morning may be interpreted differently by Australian English-background and French-background co-workers in the workplace (Béal, 1992).

4.2.5 Characteristics of An's Emerging Professional Identity

An was in constant search for an ideal profession that would match her interest and qualifications. Although she acknowledged that "at this time I'm still a student" (Interview #4, 12 June 2010), her perception of international business professionals became sophisticated, and she was viewing herself in terms of the technical competence of international business professionals:

> I have more professional knowledge, I have more professional experiences, uh and also I have developed uh I have more comprehensive uh knowledge of this world, uh my attitude toward this world, toward people, towards relations, and the way I deal with things, uh, I become more mature mmm I'm doing the things I want to, yeah, I think that's the most important. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

This realisation is likely to have contributed to her having a "more clear picture" of her future (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). She gained an international perspective in terms of her attitude towards foreigners and different beliefs and values (Zhang, 2013, p. 36):

> This is a world, not a country, yeah, a world that involve different nations, people of different em different cultural background, yeah, people who speak different languages, who have different color of skin, and who may hold different beliefs or values. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

She was therefore no longer surprised by the presence of a foreigner on the street or in class, which is indicative of a transnational identity (Rampton, 2006; Warriner, 2007). She also seemed to be fusing her "international perspective" (Interview #1, 10 November 2009) and her true Chinese self, resulting in pluralised identities (Starke-Meyerring, 2005). In response to my question "What do you think you have become now?" she said (Zhang, 2013, p. 36), "I can experience more now, I'm open to more em more activities, I learned more, but I know deep in my mind I'm a traditional Chinese, and I'll be HAPPier in that way, so that's I'll keep myself" (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). As a result, her international perspective and Chinese perspective co-existed in harmony marking her professional identity.

4.3   Dong: I Don't Like to Be a Business Professional

Dong was different from both Nan and An on several accounts. He grew up in North China and upon graduation from a language high school he was admitted direct to the Business English programme at IBSU. At university, he worked hard and achieved strong academic credentials. He believed in diligence, discipline, and devotion as markers of maturity and factors for success (Personal Vision, July 2010). He described himself as follows:

> I'm that kind of person that uh if I want to do something, if I do some-thing, no matter whether I I'm willing or not, I I hope that I can make it better. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

He was thus constantly motivated by his "Ought-to L2 self" or the self one should possess to meet expectations and avoid certain negative outcomes (Dörnyei, 2009). He was "quite active" in a number of extra-curricular activities (Interview #1, 17 November 2009). He also interned at a few prestigious foreign and overseas financial institutions, which pro-vided him rich exposure to the specialised business world. However, he eventually chose not to become an international business professional.

4.3.1 Professional Goal

Like An, Dong's professional goal kept evolving. At the beginning of Year 3 when he was responding to the question "What are your career aspirations?" in the writing needs survey, he stated that "working in a foreign enterprise would be my first choice, besides, I would also like to be a teacher in an English-speaking country, to spread the Chinese culture around the world" (Student Profile, November 2009). The preference for being an international business professional faltered around the middle of Year 3 despite his recognition of it as an option:

> I'm not quite, mm, I'm not uh prefer to be a businessperson in the future, but it will be one choice, it would be, or I have, it will be a very good choice if I can become a successful businessperson. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

When he was asked, "Do you remember any moments when you felt you were becoming an international business professional?" towards the end of Year 3, he firmly stated that he did not like to be a business professional and sighed that "I do not fit for that job … it does not mean I'm not qualified, but it's just that I don't like that kind of feeling" (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). What he held to be his ideal career was working for an NGO as he wrote:

> I prefer to be a member of an NGO committed to environmental protection. I will have duties that take me all over the world to tell governments, groups and individuals all around the world the already terribly awful circumstances we are in. (Future Career, July 2010)

4.3.2 Values and Perspective on International Business Professionals

According to Dong, honesty and trust were values for international business professionals:

> Honesty is very important, because this too can, only you uh you can, are honest, other peoples can trust you, so that other people can can

> help you, that is very important, and make a long-run friendship with their business partner, that is quite important, in the business professional, especially in international business professional. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

He cited the example of his friend's father, a businessman who trusted his workers and overseas partner and benefited from this mutual trust by living a surprisingly non-busy businessman's life (Interview #1, 17 November 2009). Interestingly, he presented these values in light of exchange for possible gains such as leisurely life, rather than as virtues in their own right, which was An's understanding, or as principles for international business professionals, which was Nan's stance. This instance of commodification of values and beliefs seems to show that Dong was aware of the Utilitarian discourse system of international business where humans "are defined as rational, economic entities" (Scollon & Scollon, 2001, p. 116) and even began to think in its terms. The differences across the five focal students in their take on the same concepts contributed to the distinctiveness of their emerging professional identity.

His perspective on international business fluctuated (Zhang, 2013). When he visited the university as a high school student, he imagined that he would become a businessperson and that international trade would be very complex as it would take him four or more years to learn how to do business. After almost two and a half years into the Business English programme, he compared international trade to a "complicated machine" with lots of parts (Interview #1, 17 November 2009) and described international business professionals thus:

> Most time, they uh the thing for the businesspeople is just sign the contract, or just like just like press the button. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

During his internships, he was exposed to foreign enterprises in China. Initially, he was impressed with their working environment. There were nice coffee machines, with a free supply of coffee, sugar,

and so on. He was also impressed with the style of work of the staff. At video conferences, they would carry on with their job rather than 嗑瓜子 [crack melon seeds/have snacks] as was common in Chinese state-owned companies (Interview #4, 16 January 2010). Yet when he was reflecting on these experiences later, he sounded quite critical. To him, the foreign businesses were 花架子 [putting on show] (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). Despite the practice of the staff calling each other by their first name, the ones having the opportunities for what he deemed to be international business, that is, visiting overseas, attending regional video conferences, were limited to the head of the department or section. Although he acknowledged that the hierarchy in the corporate world came as a result of an accumulative process, that is, ordinary employees becoming senior staff, he was negative about this status quo, in particular the huge gap between the salaries paid to the foreign management and local staff (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). He was also critical about the political and social infrastructure to which businesses succumbed. For example, while foreign enterprises were often believed to be more efficient, he noticed that there was no guarantee that they got things done as quickly as state-owned enterprises. An application to the authorities for a certain business operation by a state-owned enterprise can be processed more quickly depending on having the right connections to the authorities. He was particularly disillusioned by his observation that foreign companies acted in a way similar to domestic Chinese enterprises. For example, on the occasion of receiving the authorities, they would put up banners at the entrance to their premises with the slogan of 热烈欢迎 … 领导 莅临指导 [warmly welcome the arrival and guidance of leaders …] (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). He was disgusted that whatever the foreign enterprise, 他们脑子里东西还是一样的 [the mentality of the staff is the same] (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). All this culminated in a range of oppositions as summarised in Table 4.1 and brought to him the conclusion that international business professionals 很假 [lived unnaturally] (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). As noted earlier, he did not like the feeling and discarded international business as his career choice (Interview #6, 6 July 2010).

Table 4.1 Dong's observation of oppositions in foreign enterprises

One façade	The other façade
Rich company making huge money, luxurious offices and suites, modern on-site coffee-making facilities, expensive brand stationery instead of cheaper and usable pens and pencils	Not providing good welfare for staff, no canteen, no generous year-end benefits for employees
Offices in CBD	Limited office space for employees
Management, minority, foreigners, receiving global pay in Euro	Employees, majority, Chinese, paid in Renminbi
Care for the well-being of the minority	Indifference to the life of the majority
Efficiency within the company	Local constraints such as relationship with the authorities

4.3.3 Technical Competence

Dong's depiction of the technical competence for international business professionals is a combination of personality, way of thinking, persuasiveness, accuracy, and efficiency in expressing oneself, and a wide scope of knowledge, which he summarised as follows:

> Because knowledge has lots of aspects, one's experience is also a kind of very precious knowledge, especially for international businesspeople, and the knowledge about the formal rules, the knowledge about the cultural difference, and knowledge about how to sign a contract, the whole procedure of making business, of dealing the, dealing some, because you know, in the business process there are lots of accidents, and how to solve the problem, there are all kinds of knowledge, and a very successful businesspeople have to know those knowledge. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

He also emphasised the importance of sensitivity and foresight in international business:

> You have to be very sensitive, about the background, mm, you have to be, know what will happen, in the following month, or even years, yeah, because that is about investment, because it is an investment, you buy some goods, you trade some goods, you produce some goods, they're all kinds of investment because you are not very sure whether you can sell the

goods, yeah, you have to be, you have to have a perceptive to see what will happen in the future. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

Clearly, Dong was invoking the technical competence of international traders in his account. It did not occur to him until quite late that international business professionals should include multiple types of professionals in the business world with each type possessing highly specialised knowledge of their field (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). This realisation added to his feeling of the inadequacy of Business English majors as will be reported in detail in Chap. 5.

4.3.4   Discursive Competence

Dong came to realise that the world of international business had its ways of talking and writing. For example, he commented that language use for international business was "formal," "professional," but not "humorous" or "beautiful" (Interview #1, 17 November 2009). He noted that words in contracts such as "hereof" were not used in daily life. Although such words appeared strange to him, he accepted that it was customary for one word or expression to mean just one definite thing in business language and that this prevented readers from misunderstanding the contract. He also understood that business writing followed formats or conventional ways of organising ideas. This awareness and acceptance of business language as different from language use in the "life world" (Gee, 2011, p. 208) and as having conventional patterns of organisation indicates his insights into the discursive practices in international business.

4.3.5   Characteristics of Dong's Emerging Professional Identity

Dong's emerging professional identity is characterised by a growing tension between identification and negotiability. On the one hand, he developed remarkable technical and discursive competences that would allow him to play the professional role in international business. On the

other, he opted out due to the oppositions he observed in international business and his perceived prospect of Business English majors playing marginalised roles in foreign enterprises. While those oppositions, as summarised in Table 4.1, may have captured the surface features of modern business, they boil down to basic oppositions (Fiske, 1990), for example, between the individual and the institution, between profit creation (by the mass) and profit distribution (bulk share for the few), and between equality and equity and inequality and injustice. Viewed in this light, Dong seemed to be juggling several concurrent discourses, including the Utilitarian discourse of international business (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), the Confucian egalitarian discourse of 不患寡而患不均 [not concerned with being poor but with being ill-apportioned] (Confucius, 1998, p. 216), and possibly the social discourse circulating in contemporary Chinese society—the aspiration for equality and justice (Zhang, 2013). These discourses may be configured in a way that one discourse prevails or subordinates the other(s), such as in the case of Nan for whom the Utilitarian discourse of the international business world prevailed. For Dong, the Confucian egalitarian discourse was configured in a conflicting and disconcerting manner and apparently dominated in its interaction with the Western-originated Utilitarian discourse for international business. Despite his recognition of a few positive aspects of foreign enterprises in contrast to Chinese state-owned companies, such as promotion depending on personal competiveness and worry-free life after work in foreign enterprises versus connections for success and continuation of anxiety after work in state-owned companies (Interview #6, 6 July 2010), the international business profession embodying inequality and injustice lost its charm for him. In other words, the factor of values and perspective on international business professionals was pivotal for Dong's emerging professional identity. Meanwhile, it needs to be mentioned that he also seemed to envision a larger space where his technical and discursive competences would be relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) as he said:

> Business English can be used in lots of areas, not only in international business areas, uh, yeah I think it can be useful, I can, there will be one day I use it. … Every kind of subject or major it can train people a way of thinking, a way of dealing things, dealing with affairs, just like I think Business English, what I learned from the Business English course is not only the

words like rocket, and also what the word rocket the story this experience tell me, it tell me to be careful, tell me to know that people can be very can be much better than you, if you don't keep improving yourself, yeah, those uh these things is also what I learned from Business English. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

Additionally, his most recent aspiration to working for an NGO involved travelling internationally and interacting with international people, two elements that defined his own image of international business professionals.

4.4   Mei: To Actualize Achievement on Business Fields

Mei was to a great extent similar to Nan. Like him, she was brought up in a metropolitan city in China. When she was young, her parents were often away from home on business and left her to herself. This early life experience resulted in her feeling introverted, shy, and solitary (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She would travel alone as a way of relaxing herself and enjoyed thinking on the move as she said 脑子和脚一起动 [my brain and my feet move in synchronisation] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). She was admitted to IBSU after taking the national university entrance examinations. Unlike An, Dong, or Nan, she chose Business English as her priority major and provided three reasons: learning English to prepare for studying abroad for a master's degree in marketing, her interest in learning business and economics, and Business English as a new major in China. She consistently embraced a professional goal, that is, working in marketing and public relations for a prestigious international company, and maintained a positive image of international business professionals.

4.4.1   Professional Goal

Mei stated that her professional goal was to "actualize achievement on business fields, such as marketing, management or public relations"

(Student Profile, November 2009). She reiterated her professional goal in the first life-story interview:

> The first goal is to um go abroad for a marketing Master degree, and second goal is um got get um get a get a good job in um a fore foreign corporation which is one of the top 500. (Interview #1, 25 November 2009)

The goals of pursuing a master's degree in marketing and working for a prestigious foreign company had a significant impact on her experience of learning Business English. When she realised that high efficiency, competitiveness, and relationship were important to business, she made efforts to make herself more "extroverted" and to improve her communication skills (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She also took up the challenges of campaigning for the presidency of the student union at her university and of teaming up with students of different majors and personalities in extracurricular activities such as the brand storm competition sponsored by L'OREAL, a top business company in the world (Interview #2, 30 December 2009).

4.4.2 Values and Perspective on International Business Professionals

Mei specified "profit," "sustain growth and development," and "make advancement" as values for international business professionals (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She embraced these values herself. For example, she attributed her professional goal of working for a foreign corporation to the dynamic and competitive working environment and opportunities for personal achievement:

> I want to become a marketing people in a um in a foreign corporation as I think foreign corporation has more energy and more creativity and more innovation to um offer a lot of opportunities to um to people to make achievement, to um to apply their talent to and, um, and to make competition I think competition is also a great thing during one during people's life. (Interview #1, 25 November 2009)

Mei's perspective on international business professionals remained consistently positive. She was defensive of international business profession-

als when I quoted a widespread idea that businesspeople are economic animals (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She conceded slightly in her last interview when she was reflecting on changes in her perception of international business professionals:

> Before learning Business English I um have a more um I have a more ideal image of those international businesspeople um because there are very um glorious and um fantastic um fantastic image with them, but actually um I have um there actually are a lot of difficulties to become a businesspeople, because there is a lot of pressure, a lot of efforts, a lot of risks in a very cruel and competitive society and um some of them um have problems in their business ethics, and they um lack of social responsibility, so they are not so glorious and ethical as you have as you have thought before. (Interview #5, 5 July 2010)

However, she cherished the positive image that international business professionals as "real" businesspeople were "innovative," "responsible," and "entrepreneurship" (Interview #5, 5 July 2010). Like Nan, Mei's positive outlook on international business professionals provided the impetus for her to maintain her enthusiasm for the profession of international business.

4.4.3 Technical Competence

Mei expressed her understanding of technical competence for international business professionals in terms of behaviour, qualities, and abilities. Her initial list included three qualities such as "an international view," "knowledge of the current international business situation," and "continuous studies about the international business" (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She invoked a work-related image of these professionals being engaged in "a lot of works," "a lot of business emails," and "a lot of business meeting" (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She also gained the insight that business professionals "keep a good relationship with each other and try to avoid the conflict which is related with the profit" and "attend to their customers' um taste, their demand … make a lot of research about the consumers, and according this research to develop their product, to develop their service" (Interview #1, 25 November

2009). In international business, they followed a set of conventions and routines for negotiations, making a contract, arranging transportation, and making payment (Interview #1, 25 November 2009).

When she was interviewed at the end of Year 3, she came up with a list of can-dos or should-haves such as "can manage the intercultural diversification," "can manage multiple works and pressure at the same time," "good at English," "has the business mind," and "should have enthusiasm in acquiring more and more knowledge and want to dig more into the interesting field and then make a lot of contributions to what's to their interest and to the field of knowledge" (Interview #5, 5 July 2010). This conclusive account, which subsumed her earlier list of qualities and abilities, covered the three essential components of professional expertise, namely professional knowledge, professional practice, and discursive competence (Bhatia, 2004).

4.4.4 Discursive Competence

Mei noticed the formulaic nature of business discourse and its purpose. She said:

> 格式是比较重要因为它不是需要你呃太有文采或者是怎么样, 它需要你有一个清晰的格式然后便于别人理解和表达清楚   [layout   is quite important because it does not require you uh too much of a literary glamour or something like that, it requires you to have a clear layout so as to make it easy for others to understand and express clearly]. (Interview #2, 30 December 2009)

This understanding was confirmed when she learned from business practitioners what writing in the business world was like—when you are given a report to model on by your boss, write according to the model, and do not try to be creative in your text, or your boss may not find information in your text as he or she expects to (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). She also learned from her writing instructor that layout, format, conciseness, and clarity were important in business writing (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). These insights reflect her business genre knowledge on several dimensions, in particular the formal, process, and rhetorical dimensions, which would mediate her discursive construction of profes-

sional identity in her writing in business genres, as will be reported in Chap. 6.

4.4.5 Characteristics of Mei's Emerging Professional Identity

Similar to Nan, Mei concluded that she was not "really far away" from being an international business professional while recognising that "to a great extent I am still an undergraduate student rather than a businesspeople in the real world" (Interview #5, 5 July 2010). She set herself the professional goal of working for a prestigious foreign company and maintained a positive outlook on the international business world which, in her view, reproduced and sustained itself and also renovated and upgraded itself. More importantly, she took on the values and practices of the community as her own. She demonstrated understanding of the technical competence and discursive competence that characterised international business professionals. There was a synergistic relationship between her professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence, which characterises her emerging professional identity as an ongoing integration of the role and the self-conception (Hall, 1987) and a synergy between her identification and negotiability (Wenger, 1998).

4.5   Lan: I'm an "Always Match" Person

Lan grew up in an inland city in North China. After successfully passing the national university entrance examinations, she was admitted to the Business English programme at IBSU. The programme was appealing to her because it was brand new with a bright prospect of job opportunities and did not sound 枯燥的 [boring] like the traditional English language and literature programme (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). When she was invited to participate in the research, she was ranked among the top ten students in her class despite a feeling of diffidence as a Business English major student until after she had had some professional experience in Year 3.

4.5.1   Professional Goal

Like An, Lan did not come up with a clear professional goal. Quite in contrast to the widespread desire of her peers to get into the 500 most prestigious companies in the world, she dismissed this as probably mistaken. She critiqued characters in a classic Chinese novel widely read at the time of this research. The novel features 唐僧 [the Tang-monk], who was entrusted by the emperor of the Tang Dynasty in the seventh century AD to go to India to learn the real Buddhism. On this adventurous journey, he was accompanied and aided by three disciples. While 孙悟空 [the Monkey King] was the eldest of the three disciples and the most resourceful in the team, he had the fatal attribute of low emotional quotient and therefore often fell victim to distrust and reprimand by his master. Lan challenged the model of the Monkey King embraced by her schoolmates thus:

> 看到身边有些人渴望的成功便是 "孙悟空" 的模式。进外企, 做强人, 拼命工作, 拿高薪。恐怕这是一个误区吧。但凡情商高的人定不会让自己太辛苦, 就算辛苦也一定要让 "唐僧" 感受到并加以认可。应学会巧妙地偷懒而不是做苦力,　更不能表现得比领导聪明 [It appears to me that folks around take the Monkey King as the idol of success: to join in a foreign enterprise, be the tough guy, spare no effort on the job, get a good pay. This is probably a mistaken concept. People with a high EQ will not put themselves to such toil and even if they do, they make sure that the Tang-monk notice and recognise it. It is advisable to learn to be a clever loafer rather than a hard labourer and never to act smarter than the boss]. (Journal Entry #3, July 2010)

She was not preparing herself to be an iron lady in the business world out of her perception of the secret for successful women:

> 女强人一定不是因为像男人所以才会成功, 而是更会利用女性优势去击败自己的异性对手 … 没有女性特征是灾难, 现代女性不应该再刻意逞强做男人, 在男性化的路上走得太远了, 是时候回头拾一拾社会对女性最原始的定位和希望了 [Iron ladies are successful not because they are more like men but because they are good at using their advantages as women to beat their male rivals … it will be a disaster for a

woman without feminine features, modern women should no longer be so keen to appear as strong as men and go too far in masculinisation. It is high time that they came back to the most primitive positioning and expectations of women by society]. (Journal Entry #4, July 2010)

While she did provide a few potential employers that would be 对口 [compatible] to her major, including foreign enterprises, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Interview #5, 3 July 2010), she did not specify the industry or institution she would work in. A specific sector or business may not matter for Lan as she perceived her "personal niche" thus:

> I think I'm an "always match" person. Maybe I'm not that outstanding or distinctive, but I'm adaptable and can deal with all kinds of people. I'm willing to accept various kinds of assignments. (Personal Niche, July 2010)

4.5.2   Values and Perspective on International Business Professionals

Three years of learning Business English gave Lan some insights into the world of business and its inhabitants. International business involved cross-border business communication and activities with the overriding purpose of making a profit (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). Business relations were 既合作又对立 [both cooperative and conflicting] and that 没有永恒的朋友只有永恒的利益 [there are no permanent friends but permanent interests] (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). The relationship between businesses and their customers was not 纯粹的 [pure] because on the one hand businesses treated customers as God and tried to satisfy their needs or even create needs for them, while on the other hand they took advantage of their customers and gave priority to their own corporate interest (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). Decisions that initially appeared to her to be meaningless turned out to be strategic and led to good fortune. To run a business, one had to consider all factors such as the size of the market, the competitors, target consumers, capital

and resources available, management, and the workers. It occurred to her that there was an organisational hierarchy in business where only the boss had the power and responsibility to make decisions and the others just executed orders and followed the routines:

> 后来发现你真的要去一个公司或去一个团体里面, 很多情况下只有老板才是 decision-maker, 只需要他们有眼光就可以了, 你不需要有眼光, 呵呵, 你只是你更多的而是更多的只是听他们的命令, 然后去做你的事情, 然后你也不需要拿什么大的主意, 然后怎样怎样, 而且有的需要你做决定的时候, 可能就有一些有已经有一个流程在那儿了 [later it occurred to me that in a company or organisation, often it is only the boss who is the real decision-maker, only they need to have the vision, you don't, haha, you just follow their orders, and then do your job, you don't need to make big decisions, or whatever, even when there is a time you need to make a decision, there is likely to be a routine or procedure already in place]. (Interview #5, 3 July 2010)

She claimed to see through international business professionals:

> 我觉得可能之前是对对这 international business professional 他感觉可能就觉得他比较光鲜, 一比较光鲜, 然后, 会比较就是正面的会更多一点吧, 就正面点, 但学完以后, 就可能学完营销方面的东西或者学完商业的这些知识之后你发现其实商人是比较狡诈, 虽然之前也知道他们比较狡诈, 然后比较会诡辩的一群, 然后他们的那种目标, 就是就那种有一个目标然后一定去完成, 然后要走各种, 可能是捷径也好, 就用最效率最快去完成, 然后那种感觉, 就他们的那种行动力会比较强, 然后目标的那种感觉也比较强, 然后还有就是比较会谈判 [I felt the international business professional he gave me the impression of being quite bright and glorious, first quite bright and glorious, then, more positive about them, more positive, but after learning this, perhaps after learning marketing or knowledge of business you discover that business people are cunning and astute although I had known that they were cunning and astute, they are a sophistical pack, then their goals, that is if there is a goal they do all they can to attain it, by all means, perhaps shortcuts, that is, by the most efficient means and in the shortest time, then the feeling, that is they have strong executing abilities, then they have a strong sense of goals, then they are strong at negotiating]. (Interview #5, 3 July 2010)

They would act professional no matter whether they were really professional or not and were also会包装 [good at packaging] as she said:

> 有接触一些外企, 我觉得他们真得比较善于包装, 因为就是有一些
> 职称你看了之后你觉得是很大的一个职一个就是职位, 但其实就是
> 很低很基层的一些岗位, 所以我觉得他比较善于包装, 就让你也
> 让你员工觉得自己好像很有存在感, 然后那个价值, 还有你的位置
> 感会很强, 但其实但其实做的一些事情就是很蓝领的一些事儿   [I
> got contact with some foreign enterprises, I feel they are really good at
> packaging, because for some titles you may feel they are big that is top posi-
> tions, but they are in fact very lowly positions, so I feel they are good at
> packaging, this way they make you staff feel a strong sense of existence, of
> worth, and you have a strong sense of position, but actually what gets done
> is blue-collar work]. (Interview #5, 3 July 2010)

In her reflective account of her internship at a foreign enterprise, she made the criticism that she was given an inferior subject position and exploited (Zhang, 2013, p. 37):

> 我没有觉得我在变成他们中的一员, 而是觉得是我是被他们剥削的
> 一员, 呵呵 … 尤其是跟那些外国人接触的时候, 因为他本来你就是
> 他付你钱, 然后你要为他工作, 所以就是地位上本来就他们已经高
> 于你了, 而且你语言上要讲他们的语言, 就也是一种退让了已感觉
> 上, 就好像你的地位很低 [I didn't feel I was becoming one of them,
> instead I felt I was the one who was being exploited, haha … especially
> when I was in contact with the foreigners, because it was they who paid
> you, you worked for them, so regarding the status they were already higher
> than you, and you had to speak their language, this also felt like a conces-
> sion, you just felt as if you had a very low status]. (Interview #5, 3 July
> 2010)

Lan's classroom learning and real-life experience of international business professionals therefore brought to her a largely negative image of the international business world and its inhabitants, who were apparently capable but unlikable social beings.

4.5.3   Technical Competence

Lan's perception of the technical competence of international business professionals can be inferred from her images of them. A comparison of Lan's portrayal of international business professionals in her first life-story interview (27 November 2009) with the second one (3 July 2010) indicates that her understanding went through three stages. Before she began to learn Business English, which was the first of the three stages, the question of what international business professionals were like was of no concern to her. At the second stage, she began to develop an image of international business professionals, albeit still a blurry and abstract one. She defined an international business professional as "a person who can deal with international business after receiving business-related training and having necessary skills" (Journal Entry #1, 29 November 2009). International business professionals were glorious, high above and far from her, and with more positive qualities such as 有战略脑子 [having strategic brain] and being 灵活 [flexible]. They held resources and power and were influential. When she began to volunteer for business organisations or have internships, a mark of her third stage, her image of international business professionals became richer and more concrete. Their working environment, work relations, and practices, all this became specific and down to earth. And there were more job-related references such as schedule, workload, working with colleagues in English, and handling customers.

4.5.4   Discursive Competence

In Lan's view, international business professionals were different from ordinary people in speaking and writing. They were more "concise," more exact to avoid "ambiguities," and 必要还要透出一些人性化 [may display a human touch where necessary] (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). Her understanding of their discursive competence was expressed as an insight into the routine nature of workplace writing:

> 我觉得商务信函它那个比其它写作确实可能更简单一点就在于它
> 可以去搬, 因为就很多已经是很日常的一些东西了, 你就没必要再

去自己发挥了，可能你去公司工作他也是各种信有模版，然后你打开换不同的然后发出去就可以了，所以就这种东西就不需要发挥，就不想着去发挥 [I feel business letters may actually be simpler than other types of writing for one reason: In business writing you can lift, because much is routine, you don't need to innovate, when you work for a company, they may have various templates for letters, you open them, replace something, and then send it off, so such writing does not need innovation, no desire for it]. (Interview #3, 15 January 2010)

4.5.5   Characteristics of Lan's Emerging Professional Identity

Lan seems to have carved a mental image of members of her target community of practice when she said (Zhang, 2013, p. 35):

他们还是普通人只是，只是加入了他们跟这个，工作本身相关的一些东西，所以要表现得，我觉得说可能可能表现得不那么情绪化一些，更更中性一些吧，更理智理性一些 [they are still ordinary people, it's only that something relevant to their job is embodied in them, so they behave, I feel they perhaps behave less emotionally, more neutrally, and more sensible rational]. (Interview #1, 27 November 2009)

She took them as the other. They were capable of performing their business-related roles but were probably not likable. That is why they lost the image of 光鲜 [bright and glorious] (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). They were different but were increasingly within her reach as she hit upon her niche as an "always match" person. Her sort of feminist perspective on international business provided her with the space from which to critique, choose, and reconcile herself to being a non-follower of the mainstream pursuit of a competitive career in international business, at least for the time being. Her ambivalent and at times critical stance on international business professionals and their practices may account for the experiences of tension she felt on a number of occasions: She was unwilling to yield to the power imbalance between her and her prospective employer when they were negotiating her internship schedule (Interview #4, 3 July 2010); she preferred

to write short pieces while the business plan for her business writing assignment had a prescribed length; she felt the vision statement in her business plan that she wrote was 太矫情了… 就是把自己说得太好了 [extremely face-lifting … that is showing myself as if I were perfect] (Interview #4, 3 July 2010). She concluded that she did not like to write about business topics but preferred to discuss cultural topics such as European culture (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). In other words, she was unwilling to take up the positioning she was subjugated to either on site or in the virtual workplace as created by her university assignment of writing in the business genres.

4.6   Discussion

The five focal Business English students' experiences of learning Business English were shown to be a process of professional identity construction. Despite the manifestation of multiple differences across the students, they were all navigating the external world to achieve a match between their ability, personality, values, and beliefs, and the profession to which they would commit themselves. In the search they all developed a more or less professional goal in the business world, which began as something vague or generic and evolved into an area of specialisation such as finance (for Nan), marketing and sales (for An), NGO for environmental protection and cultural exchange (for Dong), and international marketing (for Mei). Evan though Lan did not decide on or actually care about a speciality area, she was aware that her work would involve international settings. They formed images of the international business world and viewed its values and practices in positive or negative light. Also evident was their understanding of the technical and discursive competences of international business professionals. For example, all five focal students developed an acute awareness of the international setting of their future workplace and the need for far sight, flexibility, and intercultural communication skills. More importantly, their thinking about international business professionals' technical and discursive competences was mediated by scientific concepts rather than intuitive lay terms. The four factors—professional

goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence—were underlying their conception of international business professionals as well as their evaluation of both self and other in the business world and thus represented what professional identity meant for them. In other words, professional identity had psychological reality for the Business English students and came as the sum effect of the four constituting factors. The construction of professional identity is thus a realistic goal in the university setting via the teaching of professional expertise and relevant professional genres (Bhatia, 2004).

The four constituting factors were also found to be interdependent in constituting professional identity for the Business English students. Values and perspective on international business professionals appear to be a pivotal factor in that it tends to shape professional goal. When the student held a positive perspective on the target profession, the professional goal functioned as a pulling force. Otherwise, a negative perspective would put the student off. For example, An had no definite professional goal as she opted to explore herself and the business world in order to find her ideal profession. She also did not treat international business professionals as a special group of inaccessible people. Dong was disillusioned by the oppositions he observed in the business world, in particular foreign enterprises in China, and decided not to pursue a business career. In contrast, Mei consistently embraced the goal of working in marketing and public relations for a prestigious international company and maintained a positive image of international business professionals. Nan formed his professional goal of working in the finance and investment sector and was pragmatic about the status quo of the business world. Lan perceived herself as an "always match person" who would be needed by any institution and did not consider any specific profession as an urgent concern. More importantly, Mei and Nan saw international business as a profound and dynamic field requiring continual study in contrast with Dong and An, who compared international business to a complicated machine whose complexity would dissolve with time and with no lasting inspiring quality. This result concurs with Watts's (1987) study of African American PhD medical students whose values and theoretical perspectives on medicine had a

determining effect on their professional identity. It also corroborates Ortega (2009), who nicely captures the sociocultural value language learners pursue in their learning endeavour:

> For many, perhaps most additional second language learners, it is about succeeding in attaining material, symbolic and affective returns that they desire for themselves. It is also about being considered by others as worthy social beings. (p. 250)

When professional goal and values and perspective on international business professionals were in place, the sense of technical competence and discursive competence served to enhance the pulling force of values and perspective towards professional goal. The five focal students all developed considerable insights into technical competence and discursive competence and attached much importance to these two factors in relation to the target specialisation and took them as essential for being professional. Nan and Dong are two good cases in point. As Nan was gaining a strong grasp of technical and discursive knowledge of the business profession, his professional goal of working as a financial specialist also became firmer. Conversely, for Dong, the sense of inadequacy in technical and discursive competences and possible marginalisation for Business English majors, coupled with his negative perspective on international business professionals in China, alienated him from a career in the business world. It follows that technical and discursive competences for international business were no less significant for constituting professional identity for the Business English students, a finding that is resonant with Smart and Brown's (2002, p. 135) argument for the "synergistic relationship between expertise and a sense of professional identity."

The rich negotiability demonstrated by the Business English students is worth noting. In and through learning Business English, they were not only experiencing identification in the sense of accumulating resources and experiences that would equip them for the world of international business. They were also invoking their first linguaculture (Risager, 2013) discourse such as the Confucian egalitarian discourse, gendered discourse, and the current social discourse of equity and equality as in contemporary China to interact with the Utilitarian discourse of international business

and the globalisation discourse underlying their Business English programme. The interaction between these discourses brought about quite individuated interpretations of key notions such as honesty (as a virtue or commodity for exchange of other gains) and purpose of international business (e.g., for making profit or achieving self-actualisation). The diversity in their professional goal, values and perspective on international business professional, technical competence, and discursive competence may also be a reflection of their negotiation with the "economies of meaning" (Wenger, 1998, p. 198) that were current in the discourses. Their experience of professional identity construction is thus a productive process (Gao, Zhao, Cheng, & Zhou, 2007) or transformative for the Business English students when we follow Wenger (1998), who argues:

> Education, in its deepest sense and at whatever age it takes place, concerns the opening of identities—exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state. Whereas training aims to create an inbound trajectory targeted at competence in a specific practice, education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of the self. It places students on an outbound trajectory toward a broad field of possible identities. Education is not merely formative—it is transformative. (p. 263)

That the five focal students manifested their professional identity in distinct ways may be taken as a positive of the Business English programme. Yet the fact that it ended up with some outstanding students, in particular Dong, opting out of the business profession is worth reflecting on. This will be discussed in detail with reference to communities of practice building and curricular intervention in Chap. 8.

This chapter indicates that identities in a learning situation can be complex. The five Business English students narrated their cultural identity, that is, their perception of themselves in relation to their first linguaculture (Chinese). Mei and Nan were apparently assuming a culture-free professional identity by embracing international business as competitive and being pragmatic about hegemonic practices in the business world. While Dong acknowledged the power of English and the US dollar in international trade, he maintained his perception of himself as a Chinese with the ambition of using English to spread Chinese culture and serve a

global cause. Lan was aware of her cultural identity as a Chinese, which was taken as a sort of protection from an aggressive foreign business world, while An fused her international perspective with her Chinese self. The attitudes of the five students towards English may also be attributed to their cultural identity. While Dong, An, and Lan expressed concern that their English was not native-like, Nan and Mei were comfortable with themselves as users of Business English as a Lingua Franca (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Koester, 2010) without worrying about the linguistic code itself. Interestingly, Nan and Mei were the two students who were cherishing goals of working in the business profession and holding positive images of the business world and its inhabitants.

Gendered identity was also relevant to the five focal students' experiences of learning Business English. Unlike An and Lan, Mei did not invoke it. Nor did the two focal male students Dong and Nan. For Mei, gender may appear to be neutral in the workplace without noticing the gender discrimination that has been reported in research (e.g., Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Nan and Dong, who were in the default advantageous position in the male-preferred job market in China, may not be concerned with gender as an issue. At the time of the study, there was a widespread message that in the recruitment process, local males were preferred over non-local males (applicable to Dong and Nan), preferred over local females (applicable to Mei), and preferred over non-local females (applicable to An and Lan). In their apparent silence, Dong, Nan, and Mei may nonetheless be reproducing hegemonic gendered practices in the Chinese workplace.

There were intricate patterns of interaction among professional identity, gendered identity, and cultural identity, resulting in quite unique manifestations of professional identity for the five focal students (Zhang, 2013). For example, cultural identity was subsumed by professional identity for Mei and Nan, were in confrontation for Dong and Lan, and co-existed in harmony for An. Some identities can be conducive to other identities. For example, Lan resorted to her gendered identity to construct "an 'always match'" or a less aggressive professional identity which gave her the peace of mind as a student of Business English and a business practitioner on the job. Some other identities can be problematic for the students. For example, Dong's emerging professional identity was

complicated by his cultural identity to the extent that he decided not to pursue a business career. An was ambivalent about a career in sales and marketing for women due to her observation of gendered identities. That professional identity, gendered identity, and cultural identity were in interaction indicates that learning Business English was practically negotiating multiple identities for the students. Effective management of the multiple identities by students may be the key to their success of productive learning. An appreciation of the multiple identities and their interplay enriches and deepens our understanding of the purposes and experiences of learning Business English, which is invaluable for providing a Business English education.

This chapter has implications for ESP learner needs analysis. Subjective needs of which identity is often taken as a part are often overshadowed in the sense that if they are mentioned at all, they are cursorily addressed, or are not usually delineated clearly in ESP teaching. This study shows that identity plays a significant role in learning. Professional identity, for example, either as Ought-to L2 self or Ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2009), was a powerful motivator for all the five focal students, at least in part of their journey of learning Business English. Belcher and Lukkarila (2011) point out the difficulty involved in carrying out identity-relevant needs analysis for ESP practitioners. It is shown in this chapter that this concern can be addressed by drawing on student profile, narrative interviews, student journals, and writing about personal niche as part of the writing course in obtaining information on the multiple identities students experience. Identity-focused needs analysis can take the four factors for professional identity as pointers for observation and monitoring in the process of learning. This process should also take into account the various social, gendered, and cultural discourses operating in the learning situation to gain an adequate description of ESP learners' identity-related needs.

While it is a valid critique that identity is more than "interpretive recounting" (Hyland, 2010, p. 162), this study demonstrates that narrative inquiry remains an important approach to researching identity issues. In their account of their experiences, narrators represent to themselves and the researcher who they are and want to be. Through a narrative analysis, researchers are able to unveil how identities are (co)-talked into being (Cortazzi, 2001). It should be

recognised that the professional identity for the Business English students proves dynamic and evolving. The longitudinal design allows us to capture the dynamism to a considerable extent and provides significant snapshots of the students' experiences of professional identity construction.

4.7   Conclusion

This study has made inquiries into the lived experiences of the cohort of Business English undergraduate students in China. It indicates that when English learning takes place in an ESP setting, it is appropriate to consider the relation to the profession (academic or workplace), that is, identification and negotiability with the social categories of the profession, as a key dimension of learners and their identities. Professional identity should thus be considered as an important dimension of needs analysis and carefully unpacked in terms of its constituting factors for ESP students. This study also suggests that identities relevant to Business English education are complex, which calls for due attention to the relevant identities and their interaction in ESP needs analysis and fulfilment.

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5

Mode, Access, and Agency in Participatory Learning

The professional identity for the Business English students emerged while they were living through their Business English programme. This chapter concerns their participation in three communities of practice with the focus on their modes of participation, access, and agency, as well as the impact of their participation on their emerging professional identity.

5.1   Three Interlocking Communities of Practice

The five focal students identified three communities of practice as relevant to their lived experiences, namely their university, their student clubs and associations where they undertook extracurricular activities, and various business institutions or organisations for their internship. These three communities of practice each played a distinct role in the students' construction of professional identity and may be referred to as their mediating, transitory, and target communities of practice.

5.1.1 The Mediating Community of Practice

The Business English programme engendered an identifiable community of practice which was characterised by the joint enterprise of pursuing knowledge, skills, and language for international business, mutual engagement between the students and teachers in the sense that the students were guided by their teachers to acquire technical and discursive competences relevant to international business, and shared repertoire including, for example, assignments, genres in academic and business disciplines, and university rules and regulations. This community of practice played a significant mediating role in the students' professional identity construction. It was the "middle ground" (Basturkmen, 2010, p. 12) or the "pathway" (Bruce, 2011, p. 9) for the Business English students as it provided them with a vicarious business experience as well as resources important for their construction of professional identity.

The Business English curriculum was designed to expose the students to disciplinary knowledge, practice, and language for international business and delivered by staff with expertise in business disciplines, practices, and discourses. Take the business writing courses for example. The instructor Leo, a teaching international business practitioner, took great pains to scaffold the writing of business letters and business plans for the students. What the students learned in this community of practice mediated their thinking about international business and performing of business tasks such as writing in business genres, which will be the focus of Chap. 6. For example, Dong, who used not to attach much importance to disciplinary knowledge (Interview #1, 17 November 2009), learned a lesson from his experience of writing his business plan:

> 一开始我觉得 SWOT 分析呀, 什么市场细分呀都是扯 … 但是我真正我要自己写一个东西的时候, 我发现这个东西是很有用的, 就是说, 它会帮你想, 它会帮你想很多东西, 就说你自己想的话你不会想你的 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, 而它说的很有道理的, 就是你的 strengths 和 weaknesses 是 internal 的, 但是 opportunities 和 threats 是 external 的, 所以它是有一定道理的, 所以我觉得就是可能你真正通过学和操作起来的话, 自己的一些想法是不对的, 不全面的 [at first I felt SWOT analysis, market segmentation, all such was

nonsense … but when I actually began to write, I found this very useful, that is, it helps you to think, it helps you to think of many things, when you think by yourself you won't invoke your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and what it says is very sensible, that is your strengths and weaknesses are internal, but opportunities and threats are external, so it is quite sensible, so I feel maybe through your real study and operation, some of my own ideas are incorrect, partial]. (Interview #6, 6 July 2010)

That is, Dong began to appreciate and follow scientific concepts rather than live by everyday common-sense concepts in his participation in the community of practice. With the experiences and knowledge thereof acquired, four out of five of the Business English students reported no significant difficulty transiting to the international business profession as in their internships. The Business English programme may therefore be referred to as the students' mediating community of practice.

The mediating community of practice also provided a range of possibilities for self-hood (Ivanič, 1998) or prototypical professional identity for the Business English students. "International business" is a broad umbrella term covering a wide range of commercial and organisational activities (Chen & Wang, 2009; Zorn & Simpson, 2009) and would therefore allow for diversity in manifestations of professional identity, as was indeed the case for the Business English students who formed divergent professional goals, for example, marketing for Mei and finance and investment for Nan, differential orientations to the values of and perspective on international business professionals, and varied understandings of technical and discursive competences relevant to their career choice.

5.1.2   The Transitory Community of Practice

The student clubs and associations the Business English students participated in to fulfil their extracurricular requirements provided a transitory stage for them in that they were students but needed to interact with external business contacts for business purposes. An's description of her involvement in the student organisations was typical of the Business English students:

> In my freshman and sophomore year, I used to take part in the Association of … one of the very one of the most influential student group in our university, yeah, when I in the sophomore year, I become the general secretary of the association, yeah, student group in … is very independent, yeah, not only in the organization but also in the financial aspect, yeah, they raise money for themselves, yeah, and they organize the whole activity, like some forums, or lectures, yeah, first you should have a plan, and what the procedures is, and you have to consider the financial aspect, you should have money to hold these activities, and others will not give you money, the school will not, and also you go out and have some negotiations with the business world, yeah, so maybe you can give the sponsorship to the or do, you can do some advertisement for them in the campus, yeah, then they give you money and the whole processes can practice you a lot. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

As she acknowledged in her blog text, "student organizations in China are run like a company" (Blog Entry #1, 6 October 2010). In other words, the Business English students were juggling the student role and professional role in this community of practice which was in effect the site where their emerging professional identity was rehearsed. Mei's account of her experience of managing a few large-scale projects in her student union is helpful for understanding this rehearsing role:

> I feel that it is just like a professional businesspeople need to do in his real society. … I was responsible for um public relation activities, when you do public relation activities you feel that it is um it is um very similar to the marketing process, it said first you should identify your target sponsors, just like you need to identify your target consumers and then you should make your um projects attractive to those sponsors, so you must persuade your um persuade your sponsors to sponsor to make donation to your projects, just like you persuade your consumers to buy your product, and then you will design a unique programme for your sponsors, it is like um they offer um provide money or material support for your projects, you make um promotion in the campus for the sponsors, yeah, I think it is just also like um the businesspeople who offer who offer the products to their consumers and their consumers um exchange those products with their

money, yeah, I think that because um public relation activities is relevant with external relationships, so your target audience or target participations are mm are mainly those businesspeople of company, so when you make cooperation with them you must follow the business process or um the business principle when you do these public relation activities. (Interview #5, 5 July 2010, italics mine)

In this account, Mei was turning individual anecdotes into generic understanding. With the change of reference from "I" to "you," she projected herself as someone describing the routine practices of seeking sponsorship and marketing a service. Her deployment of expert knowledge and the approach to the knowledge demonstrated herself as almost an expert in marketing rather than a newcomer to international business. The student organisations hence may be referred to as the Business English students' transitory community of practice which created the space for them to trial their emerging professional identity before they took on professional roles with serious personal and corporate stakes.

5.1.3 The Target Community of Practice

The internships provided the Business English students their target community of practice. They were peripheral and legitimate participants in business organisations or institutions assuming various professional roles with both personal and corporate consequences. The target community of practice served to validate and/or enhance the students' emerging professional identity. Through their participation in this community of practice, the students came to realise that international business professionals are specialised in certain areas and possess technical and discursive competences in their specialty areas. An articulated this well. Before she had her internships, she gave a list of general categories of qualities and abilities such as professional knowledge, consideration, communication skills, good English, and practice when she was asked about qualities of international business professionals (Interview #1, 10 November 2009). Her depiction of them was in more specific terms after she had had her internships:

> Open-minded, good language skills, em, professional, I mean a professional I mean they are they have they know his position very well, I mean for if for human resource, he can really do well in his position, for marketing, he will do well in his own, yeah, this is professional, he may not be suitable for all positions, but he can do well in his own area. (Interview #4, 12 June 2010)

Open-mindedness and specialisation stood out as two characterising attributes of international business professionals for her. She also came to realise the two-way match between a professional/mindsets and their employer/job positions:

> Different positions they want different people, and different people also are suitable for different positions, so it's not a matter that has only one direction, it's not just that the employers select the employee, the employee should also select the employer, so otherwise if you enter a company after one year or two year you oh I don't like this I quit, so it's not a good one, so I think it's a match that is mutually, yeah, two directions. (Interview #4, 12 June 2010)

Her recognition of specialisation and a match between the job and the person is a significant step in her emerging professional identity as a reconciliation of her craving for "a versatile person" with specialisation in the workplace (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). It may explain why she was keen to explore herself at university—to find the ideal specialisation that would best match her—and why she was eventually catching a "more clear picture" of her future (Interview #4, 12 June 2010).

It was in the target community of practice that the students' emerging professional identity was validated, in particular for Nan and Lan. Nan had a successful interview with the human resources (HR) manager of a US company organising internships at American investment banks for international students and felt gratified as he said:

> That is just like a different world, yeah, people come from a different world, but he he agree with you, and he em he showed his mm showed his 就是表达对你的这种认可 [that is show recognition of you]. (Interview #1, 27 November 2009)

Nan also dealt in stocks. He reviewed this experience with the following remarks:

别人问你能说得一套一套的, 有自己的看法, 这个是一个转变吧, 然后再回来学 Business English 的话会觉得学起来有一个互相印证的过程 [when you are asked by others, you can explain in detail, you have your own views, this is one change, then when you come back to learning Business English, you feel your learning and your practice are mutually validating each other]. (Interview #5, 4 July 2010)

What Nan got from the target community of practice is thus a voice of his own and the ownership of some meaning having currency in the Chinese securities market.

Similarly, Lan found her engagement in her target community of practice was a process of legitimation. When she began to intern at various businesses and organisations, she received favourable comments such as 比较稳 [quite reliable] and 靠得住 [trustworthy] from her colleagues and was called on for any emergency shortage of hands (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). She came to realise how she might fit in as a contributor rather than as an onlooker. She was both other-regulated and self-regulated (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011) as she went beyond taking the staff's favourable remarks about her performance and character as assurance of her worth (i.e., other-regulated) to her ascription of herself as an "always match" person (i.e., self-regulated). The enriched means of mediation and the ascribed identity put her mind at peace.

The target community of practice, in some cases, may be a source of alienation. Dong came to see a set of 矛盾 [contradictions] in employees in foreign enterprises. The contradictions are summarised as a set of oppositions which are included in Table 4.1 in Chap. 4. Due to these oppositions, he regarded the professionals as 很假 [living unnaturally], a feeling which was disconcerting to him (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). These contradictions in real life contributed to alienating Dong from the profession his training was intended to prepare him for.

The target community of practice also provided the possible worlds the students could belong through imagination and alignment when they were participating in their mediating community of practice. In their classroom

learning, the Business English students' imagination was not wild guessing but based on both recontextualised professional business practices as enabled by the Business English curriculum and their experiences in the field. For example, An was able to defy her writing instructor's criticism of her shorter-than-required mission and vision statement in her business plan partly due to her observation that some companies had long and detailed mission and vision statements while others did not and that some jobs required following instructions while others encouraged creativity (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). She also added the slogan "We Provide You Not Just Job, But A Career In UIBE Importers" to the end of her job posting as she had seen such slogans in pamphlets from businesses (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). Mei and Lan both tended to use templates in their writing for their mediating community of practice as they believed this was workplace practice. Mei recalled what she learned from her mentors:

> 他们的目标就是说, 呃 boss 给了一个什么样模版就一定要沿用, 就最好不要说你在这方面就不要 creative了, 就是因为你这样的话也便于他看, 就比如说他给你这个格式你按这格式写报告, 但是你要把这报告格式改了他可能就不容易从里边找到信息 [their goal is to, um the template the boss gives must be followed, you'd better not be creative at this, that's because if so it'll be easier for the boss to read it, for example he gives you this format you follow this format in writing the report, but if you change the format he may not easily find the information in it]. (Interview #2, 30 December 2009)

5.1.4 Interaction Between the Three Communities of Practice

An, Dong, Mei, Nan, and Lan lived through the three distinct communities of practice—mediating community of practice, transitory community of practice, and target community of practice. The mediating community of practice, as the name suggests, provided the resources and vicarious experiences that helped them to construct their professional identity. The transitory community of practice allowed them to rehearse their emerging professional identity despite their status as a student. The target community of practice gave them the opportunity to see their pro-

fessional identity validated, enhanced, or occasionally alienated. The role of the target community of practice in validating the students' emerging professional identity will be discussed further in Chap. 7, which focuses the international business professionals' reception of the professional identity the students enacted in their writing in a variety of business genres.

5.2 Patterns of Participation

The five focal students differed from each other in their modes of participation, that is, what they engaged in and how, what they imagined, and what they aligned with and how in the three communities of practice. Each one represented a unique pattern, namely An's imaginative engagement to explore all possibilities, Dong's critical engagement and disillusion, Mei's compliant engagement to prepare for the future profession, Nan's tactical engagement for the career goal, and Lan's peripheral engagement to discover her own niche. These differences across the five focal students had significant impact on their emerging professional identity.

5.2.1 An's Imaginative Engagement to Explore All Possibilities

An participated in the three communities of practice to explore the best match between her and her future profession. She actively engaged in and aligned with her transitory and target communities. She was involved in a number of extracurricular activities at her university such as taking the position of the general secretary of a major student association (Interview #1, 10 November 2009). She undertook a variety of part-time jobs and internships in businesses and found them useful. For example, she commented on her internship at a big agency assisting students in their applications for overseas study:

> Although what you do is limited in one department, you can see what others are doing, you can see the operation of the whole company, yeah, and this all adds to my experience. (Interview #1, 10 November 2009)

Such engagement provided her with access to the daily operations of businesses and knowledge of the corporate structure. It also rid her of illusions of professions such as human resources and brought home to her the importance of specialisation for professionals in business organisations.

However, she stood out in her mediating community of practice with the characteristic of imaginative engagement. She was a conscientious student. When she found that her English pronunciation made her hard to be understood by her classmates in Year 1, she improved herself by reading English aloud and imitating tape recordings every morning until she was commended by her classmates on her pronunciation and interesting ideas. However, she experienced a series of tensions when she was in Year 3. She had several serious arguments about the assignments with her writing instructor. The instructor had given explicit instructions for writing, but she tended to produce types of texts she thought were more appropriate. For example, the instructor was asking for a cover letter for a job application and she produced a personal statement for applying to an overseas university programme. When the instructor assigned the class to produce an outline, she wrote pages of texts. When she got a fail, she was upset and complained that the instructor was not understanding and was "rigid" (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). For the business plan, she would rather fail or get a poor score than succumb to her instructor's specific requirements such as the mission and vision statement being one-page long. She switched from a more or less completed business plan to the one she felt "passionate" to write from scratch (Interview #5, 4 July 2010).

The tensions may derive from her imagination of the mediating community of practice and her insistence on engaging in her version of this community of practice rather than the official one as conceived by the Business English curriculum. An held the consistent idea of the university being a "free environment" (Interview #1, 10 November 2009) which opened to students various "possibilities" of making their own choices and decisions (Interview #4, 12 June 2010). She resented specialisation as something contrary to a university education questioning the notion of education as training for a particular career or acquiring a university degree by asking:

While such a degree may help to prepare an individual for a particular field of employment, how much emphasis does the curriculum, or the student, place on "developing mentally, morally, or aesthetically"? (Journal Entry, 4 December 2009)

She led a university-sponsored research project investigating the Business English programme and took to task the goal of the programme: to produce 通才 [general talents] or 专才 [specialists] (Report, November 2009). She challenged the default programme goal of preparing students for foreign enterprises at her university (Zhang, 2013, p. 39):

我觉得就是…有一个缺点， 就是给所有的学生都是固定的一个思维, 思路, 就是进外企, 然后, 进公司, 进什么顶多进政府啊什么的, 我觉得人生可以有还有很多, 很多很多可能, 为什么就是一定去做这个呢? [I feel there is a defect in … that is, it gives students one fixed mindset, train of thought, that is to get into foreign enterprises, then, get into companies, and next to the best choice, the government, and the like, I think life may have many, many possibilities, why should one be bound for this path?]. (Interview #2, 30 December 2009)

She recognised herself as an individual, which she recorded in her journal:

Individual. It's recently that I began to feel the power of this word. Entering university means little protection from parents and fighting for one's own future instead of just getting high marks. This semester everything is in order and life seems to have found its right path. The word "individualism" become clearer and clearer in my mind. Although I am always busy handling every tiny thing myself, I gain pleasure, more or less.

I am growing up; I am experiencing; I am living. That's it. (Journal Entry, 29 March 2010)

She was defiant of her writing instructor's criticism of her shorter-than-required mission and vision statement in her business plan on this account (Zhang, 2013, p. 38).

I think it's a paper for a course in a college, it's not in the workplace, it's not, you know, the the assignment is quite open, you can write whatever you like, but in the workplace, it's not, the boss told you the idea, and you write

for HIM, so in this way, I will write as the boss instructs me to do, yeah, I will do according to HIS reading habits, or what he told me I will just follow it and do not have my creativity on this, I'll not expand on his explanation or something, I just write according to his instructions. (Interview #5, 4 July 2010)

To An, writing at university served the purpose of exploring possibilities while to write in the workplace was to complete a task set by the boss, an observation remarkably similar to descriptions of university writing as conscious and purposeful learning and of discursive practices in the workplace as getting the job done (Beaufort, 1999). Although she respected the writing instructor and perceived that following instructions was a practice in the workplace, she insisted that exploring various possibilities by oneself and never giving up without having taken the first step, at least at university, was more important, which she said when she was reflecting on her business plan:

About the importance of following instructions, and I know that, but it's not just what I want to do in this stage you know, that's the difference … now I just think that, you know, maybe I can maybe years later, I'll think, yeah, you're totally right, and this is quite quite important, but I want to learn my own, not just from the instruction, you know, you tell me, but you CAN'T convince me totally, from heart, because I didn't learn myself, I didn't learn from the lesson myself, and I have to go through that stage myself. (Interview #5, 4 July 2010)

In other words, the series of tensions were more of a reflection of An's imaginative engagement in her mediating community of practice: an experience of all-round development and thus freedom to explore against the backdrop of preparation for a specialised field and thus pressure to converge to conventions as is the default programme goal. That is, she did not align herself with the (official and powerful version of) mediating community of practice she was situated in. It just happened that the tensions found their explosive expression in the business writing classroom where there was a mismatch between the student and the teacher with reference to the relevant community of practice—the writing instructor was applying the expectations of the workplace while the student was invoking those of a liberal education. An's experience also suggests the

usefulness of student writing as a site of students' identity construction, struggle, and negotiation, which will be the concern of Chap. 6.

An's modes of participation in her three communities of practice impacted on her in a number of significant ways. Her imaginative engagement without alignment in her mediating community of practice created the space where she was able to explore her professional identity with a considerable amount of autonomy, most notably to the effect that her professional goal was allowed to evolve. Her engagement and alignment in her transitory and target communities of practice enabled her to validate her emerging professional identity and, as such, shaped the direction of her participation in her mediating community of practice by successively taking up or discarding certain professional goal choices or by invoking professional practices to support her discursive practices. An was peculiar in that she was able to feel and articulate the in-built tension in the Business English curriculum (professional socialisation embedded in an academic programme). More importantly, by maintaining the distinction within the mediating community of practice and aligning with the transitory and target communities of practice, she was able to navigate her way through the inherent tension. The three modes of participation therefore facilitated her crossing of the boundaries of the communities of practice.

5.2.2   Dong's Critical Engagement and Disillusion

Dong participated most conscientiously in all the three communities of practice through engagement and for most of the time alignment. He made a five-stage account of his experience of learning Business English (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). The first stage was one of 震撼 [shock] as many words and expressions in the course book for speaking and listening in Business English were unknown to him and had completely different meanings. He also felt the pressure from his classmates who were also graduates from language high schools. This provided the motivation for him to work hard on improving his listening and speaking. The second stage was the gradual loss of fresh appeal as he felt bored, but he thought that he was still learning something meaningful. This stage was followed by what he called a 危险 [dangerous] period when he felt that he was

learning nothing useful and was merely having a taste of everything. The next stage was when he began to have internships. He was struck by his incompetency in the business world. He felt that his English was absolutely not good and that he was lacking in professional knowledge adequate for working in foreign enterprises. This happened at the same time as he was writing the business plan. He felt frustrated with his limited vocabulary and sentence patterns for the writing task. It was also at this stage that he felt a stronger sense of the prospect of Business English majors playing marginalised roles in foreign enterprises. He suspected that his earlier goal of being an interpreter for a boss was unrealistic as few bosses would need an interpreter, and in the case that they did need one, the bosses would not be 太牛 [very prestigious]. At the fifth stage, when he had one year to go before graduation, he felt deeply puzzled by what he would do and what he could do. And more than ever before, he developed the burning desire to learn more English and to gain more specialised knowledge. He was eventually disillusioned by both the oppositions he observed in the business world and the prospect of marginalisation for Business English majors in it and opted not to join in.

Dong's extensive and intensive participation in the three communities of practice may be described as critical engagement. In the mediating community of practice, this feature is illustrated in his reflection on the learning of his first Business English word, "rocket":

> There was a small test in the first month, and the teacher read the Chinese meaning, was, the Chinese meaning is 飞速上升 [rising rapidly], I don't know, I don't know (laughing tone) I am not quite sure about because there are lots of words to to in English to express this meaning, and I just uh I just write rise rapidly, and when after the exam I asked what they write, which word, they told me it was rocket, I was surprised, when we learned this word? and he told me that it was the first word in this book, and (coughing) at that point I know that it was very important to know the difference when English word came to the business world, of course I think at that moment, from that experience, that's a very small part, maybe for most other people, for most of students, they would just forget this part, forget this experience because it was just one word, in one test, in one small test, quite, uh, it will not become a memory, not worth to be a memory, but for me, I know it is very important for me to know that English words

can have quite different meaning in the business world and also that, I think from that moment I think that Business English sometimes can be very interesting because rocket just means rise rapidly, yeah, it's quite, uh, how to say, you can imagine that why rocket can express this meaning, I think that's quite interesting. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

The gap that Dong noticed in his knowledge of business vocabulary was so shocking to him that he was "motivated" to study really hard (Interview #6, 6 July 2010).

If Dong's critical engagement in the mediating community of practice was targeted at technical and discursive competences, he was reflecting on himself in relation to his (potential) competitors in the transitory and target communities of practice. Dong narrated his experience of competing with a law student in a high-stake English speech contest as the winner would accompany the president of China in attending an important international event. Overwhelmed by the excellent performance of his rival who was able to make an impromptu speech with any three words from anyone, he said:

I know that uh the English major, the best English speaker may not be an English major, so if you want to do the best, if you want to be the best in your area, you must try very hard because everyone in other areas can be strong can be even stronger than your own profession. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

Another experience was his teamwork with business major students in a business planning competition. While they were able to see structures in the business case and come up with arguments, he barely went beyond an intuitive understanding of the text:

While I was reading this case, I uh just cannot find out the whole structure, although I can read very fast, there was no new vocabulary for me, but (coughing) because when we were in a room like this, we just read this case together, they they just quite often ask me oh what this word mean what that word mean, but after when they read it, they have a structure in mind, they just build some structures, they know how to solve their problem, they they have lot of uh diagraphs to help themselves to express their mind,

but when I just finish reading this case (coughing) my my way of thinking was just very initiative, not from not academically. (Interview #1, 17 November 2009)

These experiences in the transitory community of practice alerted Dong to the fragile comparative advantages of Business English majors, which were brought home to him when he had his internships, which gave him the opportunity to observe or even experience the real life in the workplace. Two days after his internship at a foreign bank in Beijing, he described the staff, using expressions such as strong interpersonal and communication skills, friendly, highly efficient, writing in English 信手拈来 [naturally and effortlessly], conciseness and clarity in writing, working overtime, automatic, separation of the public and the private affairs in the workplace, and devotion to work, and acclaimed, "真不知道原来还有这样的中国人" ["It has never occurred to me that there are Chinese like these"] (Interview #4, 16 January 2010). Such exposure to the target community of practice brought him a sense of inadequacy, which deepened when he reflected on his business letters and plans. "The letters are too simple and basic," he said (Interview #4, 16 January 2010). He lamented that if the sample business plans that his writing instructor provided were awarded 100%, his own business plan 可能也就刚及格 … 可能甚至还及不了格 [can merely pass … may even fail] (Interview #5, 6 July 2010).

The exposure also gave him an insider's view of foreign enterprises in China as summarised in the set of oppositions in Table 4.1. Most importantly, Dong reckoned that Business English majors would have a gloomy job prospect in foreign enterprises. For him, to qualify as an international business professional, one must have international connections, go abroad on business or for conferences from time to time, have foreign-oriented tasks and responsibilities, and perform the central business of the company rather than play completely auxiliary roles (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). He found that Business English students and business majors differed in a number of ways (see Table 5.1 for a summary), which would result in Business English majors being marginalised in foreign enterprises (Interview #4, 16 January 2010).

Table 5.1 Differences between Business English majors and business majors

Business English majors	Business majors
Intuitive and knowing words and expressions in reading business texts	Rational and able to build up structures and logical arguments
English as the only expertise	English as a tool to help work Business major as added value
English proficiency likely to weaken on the job	English proficiency likely to improve on the job
Difficult to acquire the expertise of business to the level of business majors	Easy to take over the comparative advantage of Business English majors
Marginalised role on the job	Central role on the job

Dong also reflected on the power of building interpersonal relationships and taking an individual approach to each client in business operations. When he was an intern at an insurance institution in Hong Kong, he felt puzzled by the empty offices during business hours and wondered how the insurance company made money. He was told by his mentor what it was like to do business with clients in the trade. The selling of insurance was treated as a type of 理财 [asset management]. The staff made phone calls, went to the hospital to see their sick clients, and made individual visits to clients during the festive season for business. When their clients were in low moods, the staff would not talk business but try to cheer them up. When they made a fortune and were happy, the staff then brought up the business deal. Dong came to the conclusion that the staff had to be sensitive to the condition of each client and deal with them "with individual approach" (Interview #1, 17 November 2009).

Dong's engagement in the three communities of practice was thus conscientiously critical with only occasional off-tracks. Through critical engagement, directed at himself first in relation to technical and discursive competences for international business in the mediating community of practice and then in relation to his (prospective) competitors in the transitory and target communities of practice, he gained a deeper insider's view of all three communities of practice and accumulated rich resources and experiences necessary for constructing his professional identity. He also aligned with the practices except in the target community of practice. For example, he was conscientious in his assignments and followed

the instructors, as he said, "I just follow the instructions, of the book and the teacher's advice," when writing his business plan (Interview #5, 6 July 2010). His critical engagement and alignment in the mediating community of practice gave him exposure to international business and deepened his understanding of the profession as he said that taking the Business English programme "give[s] me some opportunity to know the business, international business, and I know more about it" (Interview #6, 6 July 2010). His excellence in his academic work, in turn, won for him various opportunities to take part in competitions with top students from other universities and to intern at prestigious business organisations. His critical reflection on the potential use of Business English learning in broader areas than the business world led him to expand into an increasingly larger space.

5.2.3 Mei's Compliant Engagement to Prepare for the Future Profession

Mei made a distinction between her three communities of practice and participated in each in the mindset of a willing novice or in accommodationist (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998) terms. She articulated the differences between university and the workplace as follows:

> 大学校园里相对于社会上其实要容易生活得多而且压力要小很多而且在这个过程中你可以想很多东西，你可以犯错误，你可以成长 [it is actually easier to live a life on campus than in society and you have less pressure and in this process you may think a lot, you may make mistakes, you may grow]. (Interview #2, 30 December 2009)
>
> When you stand in the real society everything um you're confronted with can only be um dealt with um can only be coped um just by yourself, and there is no one can really help you. (Interview #5, 5 July 2010)
>
> At present I was I am a student in the campus, and the surrounding environment can be different from the real society, and because the environment can really um influence your um thinking, influence your behaviour, I think um sometimes the environment um the environment the great change of the environment can push you to um transform, to push you to quickly transform you into um the standards which is required by the society. (Interview #5, 5 July 2010)

She lived through the three communities of practice, knowing the joint enterprise and default way of mutual engagement for each and conducting herself accordingly. For example, although she was aware of the opportunities to learn by trial and error at university, she was consciously compliant in her engagement with the mediating community of practice. Her compliance was evident in her way of handling the assignments. Her primary concern was to meet the requirements of the writing instructor and to produce safe papers as she said when she was comparing writing a resume for the workplace and as an assignment:

> 要是做一份 resume 可能是要花更多更多时间就反复的再要改, 但是要是, 嗯因为毕竟是要吸引 HR 的那个, 嗯, 眼目光, 让他从一堆人中挑出你来, 但是要是要是交作业的话是说, 你的要求, 然后符合老师然后尽量在符合的情况下然后做得更好就可以了 [to make a resume may take a lot more time and needs revising again and again, but if, uh since the resume is to attract the HR, uh, to catch the HR's eyeball, let him pick you up from the bunch, but for assignments, your goal, then is to meet the requirements of the instructor and then under this condition try your best to do better]. (Interview #2, 30 December 2009)

She expressed a similar view in her account of her objectives of writing the business plan. She was concerned with producing a text that would meet the standard set by her writing instructor (Zhang, 2013, p. 38):

> I want to let him know that um what I have learned from his class, and I want to show a show a um business plan in a good order and good logic which he emphasized in his class, and which he um required for us. (Interview #4, 5 July 2010)

Mei also complied with the joint enterprise of her transitory and target communities of practice. At her student union, Mei had the responsibility of seeking sponsorship and building business relationships with corporations and non-profit organisations. She was exposed to how real business-people "behave in their daily operations" and gained hands-on experience of making business telephone calls, writing business emails, and making a contract (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She led her department at her student union from a poor-performing one to an outstanding one,

and her success in being elected vice president of the union (Interview #1, 25 November 2009) gave her the taste of success building on success, something valued in the business world (see Rick's comments on Dong's texts in Chap. 7). During her internships, she found that people tended to become 保守 [conservative] in the workplace and give priority to securing their job by avoiding making mistakes and following the standardised format including sticking to the templates provided by the boss (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). What Mei learned from her target community of practice echoed results of research in professional discourses. For example, Flowerdew and Wan (2006) and Devitt (1991) report that in accounting agencies, templates were regularly referred to and followed in writing a new text. Mei also acknowledged that business texts should be standardised (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). All this demonstrates that she was inclined to comply with and to converge to professional practices.

This does not mean that Mei was a blind follower. First, she was actually selective in her study of her university courses according to their usefulness for her ideal profession, as she recalled taking a "helpful" course:

Business listening and speaking is a little bit helpful um because when I um when I join in some some competition which is related with business and something like marketing, and it is helpful because the competition sometimes its um require its um they require that you use English to make the plan to make the presentation so um the business listening and speaking which can make me learn something about the special terms and the negotiation skills and also um the um also the conversation skills, so I think um it is the most helpful. (Interview #1, 25 November 2009)

The course was considered useful because she learned from it the skills for participating in activities that were congruent with her professional goals. For other courses that she did not find so helpful, she made just enough effort to rote learn the textbooks to pass the examinations (Interview #1, 25 November 2009).

Second, while she was complying with her context of situation in her writing in the business genres, she was aware of the need to address the context of culture (Lillis, 2001), as when she was talking about the process of making her business plan:

Although you just make a business plan for your final paper, you also need to make it um it um like a real business plan as much as possible, so it must be a practical plan which can be um which can be made into practice. (Interview #4, 5 July 2010)

Mei's realisation of a business plan needing to be real and practical reflected her understanding of the purpose and task of business plans, that is, the "transactional" functions of business plans (Doheny-Farina, 1991, p. 307) rather than just completing an academic assignment.

Third, she was cognisant of weaknesses in the Business English programme, in particular the depth of technical competence. She claimed only superficial knowledge of her target community of practice when she was summarising her experience of learning Business English:

I still stand in the primary stage in this process um because I think this um discipline can be um very can be um divided into um be divided into very um very diversified or profound fields because it can, it really can um cover a lot of fields in terms of business, and I just um I just learn um 就是只学了皮毛 [that is just scratch the surface] because in my opinion um I think I just have a knowledge of the principle of this course, just um stand on the surface at this discipline, other than dipping into the um profound meaning or profound field of this discipline. (Interview #5, 5 July 2010)

She found that English alone was not sufficient for performing professional identity, which she observed from contestants in a business negotiation competition:

On the final competition um there are um there are two groups there are two groups um make a very complicated business negotiation in English and I find that um it is um it is not enough for English majors um who just um who just good at English and they can speak very fluently but they have no idea or no thinking towards the towards the negotiation case. (Interview #5, 5 July 2010)

Finally, she was able to be critical about the world of international business and about her conception of herself. For example, learning Business English "make[s] me more concern about the competition and understand

that it is very important to make yourself more competitive and make me learn to um deal with pressure, and have an eye at the status quo" (Interview #1, 25 November 2009). She discovered that she had had an "excessively positive image toward myself" and that she hadn't realised "the difficulties in the business world" (Interview #5, 5 July 2010).

Participating in the three communities of practice contributed significantly to Mei's emerging professional identity. She may appear to be following an accommodationist stance in her engagement in the three communities of practice, yet she did it out of her awareness that the three communities of practice each had its distinct joint enterprise and mutual engagement. She chose to take advantage of the resources and experiences possible in each community of practice to prepare herself for her professional goal of international marketing.

5.2.4 Nan's Tactical Engagement for the Career Goal

Like Mei, Nan's participation was intended to serve his professional goal, that is, working in the finance and investment sector, and followed an accommodationist stance. What made Nan different is that he took the most tactical approach to participating in the three communities of practice. In his mediating community of practice, for example, he would skip some afternoon classes to avoid "wasting" his time by sleeping through them (Interview #5, 4 July 2010) but would go to lectures by experts on business and economics to broaden his horizon and resolve confusion over business and economics issues. He treated his lecturers as his resources, for example, his business writing instructor as someone to help him write his business plan (Interview #4, 4 July 2010) rather than as the instructor in the hierarchical teacher–student relationship.

Nan purposively engaged in the transitory and target communities of practice in which he seemed to be able to rehearse his professional identity and to have it validated. As the liaison officer in his student associations, he dealt with the shops and stores around the university campus, which he found to be "necessary" experiences (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). He sat the BEC Higher examination, which he considered to be a memorable experience as it was 自己专业方向的

一个证书, 然后是一种认可 [a certificate in my own speciality and then a recognition] (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). He benefited from his internships in a number of ways. He tried his hand at buying and selling stocks since Year 2 at university and regarded this experience as an important aspect of practice (Journal Entry #3, 10 March 2010). He was also selective in seeking internships so that he could "从现在就开始积累自己的那种 social network" ["start to accumulate my own social network from now on"] (Interview #1, 27 November 2009).

    Nan's tactical engagement in the three communities of practice signifies both identification and negotiability in his construction of professional identity. His engagement clarified for him what international business professionals were like. He contrasted his understanding of international business professionals before and after learning Business English (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). Before he started university, his image of international business professionals was abstract and was that of the general public: very capable, wearing suits, successful, earning a high salary, professional, talking in different ways from the general public. After learning Business English, he developed a concrete image of international business professionals and came into contact with notions such as specialisation, identities, and values which began to mediate his thinking and talking about international business professionals. At the insurance agency, he found he was in a world different from university:

> 和社会上的一些人打交道, 而且是真的是那种打交道 … 我发现好像就是每个人好像都很厉害, 都是那种很干练的那种, 处理事情呀什么的, 还有就是还有一点说不出好或坏吧, 就是还是比较实际 … 首先得是钱呀, 对吧, 然后还有一些机会的争取呀之类 [dealing with people in society, and that is real dealing with them … I found every one of them seems to be impressive, all are the capable type, like dealing with things, another point I don't know if it's good or bad, that is quite worldly … money takes priority, yeah, and then snatching of opportunities and the like]. (Interview #1, 27 November 2009)

He quickly learned that job titles like manager in companies were 很泛 [abused] (Interview #5, 4 July 2010) as in a 10-staff office there were 7 managers in addition to the general manager. He recounted his discovery

of the results orientation in the business world during his internship at a securities company. Each employee was set strict production goals with which any reward was correlated. The daily routines of the employees initially appeared to him to be 挺清闲的 [easy and relaxing] until he learned from his mentor that this was a false impression because it was difficult to start up, especially before one had built up a social and customer network (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). He came to realise that when dealing in stocks in China, he should not be greedy and rash, should have his own ideas, and bear in mind the characteristics of Chinese securities market and the economic situation (Journal Entry #3, 10 March 2010). Nor should he follow the recommendations by the securities agencies which made forecasts in the media (Journal Entry #4, 28 April 2010).

Although Nan questioned the institutional design of the futures market in China, which he found was favourable to the rich (Journal Entry #5, 24 May 2010), and the inequity in the securities market (Journal Entry #6, 31 June 2010), he was learning to accept the status quo and to adapt himself (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). He ended up feeling comfortable about evaluating himself and business operations in terms of the criteria for international business professionals and claiming membership to the international business world, as elaborated in Chap. 4.

5.2.5 Lan's Peripheral Engagement to Discover Her Niche

Lan engaged in the three communities of practice with a sense of peripheralisation or low self-efficacy, hence her peripheral engagement. This sense of diffidence can be traced to her experiences in the first two years of Business English learning. She had taken the course phonetics in which she failed to perform certain pronunciation tasks such as using strong forms and weak forms in reading aloud to the satisfaction of her teacher. This experience was her most unforgettable one as it made her feel特别受挫败 [terribly frustrated] and left her with the conception that her spoken English was not good to the extent that she avoided speaking in English for fear of making mistakes (Interview #1, 27 November

2009). In fact, she chose to speak in Chinese in all the interviews with occasional English words, phrases, or sentences. Her poor self-evaluation was enhanced when she took a business writing course by a "cynical" teacher as he was in the habit of telling the students that their English was still very poor and riddled with basic-level mistakes (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). This course taught her that she should be more "considerate" and 非常小心 [very careful] in business writing: Being considerate means taking into account the audience and avoiding putting to paper only the writer's own thought; being very careful means never taking for granted what a word means in another language and considering the context of its use (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). She was embarrassed that her English writing was not native-like and was hesitant in showing it to others. She probably did not realise, however, that she had picked up the Clarity-Brevity-Sincerity (C-B-S) style that is valued in business communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

Consequently, Lan felt that she lagged behind her classmates and doubted her potential for language learning. She felt the need to improve her interpersonal skills. She became 更容易自省 [prone to self-reflection]. For example, she was awakening to her shortcomings and would evade displaying them (Interview #1, 27 November 2009). She thought that she had no brain for decision-making which she held to be an essential quality of international business professionals (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). Given her imagination of business professionals as talkative and having decision-making brains, she considered herself "还不够 qualified" ["not yet qualified"] for international business (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). She even claimed that "I was good at nothing" and was anxious that she would not be able to find a job (Interview #5, 3 July 2010).

Lan took her participation in the transitory community of practice as preparing for the future profession. She narrated the extracurricular activities of being goalkeeper for her football team and of running for the position of 副班长 [deputy monitor of her class, a type of student leader at Chinese universities with responsibilities such as organising academic and extracurricular activities for the class and making and signing peer reviews of their classmates]. From her experience of being the deputy monitor she learned to improve interpersonal skills as she had to consider her role relations with the monitor and the 辅导员 [coordinator,

non-academic staff in the faculty responsible for political, psychological, and extracurricular guidance and assessment for students at Chinese universities] in the hierarchy at university and felt that this awakening and experience 对以后工作应该也是有好处的 [would be helpful for work in the future] (Interview #3, 15 January 2010).

While participating in the target community of practice, Lan began to feel like a legitimate peripheral participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991) because she received favourable comments and discovered her niche as an "always match" person (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). She toned down her image of international business professionals and saw the staff as international business professionals who were no longer far away from and high above her as she used to think (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). She even critiqued the way of mutual engagement in the target community of practice in that new staff felt exploited and belittled (Interview #5, 3 July 2010). There were notable changes in her between the last and the first interviews as she looked more relaxed, talked more, and laughed more. She began to wear a facial expression that showed her confidence in sharing her experiences and views. When this observation was brought up with her, she replied:

> 这学期基本上除了第一个月之外就接下来就没有断过，　就各种实习, 所以我觉得可能对自己也是一种潜移默化的帮助 [this semester almost except for the first month the following months I have been having internships nonstop, various internships, so I feel they perhaps have exerted an imperceptible influence on me]. (Interview #5, 3 July 2010)

Lan's participation in the three communities of practice contributed immensely to her understanding of herself in relation to international business. Similar to An, she was looking inwards to explore a match between her and a place in the business world. Through her engagement in and critique of the target community of practice, she was able to narrow the gap between her and her imagined world of international business professionals. Remarkably, she was also invoking a gendered identity and cultural identity in her professional identity construction (see Chap. 4 for detailed discussion). When she was reflecting on the impact of learning Business English on her perception of herself, she concluded:

我可能不是一个各方面就是某个方面能力很突出, 比如说我口语很好, 或者是我很善于跟人沟通, 然后我工作能力很强, 个人能力很强, 这种, 可能不属于这种, 但是就是综合各方面吧, 就是综合来说, 应该, 就没有很突出的一方面, 但各方面不算太差, 所以综合的各方面不算太差, 我就想我这种人也是有用处的呵呵, 就属于那种就在 personal niche 里面有写, 可能是属于那种混搭型的人吧 [I may not be in every aspect that is exceptional at any one specific aspect, for example my spoken English is excellent, or my interpersonal skills are outstanding, or I excel at work skills, with resourcefulness, like these, I may not be like any of these, but in sum, that is when all is considered, I should, I may not be outstanding at any one aspect, but I am not poor at any one aspect, so my comprehensive ability is not poor, so I think people like me have their use hhaha, like I wrote in the personal niche, perhaps I'm the always match type]. (Interview #5, 3 July 2010)

5.3   Coordination Between Access and Agency

The five students ended up with different patterns of participation and outcomes despite their shared goal of preparing themselves for their future in the three communities of practice. Two outstanding factors complicated their participation, namely access and agency. Access is used here to refer to the availability of a community of practice to the students including its defining characteristics such as the joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. As access means exposure to the knowledge, skills, and discourse that constitute identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991), it is a shaping factor for professional identity construction. The five focal students' access to the business world seemed to have given them different dimensions of the business world. In Dong's case, he participated in high-profile transitory and target communities of practice where specialist expertise was paramount. For example, he took part in contests where superb speech-making skills were important and interned at prestigious foreign financial enterprises where highly technical expertise was valued. As a result, international business for Dong meant the technical activities of processing international financial documentations. Partly due to the focus of his Business

English programme on the procedures and communication for international trade, there was a considerable gap between what he learned and what was expected of interns in the financial workplace. Without knowing this, Dong was made to envisage possible marginalisation of Business English students in the workplace due to their relatively less strong technical expertise. This conception as well the sets of oppositions he observed in the foreign enterprises combined to alienate him from the target community of practice. For An, her experiences of interning in different business organisations impressed her that business was specialist practices involving each person playing specific roles and assuming specific positions. For Mei, business was making profit, sustaining success, and taking the lead. For Nan, business was concerned with handling people of all professions. And for Lan, business was following orders for subordinates and making decisions for bosses. In consequence of the difference in their access and exposure to the technical and discursive competences of the business world, their perception of themselves varied with their image of the business world and of its inhabitants. Following positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), the students took up five different subject positions, some of which were preferred or default in the Business English programme while others were unanticipated.

Another important aspect of their access concerns significant people in their communities of practice. Mei had a steady role model Li Kaifu, who was former chief executive officer of Google China but did not stop at this achievement and founded the new business of Dream Factory with the mission to help young people start up their businesses. For Mei, Li Kaifu embodied the values of real international business professionals and was the significant person in her association with international business. Dong did mention, fleetingly, a few names as representatives of international business professionals including one who was a celebrity at the time of the interview but was later scandalised for dishonesty, but he did not seem to have a personal understanding of these figures. Nan had as the role model his father, who embodied the criteria for an international business professional:

> 他的交际面是很广的那种，然后经常打电话的时候还会用英语呀或者是日语说一些东西，对，然后我就觉得，这样也算满满厉害的，然后他就是，其实我觉得他那英语没有我好但是，但是他就是他但我

觉得他跟人交流的时候就满自信的那种, 然后我觉得他学习态度比我还要好, 就现在他就经常还看一些书呀, 考一些证书呀 [he is the type who communicates widely, when he makes phone calls he often speaks in English or Japanese about something, yeah, and I feel, this should be very very impressive, then he is, actually I feel his English is not as good as mine but, but he when he communicates with others I feel he is very confident, then I feel he has an even better attitude towards learning than I do, even now he often does some reading, takes certifying examinations]. (Interview #1, 27 November 2009)

From his father, Nan learned the importance of social networks, confidence in communication, and continual study to enrich himself. He also became aware of Business English as a lingua franca (BELF) and of himself as a user rather than a learner of BELF, which may explain why he was not overly concerned with the linguistic code but with the content of his writing in business genres, as will be detailed in Chap. 6. For An, the role model was her English teacher, who spoke perfect English and embodied the kind of liberal education she aspired for. For Lan, the significant people including her pronunciation teacher and writing instructor were largely affecting her negatively due to their emphasis on accuracy or language usage. The significant people impacted on the five students significantly as what the significant other was perceived to embody shaped the students' understanding of international business professionals and their emerging professional identity.

Agency may enhance or create access. All five focal students demonstrated remarkable agency in their communities of practice. An made extra efforts to improve her pronunciation and legitimise her participation in (her version of) the mediating community of practice by showing passion in her writing of the letters and the business plan. She also fused her broadened world view and her Chinese self to provide herself the resources to expand or feel comfortable. Dong disciplined himself so that he would be conscientious in his participation in all the three communities of practice. He excelled in this mediating community of practice, which won him access to high-status internships and extracurricular events. Mei actively adjusted herself so that she would be suited to the business world where extroverted personality and interpersonal skills were perceived by her to be advantageous. Nan planned for his future

profession and implemented the plan by taking relevant internships and preparing for professional qualifications examinations. Lan searched in herself for the qualities of flexibility and cooperative spirit that would make her marketable in the workplace. She created a space for herself to avoid the competition she was observing around her because she imagined the business world with a non-iron-lady perspective and a gendered identity.

Access and agency are therefore neither absolute givens nor structurally rigid but dynamic in individuals' dialoguing with the political, economic, sociocultural, and institutional structuration. They interacted with each other, giving rise to a distinct pattern of participation for each Business English student. Access seems to be pivotal as the quantity and quality of the transitory and target communities of practice available to each student differed across the five cases and engendered differential understandings of the international business world for each student. Even within the mediating community of practice, access to participation may not be automatic and/or equal due to the official versus the student's version of the community and the differential cultural capital brought to the university as has been experienced by the first-in-the-family undergraduate students in Ivanič (1998) and Lillis (2001). Agency then comes in to create access to participatory learning opportunities, in particular in sociocultural milieus such as a university which is often viewed as an equaliser for equity and social justice.

5.4   Discussion

While the Business English programme stipulated the curricular study, extracurricular activities, and professional experience as three learning spaces for the Business English students, their lived experiences of learning in and through their mediating, transitory, and target communities of practice demonstrate considerable complexity in the translation from the curriculum to student learning experience. Several aspects of the complexity will be discussed in the following section.

5.4.1   Translation from Curriculum to Learning Experience

The three learning spaces stipulated in the Business English programme materialised in the mediating, transitory, and target communities of practice for the Business English students. They were emergent rather than a priori, interlocked rather than discrete, and heterogeneous rather than homogenising.

The three communities of practice may appear predetermined for the Business English students. The opposite, however, was actually experienced by the students. It was through the emerging professional identity, the modes of participation, and the work of access and agency that each community of practice was emergent and felt as distinct learning spaces by the students.

The three communities of practice were interlocked in complicated ways. For one thing, there were both a synchronic dimension and a diachronic dimension. While the synchronic dimension is constant because the five cases were university students throughout the study, the process is diachronic in the sense that there was a general progression from abstract conception of international business professionals to concrete images of and identification with or alienation from them. For another, the communities of practice impacted on each other. The mediating community of practice provided the students vicarious experiences and resources necessary for their performance in the transitory and target communities of practice. The transitory community of practice provided the students an opportunity to rehearse professional roles despite their student status. The target community of practice, in turn, validated and/or enhanced their emerging understanding of the international business world and of themselves in relation to the world. Specifically, the target community of practice may have spurred and enhanced An's intention to explore various possibilities in her mediating community of practice so that she could discover her ideal future job. It sensitised Dong to possible inherent disadvantages of Business English graduates in the international business profession such that he tried his best to keep his competitive edge and to eventually avoid joining it. It provided Mei with real experiences

of the business world and enhanced her professional goal. It validated Nan's criteria for international business professionals and strengthened his career ambition. For Lan, it served to rectify her image of the international business world and awaken her to her own strengths and niche in the international business profession. The transitory and target communities of practice were also appropriated by the Business English students in their participation in their mediating community of practice. As the cultural–historical activity theory has it, human activity does not exist in isolation but in systems that are interrelated (Engeström, 1999). Arguably, the Business English students' emerging professional identity derived from the synergy of the three communities of practice.

The three communities of practice were not homogenising in any way for the Business English students. There was remarkable diversity among the five students in their trajectory of professional identity construction, for example, a centripetal trajectory for Mei and Nan and a centrifugal path for Dong. The inter-case variation resulted from the range and depth of the students' participation in their communities of practice. This result compels a critical attention to the possibly unknowing accommodationist stance in the Business English programme goals. Following the premise that the primary concern of an ESP education is to prepare students to function competently in their target situations (Chambers, 1980; Dudley-Evans & John, 1998) or acquire "knowledgeably skilled identities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55) as members of various sociocultural groupings, the Business English programme assumes a homogenising effect of participation in the communities of practice. The Business English students were not being homogenised in the learning process despite their shared enterprise to prepare for the target community of practice. The translocal perspective and plurilingualism in current globalisation discourses, as discussed, for example, by Blommaert (2010) and Cenoz (2013), help to account for the students' lived experiences and their pluralised identities which involve the interaction between their emerging professional identity, cultural identity, and gendered identity. It is important therefore to review the assumption regarding the uptake of globalisation discourses as unifying or homogenising in ESP education

and recognise the translocalised setting and the complexity of global and local discourses and practices in action. In this way, more realistic programme goals for Business English education may be envisaged.

5.4.2   Multilayered Mediating Community of Practice

Communities of practice may be multilayered. This was demonstrated to be true of the Business English students' mediating community of practice. As the Business English curriculum involves a professional socialisation process embedded in an academic programme, there is an in-built duality in it. This duality can be presented as shown in Fig. 5.1. Consequently, there are at least two sets of joint enterprise, mutual

Fig. 5.1   Duality of mediating community of practice

engagement, and repertoire built into the Business English curriculum with one or the other acting as the hidden curriculum at any given time for both teachers and students. This duality is likely to cause confusion as to what joint enterprise and corresponding mutual engagement are involved at a particular teaching and learning moment. For example, some teachers and students may foreground the teacher–student relationship typical of an academic programme, while others may invoke the business world apprentice model with the teacher as resource and student as novice. Or some teacher may apply criteria such as accuracy in linguistic production while others tend to accept intelligibility as the primary criterion, which has been found to be the practice in international business (Koester, 2010; Nickerson, 2005).

As is shown in An's experience, there were two contrasting conceptions of the mediating community of practice and their corresponding practices due to the dual nature of the mediating community of practice, namely a professional socialisation process, which is the official and powerful version of the mediating community of practice, embedded in a tertiary academic programme, which An held to be promoting a liberal education. This tension was made most visible in the business writing courses. There is the understanding of university writing as conscious and purposeful learning (academic), in contrast with that of discursive practices in the workplace as getting the job done (Beaufort, 1999). The Business English writing courses which were modelled on business practices had a dual nature, and the professional side was foregrounded by the writing instructor while An herself held the alternative view at the time. The tension between the student and the writing instructor is an expression of this mismatch. Insensitivity to the likelihood of confusion over the joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and repertoire at any given time within the same community of practice on the part of the powerful (e.g., the teacher) may create barriers to participation or the burden of extra efforts for the powerless (the learner). When the transitory and target communities of practice exert an effect on the mediating community of practice, the confusion is intensified, as in An's case where she invoked professional business plans having varied treatments of mission and vision in the texts in defence of her own approach. This chapter thus calls for a critical examination of the notion of legitimate and peripheral

participation in communities of practice in the design and study of learning in the classroom by considering the multiple layers of communities of practice along with agency, access, and the interplay between them in the process of learning.

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter reports on how the Business English students lived through the three communities of practice that were conceived for them in the Business English programme. Based on the five focal students' account of their modes of participation in the three communities of practice, their access, and their agency, we are able to illuminate the process of their professional identity construction. This chapter shows that unlike other conceptions for exploring participatory learning, such as individual networks of practice (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015), the communities of practice, at least for the Business English students, are each rather structured and also interlocked in complicated ways in shaping the student's emerging professional identity. The communities of practice perspective also provides the specific concepts such as modes of participation to describe the students' lived experiences in depth and detail and proves useful for exploring learning through an ESP programme as has also been argued in other studies of learning in formal settings (e.g., Clarke, 2008; Morita, 2004).

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6

Discursive Construction of Professional Identity

This chapter takes the Business English students' writing in business genres as a site for enacting their emerging professional identity and focuses on how they deployed various dimensions of business genre knowledge in their writing to index their professional identity. By drawing on a discourse analysis of their writing and interviews with them, the chapter demonstrates that the students' deployment of business genre knowledge was not random but based on their perceived professional norms, practices, and expertise. Their business genre knowledge was therefore the source of indexing devices or indexicals for their professional identity. Their discursive construction of professional identity will be reported through presenting their use of indexicals on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions.

6.1 Formal Textual Features and Professional Identity

The five focal students demonstrated considerable mastery of the formal dimension of business genre knowledge in their writing. They also associated the formal textual features with professional discursive practices. This

section focuses on their use of textual layout, move structure, speech acts, and lexicogrammatical features as indexicals for their professional identity.

6.1.1 Layout and Move Structure

The students' writing in the business genres followed the layout and the move structure identified in the literature as typical of the specific genres. For example, their cover letters had all the standard parts of a business letter: addresses, date line, salutation, body of the letter, complimentary closing, and signature, and displayed the seven-move structure as discussed in Bhatia (1993). For example, Dong's cover letter began with offering himself for the position and establishing the credentials in the opening sentence *I feel indeed honoured and excited to write this letter to apply for the position of Manager Assistant*. Immediately following this was the provision of incentives as in *I would sure to fit perfectly for this job*. The body paragraphs presented his academic accomplishments, school activities, experiences, and their relevance to the position, which was essential detailing of the candidature. He then enclosed his resume, used pressure tactics by requesting information on the contact person and offering personal contact information (also for soliciting response), and ending politely by using the formulaic polite closing *Thank you for your consideration*. Their offer, counteroffer, and rejection letters also demonstrated the typical move structures for good-news and bad-news letters (Eunson, 1996; Huseman, Galvin, & Prescott, 1988). For example, An's order letter and offer letter, with positive messages for the reader, followed the move structure of good-news letters: starting with the message straightaway and providing the details next, whereas her counteroffer letter and rejection letter, with negative messages, took the bad-news approach: beginning with a buffer (something neutral or positive), stating the message next, and finally offering some explanation or recommendation. Their resumes were of the chronological type (Pan, Scollon, & Scollon, 2002). For example, Mei's resume was a one-page chronological resume with personal information at the top of the page and three subheadings: education, experience, and skills. She highlighted the organisations she worked for and specified her responsibilities and achievements in each organisation. This achievement orientation and tailoring

of content according to the job were in line with professional practices as discussed in Swales and Feak (2000) and Goodall and Goodall (2002). They also followed the generic structure of business plans. For example, Nan's business plan modelled on the online template (Interview #4, 4 July 2010) with the generic structure of the title page, table of contents, business description, mission and vision statements, business objectives, business operations in terms of marketing analysis and competitive analysis, legal structure, support personnel, and summary. There were also tables and exhibits representing his statistics.

The students not only reproduced the standard moves of the business genres but also acknowledged them as professional practices. For example, when he was talking about his cover letter, Dong acknowledged that the letter structure with the components of the reason for the application, curricular and extracurricular activities, internships, and conclusion was more or less formulaic (Interview #1, 29 December 2009). He realised that business writing was conventionalised and not done as though 你想怎么写就怎么写 [you can write the way you want] (Interview #4, 16 January 2010). Similarly, An visualised the writing in the recruitment genre set as 编个情景剧 [scripting a situational drama] under the guiding principles of being 合情合理 [fit both emotionally and logically] and described the writing, in particular, the order and offer letters, as rather "routine" following "common practice" (Interview #3, 14 January 2010).

6.1.2   Speech Acts

The five focal students adopted formulaic expressions for their speech acts, which can be illustrated by Dong's linguistic realisation of requests and instructions in the cover letter, order letter, offer letter, counteroffer letter, and the rejection letter.

> *If there is an opportunity for me to participate in your recruitment program, please let me know whom I should contact for further information.* (Cover letter)
>   *Would you please help us place an electronic advertisement for our recruitment information on your website?* (Order letter)

   We would appreciate it if you could kindly post advertisement in an optimal location on your web page. (Order letter)
   In the event of your acceptance, please review the following company policies carefully. (Offer letter)
   Please reply us your final decision within ten days through email, we look forward to having the opportunity to work with you in the coming days. (Counteroffer letter)

The requests and instructions above were realised by using the formulaic "please + verb" structure. It is worth noting the various redressing devices in the requests or instructions. For example, the request in the cover letter was preceded by a conditional clause, "If.…" The instructions in the offer letter and the counteroffer letter were also redressed by the conditional expression *in the event of* and the expression of a wish or expectation *we look forward to*. The use of these devices indicates that Dong was aware of the possible threat of the speech acts to the face of the audience and was able to mitigate the face threat by employing different politeness strategies of indirectness (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wang, 2010). This awareness was most clearly demonstrated in his differentiation of the levels of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987) of requests and instructions and the linguistic means for their realisations, as in the order letter. As the request of posting the job advertisement at an optimal position would be more imposing than the request of posting it at the website, he used several mitigating devices: an expression of appreciation *we would appreciate it* and the conditional clause to make his request sound tentative. Dong nominated the maxims he observed when he was writing these letters, including "precise," "efficient," and "positive" (Interview #4, 16 January 2010). These considerations reflect the C-B-S principles for business communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

6.1.3 Lexicogrammatical Features

The five focal students observed lexicogrammatical characteristics of business writing. Take An, for example. She noted the principles of "simple" and "clear" in the choice of words and expressions and sentence structures

(Interview #5, 4 July 2010) and the value of technical terms to business writing. For example, where technical terms were required, as in the offer letter which concerns the terms and conditions of employment, she used specialised terms such as "fringe benefits" and "insurance policies."

Mei also chose technical, positive, and achievement-oriented words and expressions in her cover letter and resume, such as "cooperative spirit," "high efficiency," and "excellent," 因为潜意识里做这项工作 需要你具备这些素质 [because subconsciously this job requires these qualities] (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). This lexical feature agrees with Nelson's (2006) finding that business words tend to be positive and job oriented. It also reflects Swales and Feak's (2000) view on the achievement orientation of lexical choices in the application genre set. In her business plan, she used technical terms "relevant with marketing" and words that were "compact" and "simple" (Interview #4, 5 July 2010). She avoided long sentences "with a lot of complicated clause" and preferred "simple sentence" (Interview #4, 5 July 2010). This aligns with the principle of clarity in the C-B-S style of business communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

Lan noted that in business letters, decorative language was less common, ambiguity was avoided, and figures and numbers should be accurate (Interview #3, 15 January 2010). In her cover letter, she used a range of lexical items such as "responsible," "cooperative," "considerate," "conscientious," "rigorous," and "ideal." These words are positive and promotional as is typical in the business genre (Bhatia, 1993) and in business language in general (Nelson, 2006). In her business plan, the subjects were mostly the first-person plural pronoun *we*, the brand name *Miss*, or nouns denoting products or processes of production, for example (bold added for highlighting the subjects):

According to our previous sales performance, **we** have gained some recognition among customers.

  Miss has two product lines, skin care and health supplements.

  Skin care products are developed and produced at our contract facilities in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

  Owning *Miss*, **the customers** can still be beautiful and healthy under an ailing economic circumstance.

Also notable are the verbs in these example sentences: "gained," "has," "developed," "produced," and "be." These verbs express the various operations or states or conditions relevant to the business activities the business plan was produced to represent.

The examples in the last three subsections demonstrate that the students used move structures, linguistic realisations of speech acts, and job-related vocabulary and expressions denoting business operations in a way that reflects their perception of professional discursive practices in the business world. Their use of these formal textual features also aligns with the literature. They are thus the students' indexicals on the formal dimension for their professional identity. These indexicals for professional identity, however, need to be validated by international business practitioners, which will be the focus of Chap. 7.

6.1.4 Discrepancies and Uncertainties

Meanwhile, there are several discrepancies or uncertainties in the students' formal-dimension knowledge of the business genres. Regarding the move structure, the absence of certain key moves or addition of unnecessary ones was observed in their writing. For example, in An's personal statement, discussion of research experiences or academic preparedness in relation to her target programme, which is "essential" for successful candidates (Ding, 2007, p. 377), was missing or insufficiently expressed. Given that An had led several research projects funded by her university as an undergraduate student (Interview #1, 10 November 2009), her failure to mention these research experiences may suggest that she was not aware of the importance of research experience in academic applications.

As far as the linguistic realisations of speech acts are concerned, the students did not fine-tune the level of politeness of speech acts in relation to their different roles and different power relationships with the audience. For example, Dong's order letter was characterised by the redressing devices which made him appear overly polite but not firm enough, given his role as buyer in the transaction. As he was aware of the C-B-S principles (Scollon & Scollon, 2001) for business communication, this

feature of his speech acts may result from his inadequate gauging of the imposition of these specific speech acts and/or the acquisition of the linguistic resources for different levels of face-threatening speech acts.

When it comes to lexicogrammatical features, the students committed a range of errors at lexical and syntactic levels. On top of this, they seem to lack a subtle understanding of syntactic structures in business writing. For example, Dong described his language abilities and experiences in clauses such as "I've also got an acquaintance of Spanish" and "I have lots of daily affairs to handle." These clauses frame abilities as possession of things rather than in terms of abilities to act as is required by the genre of job application. Dong commented that while he could express his thoughts in English, he was not sure whether his expressions were professional or not in the sense of being "native" and "business-oriented" (Interview #5, 6 July 2010). He acknowledged his limited store of sentence patterns and structures for writing the business plan like business professionals by saying, "很难能有那么多句型句式用来写这篇文章" ["I didn't have many sentence patterns and structures for writing this piece"] (Interview #5, 6 July 2010). Mei also admitted her difficulty in the linguistic code: "I often cannot use proper words to express my ideas accurately in writing" (Student Profile, November 2009).

It therefore appears that while the Business English students were cognisant of and able to reproduce the more obvious business genre knowledge on the formal dimension, they were unaware of or unable to use more subtle features or lacked the linguistic knowledge necessary for construing the subtleties of their messages, hence their uncertainty in enacting their professional identity.

6.2 Professional Practices, Intertextuality, and Professional Identity

The five focal students demonstrated remarkable business genre knowledge on the process dimension, in particular with reference to generic and referential intertextuality (Devitt, 1991), two key features of discourse production, consumption, and distribution. They all drew on

templates and/or samples in their writing in the business genres, a sign of their awareness of generic intertextuality. For example, An's five texts in the recruitment genre set followed templates or sample letters except for the counteroffer letter for which she claimed there was no template (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). For the business plan, she followed her textbook in planning the content and organising the different sections of her text (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). Dong would consult sample texts of the genre he was to produce as was the case with his offer letter and rejection letter (Interview #4, 16 January 2010) and his business plan (Interview #5, 6 July 2010). Mei also developed the strategy of falling on templates, samples, textbooks, and online sources for tackling difficulties in writing. When she had difficulty composing a positioning statement in her business plan for a coffee shop business, she studied the web pages of a coffee shop and "make reference to" its positioning statement (Interview #4, 5 July 2010). Nan knew that analysis was the key part of the genre of business plan and statistics was crucial. When he was preparing his business plan, he carried out research and consulted various sources (Interview #4, 4 July 2010). Lan studied exemplars from various sources including the Internet, course books, and her teachers to prepare for her own writing, as in her handling of the recruitment genre set:

> 就先搜例信，然后再参照你的材料把你的材料套进去，然后你基本上就阐述得比较得当，然后信息没有那个缺失呀，然后基本上应该就可以了吧 [search for sample letters first, then see how your materials can be fit into the exemplars, then you see if the elaboration is appropriate or not, and then if any information is missing, and basically that's it]. (Interview #3, 15 January 2010)

More importantly, they extrapolated from their experiences and imagined themselves as a business professional in handling unfamiliar business genres. For example, in writing the counteroffer letter to the candidate who was a recent university graduate, An resorted to what she knew university graduates would want and value about a job (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). Nan had not learned how to write the counteroffer letter, so he put himself into the scenario and imagined what the letter should require (Interview #3, 14 January 2010).

The students' understanding and use of generic intertextuality echo the use of templates in the production of professional texts, for example, in accounting agencies as reported in Flowerdew and Wan (2006) and Devitt (1991). To the students, business genres were conventionalised in their production and consumption. Their knowledge of intertextuality allowed them to produce texts or gave them clues to dealing with unfamiliar genres in a way recognisably similar to the professional practice.

The students also displayed referential intertextuality in their writing in the business genres. In the opening and closing sentences, they would relate the current text to the preceding and forthcoming communication, for example *I'm very glad to have your response email and I appreciate your quick feedback* in Nan's counteroffer letter, and *To indicate your formal acceptance of this offer, please complete the enclosed form, sign it and mail it in the postpaid envelope* in Mei's offer letter.

Meanwhile, the students experienced problems with aspects of intertextuality, in particular functional intertextuality (Devitt, 1991). For example, Mei took the cover letter as "the catalogue" of the enclosed resume in the sense that the cover letter provided a list of the experiences and qualifications elaborated in the resume (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). This is different from the views or practices of international business professionals in that the cover letter addresses selection criteria specified in the job advertisement (Bhatia, 1993; Goodall & Goodall, 2002; Swales & Feak, 2000). Dong seems to be aware of the use of the telephone and email in recruitment processes as he said when he was commenting on his process of writing the counteroffer letter:

> 这么重要的事情, 只是一个邮件肯定不可能, 是绝对不可能, 除非说招一个临时工, 而且怎么也能打个电话吧, 就是怎么肯定也得打个电话, 打个电 话这个事情早都已经说过了, 还至于这么就(听不清楚), 就没有必要了, 就 打电话该客气就客气完了, 然后把一些该确认的放在邮件里发过去, ok,… 不可能这种作为一个 recruitment 就发一个邮件就拉倒了 [For such an important matter, only email is certainly not enough, absolutely impossible, except when hiring a temporary hand, and to say the least a telephone call is a must, that is, definitely a telephone call should be made, then in the telephone this should have been said, what point is there for this (inaudible), there is no need for this,

courtesy should have been in the telephone call, and then the email is to confirm the telephone call, ok, ... it is impossible that for recruitment an email is all there is to do]. (Interview #4, 16 January 2010)

Despite this awareness of functional intertextuality, there was no explicit reference in Dong's counteroffer letter to prior telephone communication. That the students' writing in the business genres did not demonstrate these features of intertextuality evidences their unfamiliarity with professional business practices and therefore the resources for performing their professional identity.

6.3   Rhetorical Approaches and Professional Identity

6.3.1 Purpose, Task, and Writer–Audience Relationship in Writing

The students' genre knowledge on the rhetorical dimension was demonstrated in their understanding of the purpose, task, and writer–audience relationship in the eight business genres. For example, An was aware that the eight business genres all had specific purposes such as getting a place at the university for the application genre set (Interview #2, 30 December 2009), selecting the most suitable candidate to fill the job opening and maintaining goodwill in the unsuccessful applicant for the recruitment genre set (Interview #3, 14 January 2010), and persuading potential investors to support the start-up business for the business plan (Interview #5, 4 July 2010). She understood that writers were playing roles in writing. She took up the roles of applicant, senior manager, colleague, and entrepreneur in the three genre sets and handled the interpersonal relationships involved in a way that demonstrated her awareness of her different roles, her different audiences, and the linguistic resources for constructing them. For example, in the personal statement, she presented herself on the offer side by making a set of "I-Statements" (Gee, 2011, p. 153), that is, statements of her thoughts, feelings, and actions. These "I-Statements" portrayed her as someone who was responsive and able to

think and act. In effect, she put herself, in a cheerfully confident manner, on a par with the audience, as she asserted: "I'm not only interested but also qualified" (Interview #2, 30 December 2009).

Dong developed a heightened sense of the rhetorical dimension of genre knowledge, in particular, an appreciation of the purpose of writing and aspects of the reader–writer role relationship. This sense was most explicitly expressed when he was discussing his composing process for his business plan:

> I think the most important part is that you know em the purpose to write this business plan. … I think a business plan has lots of functions. … I think this business plan is provided for those investors, so … there was no 怎么讲, 就是少走了很多弯路 [how to say it, that's make fewer detours]. (Interview #5, 6 July 2010)

Mei was keenly aware of her audience and organised her texts according to her perception of her audience's expectations. For example, her resume was a truncated version of a much richer one because she wanted her writing to be easy to read for her writing instructor as she thought he expected conciseness and a clear layout (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). For this end, she listed her experiences instead of putting them into paragraphs. She used phrases instead of complete sentences and avoided complicated sentences with embedded clauses. In her job posting, she presented information she perceived to be in the reader's interest. For example, she put the salary quite in the front of the posting 因为可能现在许多人去应聘一个职位他可能是如果现实一点的话他可能是先看这个工作福利和薪金 [because perhaps at present many people applying for a position if he perhaps is practical he will first look at the job fringe benefits and salary] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). She included a brief company briefing 因为其实有许多人他不一定需要了解那个 [because actually for many people he does not necessarily need to know that] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010), despite much more information on the company in the writing prompt for the assignment. Her selection criteria in her job posting prioritised work experience as she thought that companies 希望你一来就能干活的人 [expect new recruits to be able to start work immediately] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010).

Nan was aware that he was representing the company in the offer, counteroffer, and rejection letters and that he was the client in the order letter (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). He felt comfortable using "we" to pass on messages on behalf of his company. He even made a selection between "best regards" and "sincerely" in the complimentary closing, reserving the former for strangers and the latter for acquaintances. He chose "best regards" in his order letter to the web manager as he felt that he was the client in the transaction and should be shown more respect by the service provider (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). Nan could be right about the provider–client relationship here if he was in a buyer's market where the buyer/client would have more power than the provider/seller. In his business plan, he wished to portray himself as a qualified businessman and explained how he did this as follows:

> 因为我这里面也就是虚拟了也写了我之前曾经开过一个就是 **consulting centre**, 然后才有现在开这个 consulting group 的念头, 然后我用一些就是比较周到的分析, 然后, 然后让他们就是能体现出我那种比较缜密的思维, 然后对于这个 business plan 的全方位的考虑让他们觉得我是一个 有 **ambition**, 然后, 嗯, 确实很想在这方面就是做 **business** 的人 [because I presuppose in this I **have opened a consulting centre** and that's where the idea of this consulting group has grown, then I **make a quite comprehensive analysis**, then, then let them that is **show my thorough thinking**, and the **all-round consideration** in the business plan makes them think I am a **man of ambition**, and, em, a man who **really wants to do this business**]. (Bold font added for emphasis, Interview #4, 4 July 2010)

Clearly, Nan articulated the purpose and task of the business plan genre. His reasoning also reflected the criteria by which he would judge a business professional (see Chap. 4, Sect. 4.1), including relationship building (having run a consulting centre), capability (thorough thinking, comprehensive analysis), and ambition (desire to do the business). In other words, he was living out his perception of business professionals, at least in his discursive practice, and projected himself as one of them (see also Zhang, 2015).

Lan demonstrated considerable awareness of the task, the audience, and strategies in her writing in the business genres. Even though her

attitude to the cover letter and the resume was mainly to complete her assignments, she targeted her texts to meet her perception of the expectations of the invoked audience (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). For example, she thought that the cover letter should be adapted according to the 核心价值 [core values] of the target company (Interview #3, 15 January 2010). In her own cover letter, she showed awareness of the concerns of her target audience in the real business world by writing:

Although a recent graduate, I am not a typical new graduate.

She wrote this sentence to respond to the possible concern that recent graduates had no work experience:

想要强调自己就不仅仅是一个刚毕业的学生, 可能不像你想像的那样真的就是任何那个经验都没有 [I wanted to emphasise that I am not a mere recent graduate, not like what you might imagine that is I really don't have any work experience]. (Interview #2, 29 November 2009)

These examples indicate that while the five students were writing in the business genres, they positioned themselves as a business professional by drawing on their perceptions of the task, role relationship, and rhetorical strategies relevant to the business world. This is an important intellectual leap for the students because this awareness of writing as addressing the exigency of a real situation captures the essence of genre knowledge (Miller, 1984). With this awareness, writing in the business genre would be less personally speculative but professionally imaginative. In other words, their approaches to handling the purpose, task, and writer–audience relationship as deployed in their writing in the various business genres indexed their professional identity for international business.

6.3.2   Discrepancies and Uncertainties

Similar to the formal and process dimensions of business genre knowledge, the Business English students' rhetorical dimension of business genre knowledge is indexical of the developmental stage of their emerging professional identity. While they were sensitive to aspects of the

rhetorical purpose, task, and relationship between the author and the audience involved in the various business situations, the role relationship they constructed for themselves and their readers were yet to be compatible with the professional one. While they were able to address the rhetorical demand of the scenarios set for them by imagining professional practices and interpolating their real-life experiences, they were yet unable to evaluate their appropriateness to the scenarios.

The rhetorical dimension of genre knowledge was not as neat for An, Dong, Mei, Nan, and Lan. The most striking aspect to note is the positing of themselves and their reader in appropriate business roles. They tend to bring in their personal understanding of the target community of practice in writing in the business genres. For example, An acknowledged awareness of the immediate audience, such as the professor at her target university, the writing instructor for her texts in the recruitment genres, and the investors for her business plan, yet she seemed to be pushing her ideas, for example expressing her keenness and earnestness in her personal statement (Interview #2, 30 December 2009) as interesting and relevant without considering whether they would indeed be so expected or received in the respective target community. She also mixed the genres (Bhatia, 2004) in her writing for applying to the US university as she followed the layout of a cover letter with the inside addresses, salutation, body, complimentary closing, and signature while intending it to be a personal statement. This genre mixing had the consequence of certain parts of the text being misinterpreted by target readers as irrelevant to the genre intended for the situation, which was indeed the case for Tim, one of the eight business practitioners who commented on An's writing (see Chap. 7). This may even indicate a lack of full understanding of the rhetorical purpose of the genres as moves are rhetorical actions reflecting communicative purposes (Swales, 1990), which is the core of the rhetorical dimension of genre knowledge.

In the counteroffer letter, An attempted to persuade her reader to accept the offer without the 10% salary rise as an alumna:

> When you become one part of it, you'll find it a very desirable place to work. The culture is kind of strict due to the professionalism required to maintain business relation with U.S. Partners. Thus we have a lot of benefi-

cial training programs. I used to change my job a lot until I met UIBE Importers and settled down. Unlike giant companies in which employees specialise in repetitive tasks, here you may experience flexible job assignments. I started as a assistant and now I am a senior manager. Expanding UIBE Importers offers considerable promotion opportunities.

The first half of this text enacted a professional role as An was discussing the advantages of the job from the point of view of the company. The second half, beginning with *I used to change my job*, introduced a personal identity. An reported that she 不能很官话 [shouldn't write matter-of-factly] and 应该更多也加点个人的因素 [should add more of something personal] and that she was assuming the role of 小学姐 [young alumnae], telling younger schoolmates what it was like in the business world as it was common at her university for younger students to consult and trust their alumni (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). Similarly, in the offer and counteroffer letters, Dong played the double roles of we—the employer informing the reader of the company's decisions and I—the future colleague trying to project himself as cooperative and considerate. He explained that by taking the personal approach there would come goodwill from the reader, who if employed, would thank him for his consideration and help him with his work in the coming days (Interview #4, 16 January 2010). Mei also adopted a personal touch in her recruitment genre set by choosing *join us* instead of the company in the offer letter and concluding the letter with *Wish you happiness and progress in our company!* This preference might reflect her conception of the workplace and workplace relations. Mei thought 公司感觉是没有生命的东西 [the company feels like lifeless] and staff were not just 服从命令的 [order followers] or subordinates but members and equals whose happiness and progress counted for the organisation, in particular organisations relying on innovation (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). She wanted her rejection letter to show kindness and respect to the reader despite the rejection, that is, 婉拒 [tactful rejection] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). In Nan's counteroffer letter, apart from his role as senior manager recruiting new staff, he assumed the role of a 长辈或过来人 [senior or experienced] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). He seemed to be unaware that assuming the role of a senior or an experienced person was patronising as in the

world of international business individuals are supposed to be free and equal (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

This notable feature also relates to the characteristically Chinese rhetorical way of handling interpersonal relationships in writing business genres. For example, An chose "your distinguished university" in her personal statement as it is common to address the reader's university as 贵校 [your distinguished university] in Chinese writing (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). Her insistence on being 合情合理 [fit both emotionally and logically] (Interview #3, 14 January 2010) in business writing resonates with the Chinese rhetorical preference to both the pathos and logos in business communication (Zhu, 2005). Dong's consideration of a future personal relationship and the resulting gains reflects the Chinese workplace setting where relationship building is paramount for work success. Mei consistently adopted the inductive pattern (Scollon & Scollon, 2001) in the recruitment genre set. She would not issue her request or instruction without some accounts, a common practice in performing directives in Chinese business writing (Kong, 2006). Given that Mei was playing the senior manager, she was in a position to command the request and did not seem to need to explain the situation.

The discrepancies and uncertainties that have been described may need to be reviewed in light of the argument for glocalisation in writing in International Business English. Just as it is easy for a non-expert user of a second language to slip into direct translation from their first language in second-language production, resulting in surface equivalence, when not monitoring their language production, so it is easy for students to unwittingly follow or voluntarily adopt their native linguaculture when speaking or writing in their second language. While writing in the international business language in a local setting, should the frame of reference be local or that of international business? In Mei's view, for a global company operating in China, the local Chinese way of handling a situation should be taken (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). While Mei would gain support from research on accommodation and Business English as a Lingua Franca in international business communication, for example Connor (1999) and Nickerson and Planken (2015), the discussion is still open. Mei's utterance suggests that while the students were acting the professional role, they were positioning themselves, consciously, as a globalised local, that is, an international

business professional operating in a Chinese context and glocalising business practices, hence their "pluralized identities" (Starke-Meyerring, 2005, p. 469). The discrepancies and uncertainties noted in this section are complex and worth discussing on a case-by-case basis.

6.4 Information Selection and Professional Identity

6.4.1 Insights into the Relevance of Information for Inclusion

The five focal students were aware of tailoring information relevant to the business world. For example, An explained her choice of the subject matter in her application letter thus:

> 别人就是在选你的时候 … 他对你了解更多, 也许他会对你更有兴趣 … 他没有与你相处过, 那你要做的是什么呢?就是说尽量用更少的东西, 来让他更好地了解你, 然后让你想, 呃, 你想让他了解什么, 你更多地把这些东西写进去 [when others are selecting you … the more he knows about you, perhaps the more he will be interested in you … he has had no other contact with you, then what should you do? That is use the fewest possible words to let him know you better, then you think, em, what you want him to know, you put more of this into your text]. (Interview #2, 30 December 2009)

Her business plan for a click-and-mortar company branded "I CAN" also reflected her genre knowledge on the subject-matter dimension. It was started up to provide integrated online education and on-site coaching for children in rural China. She was astute enough to take advantage of the extracurricular resources such as dancing, music, foreign language, which are advocated in the public discourse of contemporary China as essential to an all-round development of children, the mentality of 攀比 [keeping up with the Jones], and the concept of elite/quality education, which in contemporary China means to give one's child a head start.

Dong demonstrated awareness of the information relevant to the genre he was writing in. In his application genre set, for example, he selected from his experiences what would match the job as he said:

你得看工作的性质是什么, 比如说它要是一个 sales 的 … 我以前做过哪些实习然后跟 sales 有关的那些调到前面来,但是如果要是, 嗯, 要是一个翻译的话 … 我可能还是会把学习的东西放在前面来 [It depends on the nature of the job, for example if it is sales … my internships which are related to sales are moved to the front, but if it is, uh, translation … I may still put my academic study in the front]. (Interview #2, 29 December 2009)

Mei's selection of information to include in the organisational background in the job posting was based on three considerations: the company's history, standing, and reputation; the salary and the benefits; opportunities for promotion. These criteria for selection were based on her perception of the beliefs, values, and practices in international business: what people across cultures preferred, whether it was material gains, spiritual well-being, or personal advancement, whether there was room for personal development on top of the salary and benefits, and whether there were promotion opportunities (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). These are largely ideas in human resources management courses and were appropriated by Mei in the profiling of her fictitious company.

Nan highlighted relevant activities (his extracurricular activities) and his strengths (professional knowledge and pragmatic attitude) in his cover letter. In his business plan, he included four essential components: company information, market analysis, marketing plan, and financial analysis to represent his 比较周到的分析… 比较缜密的思维 [quite comprehensive analysis … thorough thinking] (Interview #4, 4 July 2010).

Lan was aware of the selection of the subject matter for inclusion in business genres. She thought that it was inappropriate to include personal matter in business texts as she said:

我觉得应该没有那么, 就是没有那么多个人的东西吧, 应该稍微就客观性的东西更多一点吧, 就这种感觉, 就你可能有一些客套跟寒

暄的用语, 但是好像不会涉及到你内心的一些想法之类 [I feel there shouldn't be so, that is there isn't so much personal matter, there should be more objective matter, that's how I feel, you may have some politeness rituals and greetings, but it seems you don't expose your inner thoughts and the like]. (Interview #4, 3 July 2010)

Lan also developed the insight that the choice of content should be conducive to her purpose and differ between foreign and domestic companies. For example, she wrote that she would advance her skills while working for the company in her cover letter. She would not have written this if she were applying to a domestic company, a sign of awareness of intercultural communication (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009):

对于外国企业来说, 他们会比较看重就是很诚实的这样讲或者就, 它觉得你就可以发展你自己的技能, 可能不是特别介意, 但是如果是国内的企业, 我觉得可能你就不能直接说我是为了, 一边为了你们公司工作一边就发展自己 [for foreign companies, they will give credit to that is speaking honestly like this or, they accept that you will be developing your skills, they may not mind too much, but to a domestic company, I feel perhaps you cannot directly say I intend to work for your company and meanwhile develop myself]. (Interview #2, 29 November 2009)

6.4.2   Discrepancies and Uncertainties

As shown in the last subsection (Sect. 6.4.1), the students were selecting certain information they perceived to be valued (An's and Dong's case) or relevant (Nan's, Mei's, and Lan's case) in the business world when writing in the business genres. Meanwhile, they produced a variety of questionable, irrelevant, or generic information. For example, as noted earlier about An's rhetorical positioning of her audience, what she perceived as necessary information may not match the expectations of international business practitioners. In her business plan, An's marketing strategies ranged from personal selling and direct marketing, TV commercials, sales promotion, and public relations campaign, a generic list rather than strategies specific for her own specific business. Lan was doing

something similar to marketing in her counteroffer letter. As she was recounting her composing process, she came up with various non-monetary benefits to persuade Mr. Porter to accept the original offer:

> 还有就是你的那个工作前景, 有可能会有晋升的机会, 然后, 这点应该是也对, 对那个, 就是那个, employee 来说是比较重要的一点 [still another is your job prospects, there may be opportunities for promotion, then, this should also be a point important to, to the, that is, to the, employee]. (Interview #3, 15 January 2010)

This list of non-monetary benefits looked like a theoretical discussion of an ideal case without addressing the specific situation of Mr. Porter, who cared for money more than any other aspect of the original offer. In this sense, Lan went generic in her dealing with the specific job applicant. Note the use of the generic word "employee" in her reference to the candidate.

Some information is questionable. For example, in Nan's offer letter, he wrote "We appreciate your interest and dedication to join us," suggesting that interest and dedication rather than competence and qualifications were the criteria for selection. In the counteroffer letter, he mentioned again that employees had opportunities for promotion on the basis of their "strong dedication and will" rather than performance and results. In the rejection letter, the unsuccessful candidate was told that "this is not a negative evaluation of you." This is against the recruitment practice of selecting candidates on the basis of their qualifications.

One more problematic example on the subject-matter dimension is lack of relevant information. Although Lan seemed to know the subject matter of each business genre in a rough general way, she admitted that business writing was difficult because of the subject matter. She illustrated this with the example of writing an offer letter:

> 比如说给你个 offer 然后你要写, 你肯定要告知他被录用了, 然后下面, 下面要写什么你可能不太清楚了, 就介绍一下薪水, 然后他倒底要享受什么福利, 然后你可能就不知道了 [for example if you are asked to write an offer letter, surely you will advise that he has been accepted, but

what comes next may not be clear to you, you may write about the salary, but what benefits he will be entitled to, this you may not know]. (Interview #3, 15 January 2010)

The students seem to realise this as they attributed their inadequacies to their lack of practical experiences. For example, Mei felt that her texts and professional writing were 不完全像 [not exactly alike] and hers was 单薄了点 [less substantial in content] because she did not have enough work experience (Interview #2, 30 December 2009). When Dong was reflecting on his business plan (Interview #5, 6 July 2010), he recognised that he could neither name all the strengths of his competitors nor envisage more strengths of his own cake shop to be competitive. More notable is his recognition that a few months in the industry would help out. Such awareness demonstrates the students' valuable meta-cognitive knowledge of the subject matter for the business genres.

6.5   Discussion

By examining the business genre knowledge on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions the Business English students deployed along with their rationale for selecting those genre features, we are able to show that the students were establishing associations between business genre knowledge and business practices and expertise and, in so doing, indexing their professional identity. Business genre knowledge thus serves as indexicals of professional identity for the Business English students and their writing in business genres is an important site for enacting their emerging professional identity.

Producing a professional business text requires an in-depth and subtle understanding of the procedures of business, the roles of the reader and the writer in the business operations, the hard content of business activities, and, on top of these linguistic knowledge. In Tardy's (2009) words, the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions should be integrated to attain genre expertise. When genre expertise is paraphrased with reference to indexicals, there should be balanced co-occurrence of indexicals on the four dimensions for professional identity.

On the whole, the students developed a meta-cognitive form of indexicality where the indexicals were rudimentarily linked to their associated meanings. It seems that the students' indexicals on the four dimensions were not developing in synchronisation and their indexicals were not yet well patterned (Gee, 2011) or configured (Blommaert, 2005) as indexing devices for their emerging professional identity. Take Nan for example. He did not appear to have the sense that formatting conventions, part of the formal dimension in Tardy's (2009) genre knowledge framework, are as much a part of the 格式 [layout] of business writing as the sequential organisation of ideas. In his cover letter, he neither used the full name of the reader in the salutation nor his full name in the signature. There was no spacing between the salutation and the opening sentence of the cover letter or between the paragraphs. Although he regarded politeness as an important aspect of business communication (Interview #3, 14 January 2010), his linguistic competence seems to fall short for realising it. For example, in his rejection letter, he informed the reader of the bad news with "Therefore we will not offer you the position." The high modal expression "will not" renders a harsh rejection. He did not always evaluate the relevance of the information at his disposal. For example, he intended his business plan to be 全面 [comprehensive] (Interview #4, 7 July 2010) without considering or being aware that some of the methods of advertising he proposed may not be appropriate for his firm. Therefore, although Nan developed a rich range of indexicals on the four dimensions of business genre knowledge, he was yet to learn the formatting conventions of the genres, the treatment of the reader–writer relationship, and the selection of appropriate subject matter for inclusion in his writing. His English proficiency was also to be strengthened to enable him to convey his messages appropriately. Aspects of his more advanced genre knowledge projected him as professional while the less sophisticated or inappropriate ones indexed a less-than-professional business writer.

This study argues for the approach of handling each writing situation in situation-specific ways rather than just a generic understanding of business genres. To achieve this requires understanding the profession in depth and the specific situation of genre production in detail. For students who do not have immersion into the profession or situation,

it is difficult to imagine the practices in full detail and accuracy. The Business English students typically admitted that they did not know nor could imagine what being native or professional was like. They tended to compensate for this by resorting to what was available to them, for example their personal experiences, to give them a start when dealing with the world of international business. The lesson for Business English teachers is that writing assignments should draw on students' real experiences and also align with professional practices. By doing this, their students are guided to appreciate the nuances of professional discursive practices and well positioned to start.

Although this chapter focuses on the discursive construction of professional identity by the Business English students, it relates to Chap. 4 about their emerging professional identity. The students' emerging professional identity was underlying their discursive process. For example, the values and perspective on international business professionals and the relevant technical and discursive competences found their way to the students' writing in the business genres. As a result, their emerging professional identity worked like the "autobiographical self" (Ivanič, 1998) in shaping the students' writing in the business genres.

This chapter represents one of the possible sites for the emerging professional identity to be enacted and observed. As both the text and the rationale for the text as elicited from the text-based interviews were drawn on in the study, the chapter is able to examine the extent to which the students' deployment of genre knowledge was conscious, that is, associated with professional identity. Hence, both aspects of identity in the conceptualisation of professional identity—performance of role and self-perception in relation to the role—are incorporated in this chapter. This approach complements the work of ESP researchers whose focus tends to be on textual features rather than the users' cognition of their use.

It needs to be conceded that this chapter is based on the genre knowledge features alerted by the literature to the researcher's attention and also identified by the students as relevant to their professional identity performance rather than a systematic analysis of the students' whole texts. This may mean the miss of some aspects of otherwise relevant business genre knowledge or indexicals in this study. Another concession to make is

that the chapter reports on the general trend of the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity through their writing in business genres over one year. As each genre represents a typified rhetorical response to a recurring social situation (Miller, 1984), genre knowledge expects to differ from a social situation to another. As will be illustrated in Chap. 7, the five students seem to use some genres better than others due to a host of reasons. While this is a reminder that identity performance is situated (Gee, 2011), it should not discredit the overall trend observable in the students' performance of professional identity.

The last concession to offer is that the students' emerging professional identity and their discursive construction of professional identity are related but are also different issues. The former is reminiscent of the autobiographical self which underlies the discoursal self (Ivanič, 1998), or the discursively constructed professional identity as in this study. Confined to the performance site, the Business English students' writing in the business genres may not evoke all features of their emerging professional identity. However, elements relevant to the four constituting factors for their emerging professional identity were abundant in their discursive practices of writing in the business genres, for example the display of a strong analytical expertise and the aspiration for the business venture in Nan's business plan.

6.6   Conclusion

This chapter is concerned with how the Business English students enacted their professional identity while writing in a range of business genres. It builds on the sociocultural linguistic theory of indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) by treating genre knowledge as semiotic resources that are exploited in indexing professional identity. Tardy's (2009) framework for genre knowledge was adapted in the examination of the five focal students' writing in the three genre sets (Bazerman, 2004) of application, recruitment, and business plan, and the text-based interviews were drawn on to examine the associations the students were setting up between features of business genre knowledge and professional identity. The study indicates that the five focal students displayed considerable genre knowledge on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions.

More specifically, they were aware and largely capable of reproducing the move structures, selecting lexicogrammatical features, and performing key speech acts common to each of the business genres. They developed insights into the process of production, distribution, and reception of the genres and ways of handling unfamiliar genres, for example drawing on relevant writing samples or templates. They put themselves in the place of their reader and imagined his or her thinking in the process of their writing. They understood the purpose and tasks involved in each genre and positioned themselves as playing roles in relation to their audience. They chose information they saw as relevant to their writing. By deploying these dimensions of business genre knowledge consciously as professional practices, the students enacted their professional identity as job applicant (candidate for a university programme in An's case), senior manager recruiting a new staff, and entrepreneur writing to create a business.

The discursive construction of professional identity requires the configuration of semiotic resources on the four dimensions of genre knowledge and requires them to be compatible with each other. While the students understood many features of the business genres, there were a number of aspects of genre knowledge in the students' writing that fell short of professional writing, for example the choice of lifeworld vocabulary instead of technical terms, lack of a nuanced understanding of referential and functional intertextuality, transmission of some information in a non-positive way, and inclusion of generic, unnecessary, or questionable information. While some of these features look simple and are readily observable, such as the layout, others are more subtle and require insights into the professional practices and cultures in which the writing is usually produced. These features of the indexicals evidence the developmental nature of the students' professional identity.

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7

Reception of Students' Professional Identity Construction

This chapter follows on the last chapter concerning the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity by presenting how it was received or in a sense validated by eight international business practitioners. On the whole, these professionals viewed positively the students' deployment of genre knowledge in their writing in the various business genres and also related the students' genre performance to their professional identity. Based on their comments, which were heuristically categorised into the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions of business genre knowledge, this chapter reports on the expertise (evidence in the positive comments) and gaps (the negative comments) of the five focal students in their discursive construction of professional identity (see also Zhang, 2013). The international business professionals' comments also inform the generation of a scheme for giving feedback on students' writing in business genres.

7.1   Overall Recognition of Students' Professional Identity Construction

The eight international business professionals reacted to all five focal students' discursively constructed professional identity in considerably positive light. Dong was commended as readily employable. The practitioners generally accepted his business genre knowledge on the four dimensions as displayed in his writing in all the eight business genres. For example, in response to the question on his business plan "Does the text read like professional writing?" Rick replied: "Generally yes. It tries to sell the concept on the basis of logical arguments and facts" (Rick's comments on Dong's texts). Tim commented positively on Dong's rejection letter with "Perfect! Very encouraging to the person being rejected" (Tim's comments on Dong's texts). He also thought highly of Dong's business plan:

> *This is an excellent business plan. Well researched, good use of graphs (visual aids are always good for presentations), lots of facts/figures to back up comments.
> *Very good writing style – choice of words. He combines business phrases with an easy-to-read and follow flow of words (this approach means it is easy for anyone to understand – even non business people)
> Someone should hire this man!!!

An was recognised for her "awesome" writing. Her personal statement was awarded 100% and with the single-word comment "Awesome!" by her writing instructor (Leo's comments on An's texts). Her writing in the recruitment genre set and business plan was also awarded high scores, 96 and 87, respectively, by her writing instructor. Sam commended her on her business plan by writing, "This is a good plan and the use of English is very good" (Sam's comments on An's texts). To the question "Do you feel the text reads like professional writing?" Luo replied: "Generally speaking Yes" (Luo's comments on An's texts).

Lan was recognised for the human touch in her writing. Leo, her writing instructor, awarded her cover letter 100% and made a specific mention of the "nice 'human' element" in it (Leo's comments on Lan's texts).

Tim accepted the cover letter as "good and concise" and concluded his review of Lan's business plan with the following remark:

> Very informative/well-researched business proposal. Additional use of graphs would be good when giving actual statistics. (Tim's comments on Lan's texts)

Mei minored in marketing and learned about marketing and human resources from both her major curriculum and her minor curriculum. Her knowledge of the business profession was amply demonstrated in her approaches to the recruitment genres and the business plan and was recognised by the professional participants. For example, in his comments on Mei's business plan, Leo wrote: "You know the stuff real well" (Leo's comments on Mei's texts). Tim was also positive about her business plan with the comments of "well laid out plan" and "very thorough investigation covering all aspects + including marketing figures" (Tim's comments on Mei's texts). This recognition was to some extent shared by Rick who, in his response to the question *Does the text read like professional writing*, wrote:

> We can tell this is not written by a native speaker. In a business case in a multinational context this should not be a problem so long as the English usage is sufficient to convey ideas clearly, even if unusual or odd-sounding constructions are occasionally used. … It reads like someone who is capable of professional writing, but there are some problems in the organisation and content which makes me feel that the person had some difficulty constructing a persuasive professional presentation of the ideas. (Rick's comments on Mei's texts)

This balanced view was echoed by Qian who commented on the business plan that the "logic is ok but not the words" (Qian's comments on Mei's texts).

Despite his own claim that his texts approximated professional writing in terms of language and structure (Interview #2, 14 January 2010; Interview #3, 14 January 2010; Interview #4, 7 July 2010), Nan's writing in the eight business genres received mixed reception from five of the professional participants who commented on his texts (Zhang, 2015). For example, Tim was in favour of Nan's offer letter with the comment

"Good – brief and to the point with some positive reinforcement" (Tim's comments on Nan's texts). Sam also recognised the letter as "business-like" (Sam's comments on Nan's texts). But Nan's business plan was marked low by Qian, who stated that "I'm not convinced!" by Nan's conclusion that his "Quality Financial Consulting Group will be successful" (Qian's comments on Nan's texts). Tim criticised Nan's formatting practices and wording with the verdict on his cover letter: "Trying to sound professional but sounds more amateur" (see Fig. 7.1). The variation in Nan's writing may be attributed to Nan's weak effort. Leo, for example, commented on Nan's writing in the recruitment genres thus: "You can write better than that. You write extremely well, but your effort is weak – Quite honestly – you have the ability to out-write 95% of the students in class, but you like the internet trash."

7.2 Concern with Business Genre Knowledge on All Four Dimensions

The professionals' comments concern all four dimensions of genre knowledge. Table 7.1 represents the aggregate frequency counts of the professionals' comments on the four dimensions of genre knowledge for the five focal students. The largest and second largest numbers of comments belong to the formal dimension and the subject-matter dimension, respectively. There are also a large number of comments on the rhetorical dimension and a considerable number of comments on the process dimension. This result suggests that the international business practitioners considered the full range of business genre knowledge in evaluating writing in their profession.

It is worth mentioning that the process dimension received far fewer comments than the other dimensions from the professional participants except Qiu. This does not mean that it was considered to be a less important dimension of business genre knowledge by the practitioners. In fact, as Qiu noted in her review of An's writing, the process dimension is a key aspect of business genre knowledge as the display of process knowledge reflects mastery of business processes and procedures for business operations. For example, the inclusion of referential intertextuality (Devitt, 1991) in an order letter such as *Further to our talk on the phone* and *Thank you for your faxed catalogue and*

price list represents the business practice of negotiating terms and conditions by telephone or fax prior to the writing of the order letter, which in turn is an example of functional intertextuality (Devitt, 1991). One possible reason for the small number of comments on the process dimension is that the dynam-

Fig. 7.1   Nan's cover letter with Tim's comments

Table 7.1 Summary of professional participants' comments on student writing

Genre knowledge concerned with	Student participants	Professional participants							
		Luo	Qian	Qiu	Leo	Sam	Rick	Bill	Tim
Formal dimension	An	3	7	26	13	39	NA	NA	86
	Dong	7	127	NA	17	NA	12	57	17
	Mei	2	41	NA	14	NA	15	24	89
	Nan	0	29	NA	12	19	NA	NA	27
	Lan	2	23	NA	16	21	NA	NA	24
Process dimension	An	1	0	21	0	0	NA	NA	1
	Dong	1	0	NA	0	NA	3	0	2
	Mei	0	0	NA	0	NA	1	0	1
	Nan	0	1	NA	1	1	NA	NA	1
	Lan	0	0	NA	0	1	NA	NA	2
Rhetorical dimension	An	0	0	6	1	5	NA	NA	14
	Dong	0	1	NA	0	NA	1	1	1
	Mei	1	3	NA	9	NA	3	0	5
	Nan	0	0	NA	4	3	NA	NA	5
	Lan	0	0	NA	4	2	NA	NA	13
Subject-matter dimension	An	3	1	7	1	14	NA	NA	7
	Dong	4	14	NA	2	NA	12	6	2
	Mei	1	1	NA	5	NA	7	6	6
	Nan	0	10	NA	3	10	NA	NA	6
	Lan	1	5	NA	7	4	NA	NA	9

Note. NA indicates that the professional participant did not read the student's texts. Qian, Leo, and Tim reviewed all the texts of the five focal students. Luo reviewed all of An's, Dong's, and Mei's texts and Nan's and Lan's texts except for their business plans. Qiu reviewed An's texts in the recruitment genre set. Sam reviewed An's business plan and Nan's and Lan's letters except for their rejection letters. Bill reviewed Dong's and Mei's texts in the application genre set and recruitment genre set except for their counteroffer and rejection letters. Rick reviewed Dong's and Mei's business plan

ics of text production, distribution, and reception involved in the process dimension may be less easy for the business practitioners to capture than the other aspects of business genre knowledge.

7.3   Significant Diversity Among the Professionals

The professionals differed from each other in the total number of comments each made on the Business English students' writing regardless of their language background or professional field. For example, Qian, a Chinese

business professional in the field of manufacturing, made significantly more comments than Luo and Qiu, two other Chinese professionals in the fields of logistics and insurance, respectively. Tim, an Australian international trader, made far more comments than Leo, the writing instructor and former financial analyst at a major US automaker. The professionals also differed from each other significantly regarding their comments on each individual student (see Table 7.1). When reviewing An's writing, for example, Luo, Qian, Qiu, Leo, Sam, and Tim made, respectively, 3, 7, 26, 13, 39, and 86 comments on the formal dimension of An's writing. Qiu made far more comments (21 comments) on An's process knowledge than the other professional participants who made no or just one comment.

The practitioners also commented on the same text differently. For example, Sam was generally positive about An's business plan as he wrote: "This is a good plan and the use of English is very good" (Sam's comments on An's texts). Qian, however, concluded that ideas in An's business plan were "questionable" (Qian's comments on An's texts). An's business plan did not have a contents page, which Luo thought made her business plan "less professional" (Luo's comments on An's texts). But no other professional participant questioned that. Qiu maintained that An's offer letter was not properly laid out as an offer letter is like a contract whose terms and conditions are listed and verbalised in independent sentences (Qiu's comments on An's texts). Yet Tim did not find it inappropriate in any way and commended An on her approach (see Fig. 7.2).

The business writing instructor Leo differed from other practitioners in responding to the same texts. For example, concerning Nan's use of personal persuasion in the third paragraph of his counteroffer letter, Tim trashed it as "irrelevant" and "personal" (see Fig. 7.3), while Leo awarded to it the comment "good job" (Leo's comments on Nan's texts). This is probably due to Leo's stance on his course objective and conception of management (see also Zhang, 2016, p. 153):

> As a manager, which I believe all of the students will be, they must balance professionalism and personality. 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. (Leo, Personal communication, 28 December 2009)

ASSIGNMENT 2 –

* Very direct points so the reader fully understands the basic terms of employment before the 'brochure' arrives.

From:

To:

Subject: Acceptance Announcement from UIBE Importers

Dear Miss Cathy Smith,

new Assistant Manager

Congratulations on being accepted by UIBE Importers as our ~~manager assistant~~ for *the* sales department.

This letter confirms our acceptance of you for this full-time position. The starting salary is 5,000 RMB per month. Normal hours are from 9 A.M. to 6 P.M., five days a week. You will, however, be expected to work some extended hours when required. But the hours are fairly flexible for non-busy times, *as well.*

also

Good explanation

A brochure is being mailed separately outlining our personnel policies, insurance policies, fringe benefits, current payroll taxes and other details of employment.

To indicate your formal acceptance of this offer, please complete the enclosed form, sign it and mail it in the postpaid envelope. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there are any points you would like to discuss.

Once again, congratulations on your selection.

→ Good positive reinforcement the company is happy with the reader's 'selection'.

Fig. 7.2 An's offer letter with Tim's comments

All this diversity in the professionals' responses to the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity suggests that business genres are flexible rather than fixed and that there does not seem to be a uniform discursive practice in international business and hence no monolithic international business professional identity. Rather, it is likely to vary considerably from individual to individual and across contexts. It is also clear from the professionals' comments that there was unbalanced development among the five students regarding their knowledge of different business genres, that is, they were more proficient at some genres than other genres, and regarding the different dimensions of the knowledge of a specific business genre, that is, they mastered some dimensions better than the other dimensions.

Fig. 7.3   Nan's counteroffer letter with Tim's comments

7.4   Intelligibility and Accuracy

The professional participants recognised mutual intelligibility in Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF; see Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Koester, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Nickerson, 2005) and meanwhile drew attention to accuracy in writing. For example, Luo's comments on Mei's writing demonstrate BELF for international business:

> The content is more important than language factors such as words, expressions, sentence structures, rhetorical organization, which are generally attached less attention by professionals. (Luo's comments on Mei's texts)

The professionals were aware of the different ways that English is used globally. When Bill was commenting on his revision of Dong's business letters, he explained (Zhang, 2013, p. 152):

> We are taught to be brief and to the point in our written correspondence. If something is not needed in the letter to make it more understandable, then do not say it. We are taught not to use elaborate (flowery) expressions. I do realize this is a cultural issue. The Chinese style of writing is more formal and polite than ours. (Bill's comments on Dong's texts)

Interestingly, for some of the Business English students, mutual intelligibility, rather than native-likeness in the linguistic code, was also highlighted as the criterion for international business interactions. For example, when Nan and Mei were interviewed about their texts, neither of them was worried about the linguistic code of English. In fact, Nan claimed that the major difference between his texts and those of business professionals lay in ways of thinking rather than language (Interview #4, 7 July 2010).

This focus on mutual intelligibility, however, does not mean that the linguistic code was in any way insignificant for the professional participants. They were actually concerned with general English proficiency, including the use of general vocabulary, formal or informal expressions, verb in the main clause delimiting the perspective of the subordinate clause, a chain of simple sentences, Chinglish, and mechanics. For example, there were five comments on An's business plan by Sam which may illustrate the use of clause complex by international business professionals. Sam's revisions are marked with *.

> There exists a gap between needs and supply. I CAN will be the first-comer to dig the market potential. We aim to provide a channel that connects needs and supply. (An's original)
>   *I CAN* is the first to recognize this gap between need and supply and aims to develop the market by providing a channel to connect the two. (Sam's revision)

> When bringing the opportunity for students to learn more skills, it creates a new form of education. It's neither merely online learning nor traditional training. I CAN is more than a bridge. (An's original)
>
> *I CAN* combines the best of traditional and on-line learning by a unique use of web technologies and person-to-person contact − a click and mortar concept. (Sam's revision)

An's original writing looks like sets of discrete statements. Sam combined the otherwise individual sentences into clause complexes which consist of two or more clauses in either paratactic relation (constituent clauses having equal status) or hypotactic relation (constituent clauses having unequal status) with each other (Halliday, 1994). The resulting sentences are action oriented because both ends and means are specified in the same clause complex.

Chinglish was used by Qian, one of the professional participants, to refer to the use of English, which may deviate from the 'standard' English including literal translation of ideas from Chinese to English regardless of their compatibility. For example, when she read the sentence *So we don't want too many discounts and low price spoil the brand* in Mei's business plan, she wrote the comment "Chinglish" next to it and revised it as, "We don't want to spoil the brand by offering discounts and low price from time to time" (Qian's comments on Mei's texts).

In her business plan, Mei probably translated the idea in Chinese 小资情调 [yuppie taste] literally into "petty bourgeois" for describing the ambience of her coffee shop, which Tim found inappropriate or even "political" (Tim's comment on Mei's texts) even though he did not use the label Chinglish for it. Dong wrote in his business plan: "Cake Shop is never something small business as most people consider." It was likely to be a literal translation of a Chinese sentence. Rick made this comment on it: "intelligible but weak grammar" (Rick's comments on Dong's texts).

The linguistic code, after all, is an important factor in BELF for both native and non-native users of English. An, Lan, and Dong themselves felt that their texts were not yet professional due to their concern that their English was not native-like. It also seems to be an important crite-

rion for evaluating the writer as a professional communicator. For example, Mei's claim to being an excellent communicator in her cover letter was challenged by Bill: "If you say you are an excellent communicator, your written work *MUST* be excellent, too" (Bill's comments on Mei's texts; italic in original).

7.5   Gaps in Business Genre Knowledge

This section focuses on the features of business genre knowledge the students were found to fall short of. The gaps on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions are presented in turn.

7.5.1 Regarding the Formal Dimension

The international business professionals noted a number of issues with the students' formal dimension of genre knowledge which may be taken as their lack of competence at handling textual features. This section focuses on the formal dimension issues which are identified in the literature as more or less features of business discourse, including the move structure and layout, medium and mode, linguistic realisation of face-threatening speech acts, perspective and thematisation, verbal versus nominal groups, boosters, technical terms, redundant words and expressions, and addition.

7.5.1.1   The Move Structure and Layout

The professional participants attached importance to the layout and move structure for the business genres. For example, Rick noticed that Mei did not follow the conventional order of putting T (threats) after O (opportunities) in her SWOT analysis in her business plan (Rick's comment on Mei's texts). Tim advised that Nan's cover letter should "get the manager's name" (see Fig. 7.1 for Tim's comments on Nan's texts). Leo noticed that there was no spacing between the salutation and the opening sentence of the cover letter or between the paragraphs (Leo's comments

on Nan's texts). Tim found Nan's two-page resume "too long and cluttered" (Tim's comments on Nan's texts) and the contents page of his business plan "awkward" (see Fig. 7.4).

Fig. 7.4   The contents page of Nan's business plan with Tim's comments

7.5.1.2   Medium and Mode

The use of the medium of communication (e.g., speaking, writing, email, SMS) and mode (e.g., language, image, music) is complicated in the modern workplace (Nickerson & Planken, 2015). Dong's job posting is a multimodal text with a jigsaw puzzle framed at the top, job description and requirements in the middle, and contact information at the bottom. In the jigsaw puzzle there is a missing piece. The sentence "You complete us" was put in the place of the missing piece. Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the contact information at the bottom indicates actions to take, the job description and requirements in the middle highlight the message of the text, and the jigsaw puzzle at the top of the page projects an ideal state (when the successful candidate fills in the missing piece). Leo found it overdone because of too much display work.

7.5.1.3   Linguistic Realisations of Face-Threatening Speech Acts

Face-threatening speech acts such as requests and instructions are common in business discourse. As business communication is not faceless communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), potential face threats need to be carefully mitigated. Examples (1) and (2) are from a student's order letter.

(1) Would you please help us place an electronic advertisement for our recruitment information on your website?

(2) We hope the advertisement could meet the following requirements.

In Example (1), the student framed the request as an appeal for assistance following the "suggestory formulae," whereas the professional revised it as *Please place the following advertisement on your website*, which is an instruction, the most direct way of making a request (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 18). In Example (2), the request was originally framed by the student as a "want statement" in contrast with the "obligation statement" in the revised version *The advertisement should*

meet the following conditions (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 18). The student seems to be following textbook teaching on politeness in his realisations of speech acts without adjusting them to the situational context of writing, that is, his own advantageous buyer position. Tim made this point clear in his comment on An's order letter:

> As "you" are paying for the job advertisement to be placed, you don't have to be "overly" (too much) polite.

The professionals, nonetheless, did consider politeness but they performed it in more subtle ways, as in Example (3).

(3) That's all of the advertisement. We hope to find some qualified applicants through it. Thank you for your time.

The student version was revised by Tim as *Thanks for your assistance William and please let me know if you require any further details*. Note the addressing of the reader (William Smith) by his first name, which adds a human touch to the text.

The professionals also adjusted their speech acts by using appropriate modal verbs. In Example (4), "would post" was substituted by Bill for the original wording "could kindly post."

(4) We would appreciate it if you could kindly post the advertisement in an optimal location on your web page.

It is interesting to note here that Bill also revised Examples (1) and (2) from requests into instructions and to compare his handling of these three examples. As the request in (4) is more demanding than the rather routine requests in Examples (1) and (2), he chose a more polite sentence and higher modality. He seems to have calculated the amount of face work and adjusted his linguistic realisations on the basis of the obligations for the writer and the reader in the specific transactional setting and the level of imposition of a specific speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As shown in Chap. 6, Dong, who produced the four requests and instructions that have just been cited in this subsection,

was aware of the face threats and their different imposition levels but tended to use more indirect linguistic realisations than the professionals.

7.5.1.4   Representation of Perspectives

Perspective reflects how an event is viewed by the viewer and is thus important to examining how writers position themselves and their audiences. In business writing, the writer is enacting institutionalised roles that require them to adopt appropriate perspectives on the message to transmit. This is achieved through the use of thematisation, diction, and avoidance.

Thematisation provides one linguistic means of representing perspectives. Below are several examples of how the business professionals realised their perspectives through thematisation (Brown & Yule, 1983; Halliday, 1994). An's original sentences and the professionals' revisions marked with "*" are reproduced below:

> Besides, I have managed to involve myself in various books concerning agriculture and have gained an increasingly deep understanding. (An's original)
>   *I have also managed to involve myself in various books concerning agriculture and have gained an increasingly deeper understanding. (Tim's revision)
> Therefore, I chose Business English as my major in university after much deliberation. (An's original)
>   *After much deliberation I chose Business English as my major in university. (Tim's revision)

The marked, textual themes (Halliday, 1994; Martin & Rose, 2007) of "Besides" and "Therefore" were replaced by the unmarked topical theme "I" and marked topical theme "After much deliberation." The original themes seem to maintain the storyline or logical connection, while the revised topical themes foreground the applicant, the key player in the personal statement, and An's determination and conscious preparation. These examples suggest that while logical relations need to be clearly indi-

cated as in Ellis and Johnson (1994), the "conjunctive adjuncts" that show logical connections in the text (Halliday, 1994, p. 49) need not be thematised.

In his cover letter, Dong wrote: *To use the knowledge I learned from my professional training in Business English*. Bill changed it into "Based upon my education in Business English" (Bill's comments on Dong's texts). In the revision, the application for the position was supported with one's educational qualifications rather than some desire or subjective belief. The revised version changed the perspective by emphasising the mutual benefits that may ensue as a result of employing this candidate. The writer was thus made to appear objective and rational. In his business plan, Dong wrote: "I believe our cake shop can be widely successful" and "We all have the reason to be optimistic." These two statements were changed by Rick respectively into "Based on the encouraging growth and success of our first two stores, we believe that we can profitably enlarge our business" and "All of the factors we have examined point toward strong potential in our selected market." In the first case, Dong's original text foregrounded an individual belief, while the revised version explicitly stated the rationale for the belief. The revision took past success as the given/background information in presenting the new/prospect of success. The logic behind this was more success building on past success (Rick's comments on Dong's texts). In the second case, it was on the basis of the "objective" factors rather than the "subjective" beliefs and benign wishes that the forecast was made.

Another way the professionals adopted to realise perspectives is diction. One example is An's use of "Cheaper price" as her comparative advantage when she was describing her product in her business plan. Sam revised it as "Lower Cost" (Sam's comments on An's texts). In the context of the business plan, the expression "lower cost" adopted the customer orientation/perspective, that is, lower cost for the customers, which would be more appealing to the prospective customers. One other example is taken from the market segmentation section in Dong's business plan where he was discussing potential customers of his do-it-yourself (DIY) cake shop: There are lots of *other reasons for the customers* (other customers who have a reason) to make a cake by themselves. The professional's revision in

brackets ties well to the emphasis on the target customers rather than their reasons for making DIY cakes.

One more device in the professionals' toolkit for realising perspectives is avoidance or selecting what not to convey. For example, the sentence in An's rejection letter *So I'm sorry to tell you that you're not accepted for the current opening* was deleted by Qiu. While An announced to the candidate that he was not offered the job after some buffer, Qiu simply wrote that she had selected the candidate that best met her needs for the current opening and explained her approach thus: "I think it [An's rejection letter] is quite well structured. However, I prefer not to emphasize the fact that we cannot accept this candidate now, but rather just inform him the recruitment result" (Qiu's comments on An's texts).

7.5.1.5   Verbal Versus Nominal Groups

A number of the nominal groups in Mei's cover letter were changed to verbal groups. For example, Bill changed "is in search of" into "is searching," "you will likely have an interest" into "you will be interested," "I have … high efficiency and effectiveness with definite goal and cooperative spirit" into "work effectively within teams" (Bill's comments on Mei's texts). The verbal groups made the messages more action and achievement oriented, which is expected in job applications (Swales & Feak, 2000). While Mei was aware that she should be using words sounding important in her cover letter (Interview #2, 30 December 2009), she did not seem to know the preferable linguistic form they are used in.

A reverse example, however, is more subtle. In her cover letter, Lan described her academic record in these terms:

I get scholarships twice.

This sentence Sam changed to read:

I received two scholarships. (Sam's comments on Lan's texts)

Apart from the verb tense error, Lan's original sentence, probably a literal translation from Chinese, was more colloquial and less action

oriented. A more subtle difference may be the textualisation (Bhatia, 1993; Widdowson, 1979) of quantity and the provision of structural slots for epithets in the revision, for example adjectives such as *prestigious* can be comfortably placed in between "two" and "scholarships." This syntactic structure is found to be effective in English advertising (Leech, 1966), which belongs to the promotional genre encompassing employment application letters.

7.5.1.6   Boosters

"Boosters" are words or expressions that (are intended to) produce an amplifying effect. The professionals illustrated what to boost, by whom, and how in their revisions of the students' writing. Boosters were used by the business professionals when presenting their own qualifications and skills. For example, An wrote in her resume: "good written and verbal communication skills in English." Leo replaced "good" with "exceptional" (Leo's comments on An's texts), a reflection of the promotional nature of the genre (Peagler & Yancy, 2005). Bill changed the word "high" in "high marketing performance" in Mei's cover letter into "exceptional" (Bill's comment on Mei's texts). The revision boosted Mei's ability and skill. Similarly, in the discussion of promotion strategy of his business plan, Dong kept using "would." Qian wrote: "Do not use 'would', 'may' in your strategy statement; instead, 'will' will be the right word" (Qian's comments on Dong's texts). By using the lower modality modals such as would and may, Dong presented himself and his DIY cake shop in a tentative tone, which was judged to be inappropriate for promoting his business and therefore revised by the business professional. They were removed, however, when describing those of their readers. For example, in a rejection letter, one student wrote: "Your experience and capability is perfectly suited for the job." The booster "perfectly" was substituted with "well" by Sam (Sam's comments on the writing by Yun, who was among the ten students whose writing was reviewed by the professionals). An's use of the word "distinguished" in her cover letter to compliment the target university was unfavourably received by Tim who commented that it is "too strong" (Tim's comments on An's texts).

The professionals also used boosters to upgrade the requirements or obligations of job candidates as in the next two examples. In the description of

the prerequisites in her job opening, Lan wrote: "be able to use Microsoft Office." Sam commented on this with "a bit better to say proficient with" (Sam's comments on Lan's texts). The adjective "proficient" stipulated a higher level of computer literacy of the candidate(s) than the student's version and boosted the requirement for computing skills of the candidate. Bill's substitution of "must" for "can" in the sentence "Interested applicants can send resume to" in Mei's job posting (Bill's comments on Mei's texts) gave the statement the power of an instruction.

Some statements were toned down to reduce the high modality by the professional participants. In his rejection letter, Nan informed the reader of the bad news with "Therefore we will not offer you the position." The high modal expression of "will not" was changed to "are unable to" by Tim (Tim's comments on Nan's texts) and "can not" by Qian (Qian's comments on Nan's texts). These changes made the message of rejection less harsh for the reader. Mei wrote this in her business plan:

> In the short term, the new entrant, Moonlight Café will achieve a 30 percent market share within 2 kilometers area of the first café, where its main consumers are college students and young office workers.

Tim changed "will" to "aims to achieve" with the comment: "This means 100% – a guarantee. A better phrase is 'aims to achieve'." Through the revision, the obligation on the part of the business to generate profit is considerably moderated.

Boosters were often expressed by modal verbs or expressions. In the counteroffer letter, Dong was trying to explain to Cathy Smith why her request for a pay rise was not granted by saying "we are forced to follow the standards and principles of the company's salary system." Qian changed "are forced to" into "have to/should" (Qian's comments on Dong's texts). Bill turned it into "must" (Bill's comments on Dong's texts). Stating that one's company was forced to perform an action positioned the company negatively.

Boosters were also expressed through appropriate general words. For example, whereas An wrote, "Here is a short list of the inconveniences for children in rural areas to learn," Sam commented, "The barriers for children in rural areas to learn" (Sam's comments on An's texts). A barrier

is more severe than an inconvenience. Sam's version therefore was likely to have more impact on the reader who was being persuaded to invest in the proposed business to remove the barriers. Below is an example from Dong's business plan (original sentence italicised and professional's comments and revision in brackets):

> *Besides, the electronic machines should be safe enough* (alarmingly too casual to an investor, especially with the mention of children customers in the next sentence. Liability issues are present. Statements dealing with issues like this which could cause concern should be handled more authoritatively, like: "To ensure customer safety, all our cake-baking machinery meets or exceeds the stringent standards of …").

The original sentence is a tentative and subjective proposition through the high modal verb "should." Rick's comments and rephrasing of the original as "meets or exceeds the stringent standards" removed any suggestion that the DIY cake shop might be a dangerous environment. This is also an additional illustration of the realisation of perspective in that the revision makes use of the problem–solution textual pattern by backgrounding the problem (concern with safety) and foregrounding the solution (proactive measures of meeting or exceeding safety standards).

These instances of boosters give clues to the values and perspective of international business professionals: a positive image is projected of the self and more is expected of the staff including prospective staff; caution is taken when committing oneself to statements and actions.

7.5.1.7   Technical Terms

Technical terms represent business procedures and activities and are thus most indexical of professional identity. The use of technical terms in business writing was regarded by the professional participants as one weak area of the students' business genre knowledge. One common problem is their use of everyday language for technical information. For example, in Nan's business plan, he used "money managing programs" for "asset management programs," "representative prices" for "representative charges or fees or rates" (Qian's comments on Nan's texts).

In her rejection letter, An wrote: "Please understand that this is not a negative evaluation of your accomplishment, but rather a reflection of our unique hiring needs." The word "accomplishment" was changed to "qualifications" by Qiu (Qiu's comments on An's texts). Qualifications are concrete, specific, and objective and are thus impersonal criteria for evaluating candidates while accomplishment can be personal and hard to evaluate. Dong used "some professional and innovative cake designers to provide suggestions and guidance" in his business plan to refer to his staff who were hired to advise customers on making DIY cakes. Rick criticised this use as "vague" and suggested the more concrete and technical term "trained cake design consultant" (Rick's comments on Dong's texts), which sounds like a professional title for the staff. Similarly, where Dong used casual everyday language such as "Improvement in the level of materials," "Making the environment more romantic and charming," and "Recruitment of professional advisors for the customers," Qian packaged them in technical language, respectively, "Improvement in the quality of ingredients," "Making service as product," and "Quality assurance measures" (Qian's comments on Dong's texts). In Mei's job posting where she listed the job responsibilities for the candidate, she wrote, "Preparing analysis on the account," which was revised as, "Preparing account analysis" (Bill's comment on Mei's texts). In her business plan, she wrote "citizens" to refer to the public or consumers, which Rick criticised as having a "social orientation" (Rick's comments on Mei's texts). As in the business plan the public is institutionalised into clients or consumers, the general word *citizens* may invoke a lifeworld scenario which is not appropriate for the institutional setting (Gee, 2011; Pan, Scollon & Scollon, 2002).

The professionals' comments indicate a number of facades of business practices. Businesses are institutions with designated roles and explicit procedures for their operations. People are converted into roles and are referred to by (professional) titles. Operational procedures also have technical/specialised ways of referring to them. While professionals use the technical terms for the roles and operations as insiders, the students as outsiders either did not know the terms or were unaware of the technical processes such that they were unable to select the appropriate words for their meaning.

7.5.1.8   Deletion Versus Expansion

Achieving a balance between clarity, brevity, and sincerity when following the Clarity-Brevity-Sincerity principle (Scollon & Scollon, 2001) for business communication is an important area where the students and the practitioners were differentiated. Expansion (i.e., adding a word or expression in the text) or deletion (removing a word or expression from the text) received a large number of comments. Below are some examples.

Words or expressions that expressed the same meaning as other words or expressions in the text were crossed out. For example, in Mei's order letter, she wrote:

> We would like your assistance in placing an electronic ad that will be available, open for seven days starting March 26th, 2010.

The word "open" was deleted by Tim (Tim's comment on Mei's texts). "Open" means the same as "available" and was thus redundant in the text. Bill also deleted the word and explained the revision in terms of the principle of brevity in business writing (Bill's comments on Mei's letters). Sam did not like Nan's complex English expressions in his counteroffer letter and advised that "when in doubt go for simple!" (Sam's comments on Nan's texts).

However, words or expressions were added to make the message clearer. For example, Mei wrote "the States" in her description of her company in her job posting. Qian changed it to "the United States" with the explanation that it was a "formal expression in company briefing" (Qian's comments on Mei's texts). Tim revised Mei's sentence "UBC Coffee and SPR Coffee are market challengers" into "followed by UBC Coffee and SPR Coffee as market challengers" (Tim's comments on Mei's texts). In her counteroffer letter, An wrote: "So I'm sorry to tell you that it's difficult for us to offer you a 10% pay increase at this moment." "At this moment" was replaced by Tim with the much clearer adverbial phrase of time: "prior to your commencement at UIBE Importers." An began her rejection letter with a plain description of a fact: "Thank you for your recent application to UIBE Importers." This was rephrased into:

Thank you for your interest in UIBE Importers and taking your time to participate in our recruitment process. (Qiu's comments on An's texts)

Qiu's version was longer, transmitting her wish to show her appreciation of the candidate's effort (Qiu's comments on An's texts).

The addition of the first personal pronoun "I" or "we" is more intriguing as ways of adding a human touch:

Look forward to hearing from you soon. (An's original writing in the counteroffer)
    *I look forward to hearing from you soon. (Tim's revision)
Wish you a very successful future in your career! (An's original writing in the rejection)
    *I wish you a very successful future in your career! (Tim's revision)
    *We wish you a very successful future in your career! (Qiu's revision)

The personal pronouns infused a personal touch into the imperative sentences. This may appear to deviate from the view that "individuals should set aside personal, cultural, and other group-derived relationships and enter into purely logical relationships in corporate discourse" (Scollon & Scollon, 2001, p. 205). Yet given the communicative purposes of the counteroffer and rejection letters, the personal touch conveying the business practitioners' kindness and positive attitude may be conducive to obtaining a response and possible goodwill on the part of the reader and is thus a subtle way of being personal in business writing.

Adding hedging is useful for expressing tentativeness and politeness in business discourse. For example, Tim added the hedging word "unfortunately" (Tim's comments on Nan's texts) before "can not be offered" in Nan's counteroffer letter, which is a kind of buffer to make the message less blunt. This aligns with the principle of sincerity according to the C-B-S principle (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

In sum, the business practitioners removed words, phrases, or sentences that did not add to the clarity of the message, which suggests that they comply with brevity. Expansion may sound counterintuitive, yet the professional participants also added words, expressions, or even entire clauses to make the point clearer and/or to convey politeness. The

examples of deletion and expansion indicate that in business writing clarity is the primary concern and that it is on the basis of clear expression of the message that brevity comes in. These subtle ways of indexing professional identity seem opaque to the student writers.

7.5.2   Regarding the Process Dimension

There were far fewer comments on the process dimension than on the three other dimensions. However, it can be noted from the business practitioners' comments that this dimension of genre knowledge is essential for professional identity as it reflects procedural matters in business practices.

Qiu's comments on An's recruitment genre texts are revealing. She noted that there was no mention of the price in An's order letter for posting the job advertisement. The order letter should be a later stage of the transaction, that is, the senior manager should have telephoned the web site manager about the job posting and the email was then sent to confirm some details of the telephone conversation and/or request the contract for the order. The job posting should be an attachment rather than being inserted into the email order text. As the offer letter was rather personal and confidential, it was usually attached to the email message. No brochure of the kind mentioned in the offer letter was sent to the candidate until he or she had signed the contract. The counteroffer letter was quite unusual in two ways. For one thing, the offer was usually the agreed terms and conditions between the employer and the candidate during the job interviews and seldom was there a follow-up request for pay rise. For another, if it did happen, the negotiation was usually conducted on the telephone. As a result, there should be textual references to the telephone conversation in the email text, that is, referential intertextuality (Devitt, 1991). On the basis of these observations, Qiu concluded that An's writing did not reflect business practices.

While it may be conceded that in writing in the business genres, the students were addressing the context of situation (Lillis, 2001) by complying with the detailed requirements for their assignment (e.g., the students were assigned to write email letters in their assignments; see

Appendix 3.2), the comments show that the students lacked the nuanced process knowledge concerning text production, distribution, and reception in professional contexts.

Another example of the process dimension reflecting professional procedural practices is the way they read application genre texts. Tim wrote that business professionals barely had the time to read long cover letters:

> This cover letter is too long. It needs to be much shorter. Get to the point of why you are applying. Keep it business-like (less personal). The Resume will cover all experience/education – which is what most employers are looking for (i.e. they are looking at a certain criteria/education-experience level to fill the position). If this Resume matches what they are looking for, then the personal experiences/thoughts can be discussed in the interview. Remember – the employer is possibly looking at 100's of Resumes + Cover letters. If the Cover letter is too long, they will skip it and go straight to the Resume. (Tim's comments on An's texts)

Although this reading of An's personal statement may not be true of the reception by the academic community as the personal statement for a university application is a different genre in the family of promotional genres (Bhatia, 2004; Ding, 2007), Tim's comments can be taken as representing the reception of cover letters in business settings. Luo shared this concern in his comment on Dong's cover letter:

> I would make a short summary instead of a full page letter. I am wondering if the HR has enough time to go through the full page. (Luo's comments on Dong's texts)

Tim's comments also concerned the relationship between the resume and the cover letter, or functional intertextuality (Devitt, 1991) as he pointed out that "most education/experience points are in the Resume" (Tim's comments on Dong's texts). The relationship is clarified in the literature on business writing. For example, the cover letter addresses the criteria in the job advertisement (Goodall & Goodall, 2002) and "should amplify or add to your CV" (Stewart, 1987, p. 80). Dong later realised that his cover letter looked like a catalogue or summary of his resume rather than a text projecting him both as a talent and as a candidate suited to the job

opening (Interview #2, 29 December 2009). Functional intertextuality was also an issue in business plan writing, as may be seen in the following comments:

> Excellent! Reinforces the business proposal with objective/external/independent sources. (Tim's comments on Nan's texts)
> Very informative/well-researched business proposal. (Tim's comments on Lan's texts)
> Based on research – what kind of research, how many people, what they were asked. It should be in a footnote. (Rick's comments on Dong's texts)

Tim commended Nan on his inclusion of statistics about his competitors in his business plan and Lan on her business plan capturing the procedure for market research for producing a business plan. Rick pressed Dong for more detail on his research. These comments made explicit the importance of genres associated with business research to business plan writing. The students were also aware of this aspect of functional intertextuality. For example, Lan acknowledged the importance of research for her business plan as she herself did considerable desk research such as searching for the percentages of target consumer age groups (Interview #4, 3 July 2010). Dong noted the discursive practices of basing a business plan on years of financial reports in the workplace, but for lack of hands-on experiences of the industry, he was unable to give substantial information or detail on it (Interview #5, 6 July 2010).

The professionals' comments also reveal professional practices in the use of templates in business writing, or generic intertextuality. For Leo, sources on the Internet did not provide good models for slavish imitation. He took any models as a frame within which there were "infinite possibilities" and encouraged his students to write their own texts (Leo, Personal Communication, 28 December 2009).

These comments throw light on the discursive practices of the business professionals. First, business professionals form an impression of the writer on the basis of his or her text. Second, they have a prototypical structure of the document in their head or in genre terminology know the genre conventions, which guide them to look for certain information in a specific section of the text. Third, they seem to make use of "intertex-

tuality" (although they may not use this term in their comments) in reading texts analytically—they read critically in the sense that they evaluate ideas with reference to information both within the text and in the real world (e.g., Rick's concern that Mei's proposal of a 24-hour coffee shop service may not comply with municipal policy). Fourth, texts (e.g., business plan) are based on prior texts (research). They prefer to write their own texts, go for simple expressions when in doubt, evaluate the claims they read, and increase their credibility through objective and independent evidence rather than subjective claims. For students who reduced writing in business genres to a process of selecting the appropriate template and accommodating the requirements of the writing instructor, it did not seem to occur to them that the process dimension of genre knowledge for international business professionals was far more complicated. It should also be noted that the students were demonstrating some aspects of the process dimension but not other aspects, an example of the latter being putting terms and conditions of employment as an attachment and indicating this in writing (referential and functional intertextuality). The lack of referential and functional intertextuality reflects their unawareness of the complexity of writing in the workplace (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999). This may be due to their lack of experience of the procedural matters in business, which they themselves were aware of.

7.5.3 Regarding the Rhetorical Dimension

7.5.3.1 Plain Statement Versus Positive Framing

The professionals identified a number of statements in the students' writing which were revised to give them a positive reading. One example is Rick's comments on Mei's SWOT analysis in her business plan for a new coffee shop. Mei wrote:

> Since some famous café brands with their coffee shop chains almost spread all over Beijing and own established clientele via elegant ambience. Thus, it is difficult to surpass these coffee shop brands and attract more consumers.

Rick commented, "[A]fter stating that 'it is difficult to surpass these coffee shop brands and attract more customers', you have to imply that there is a way to do it, perhaps by adding a phrase like 'and will require careful differentiation of our service to our target customers'." By acknowledging the threat in the first clause and providing a way of addressing the threat in the second, Rick's revision resulted in a more positive message. In the executive summary of her business plan, Lan was projecting the future and handling uncertainties thus:

> However, to be a global company and a powerful player in the highly competitive skincare and supplements market, we still have a long way to go.

Tim responded to the main clause with "not very positive … perhaps 'which we are working towards over time'" (Tim's comments on Lan's texts). The rather negative original was rephrased to sound more positive as an obtainable goal and thus more persuasive to the reader.

One more example is An's description of her online education programme in her business plan as a "niche market in rural areas." Sam revised it into "is especially relevant to the needs of students in rural China" with the comment: "Niche is a good word but has the implication of small" (Sam's comments on An's texts). Sam's comment may also capture some mismatch between An's depiction and reality—the kind of online education programme was actually rare on the market and should have a broad clientele.

Unsurprisingly, the students' positive presentations were well received by the professionals. An's own positive projection of her online programme providing "the skills and competencies needed in the 21st century" received the favourable comment of "a great phrase to use" (Sam's comments on An's texts). Similarly, Lan's rejection letter was applauded for its "positive" approach by Tim (see Fig. 7.5).

7.5.3.2   Juggling Personal and Impersonal Persuasion

The professional participants seem to uphold an impersonal business world. They tend to reject the use of personal information. For example, similar to his negative comment on Nan's personal opinion

Subject: Letter of Rejection

Dear Miss Smith,

Thanks for your enthusiasm for UIBE Importers and your application to this position.

We are impressed by the high quality of your background; however, due to the large volume of high-caliber candidate's applications, we are sorry to inform you that we will not be able to offer you the pass ticket at this moment. However, our company will be expanding soon and may need more employees in August. We will keep your resume in our talent database and we will inform you if there is any suitable job at that time.

Thank you again for your interest in our company. We wish you success with your job search and in your professional career!

a position

Sincerely,

Human Resources

UIBE Importers

Good ! Very encouraging / positive, even though the writer is giving bad news (rejection).

Fig. 7.5   Lan's rejection letter with Tim's comments

ASSIGNMENT 3 –

From:
To:
Subject: Warm Welcome from UIBE Importers

Dear Cathy,

I
I've received your reply and ~~I~~ quite understand your ~~considerations~~ *concerns*.

However, as you can see from the brochure I sent to you, it's our rule that such a position starts at RMB 5,000 per month which is average for the industry. UIBE Importers adopts|half-a-year-based performance assessment in which better performer s *are* will be awarded appropriate pay rises.

So I'm sorry to tell you that it's difficult for us to offer you a 10% pay increase ~~at this moment~~. *prior to your commencement at UIBE Importers.*

You may have noticed that UIBE Importers provides a comprehensive insurance *(*)* package and generous performance-based compensation. When you become one part of it, you'll find it a very desirable place to work. The culture is kind of strict due to the professionalism required to maintain business relation with U.S. Partners. Thus we have a lot of beneficial training programs. I used to change my job a lot until I met UIBE Importers and settled down. Unlike giant companies in which employees specialize in repetitive tasks, here you may experience flexible job assignments. I started as a assistant and now I am a senior manager. Expanding UIBE Importers offers considerable promotion opportunities.   *(**)*

UIBE Importers

I'd like
again
~~We'd like~~ to take this opportunity to welcome you to ~~join our big family~~. Whatever your final decision is, please ~~make me informed~~ before May 7th, 2010. ~~I~~ Look forward to hearing from you soon.   *inform me*   *I*
With best regards, *saying the same thing twice.*

~~Sincerely yours.~~

(*) good start. State the benefits (besides salary).
(**) Don't make it too personal. Some of these points are negative and might persuade Cathy NOT to work at UIBE (besides the salary). Use facts to persuade Cathy.

Fig. 7.6 An's counteroffer letter with Tim's comments

in his counteroffer letter (see Fig. 7.3), Tim found An's account of her personal career path in her counteroffer letter "too personal" (see Fig. 7.6). However, other professionals accepted the students' showing of personal touch and emotion in their writing in the business genres. Mei wrote the letters of counteroffer and rejection in a matter-of-fact manner and was criticised by Leo for being "very cold on the rejec-

tion" (Leo's comments on Mei's texts). Lan's counteroffer letter was highly valued by Sam (see Fig. 7.7). Yet, her personal approach was not accepted in some other situations. She used figurative language in her company briefing:

> Founded in 2002, *Miss* Corporation dedicates herself to caring for women between 25 to 59 years old. She has launched various anti-aging skincare and health supplements. *Miss* sets her headquarter in Beijing. Now she has more than 200 employees. *Miss* is a company that is willing to assume social responsibilities. She has set up two funds to help middle-aged women get rid of menopause syndrome.

Tim commented, "The writer is trying to give the company a personality ('she', 'herself'), but it doesn't work. Better to use 'it', 'itself'" (Tim's

Subject: Reply to your 10% Pay Increase Request.

Dear Mr. Porter,

Thank you for your letter dated May 4, 2010. I'm happy to see that you have the intention to work for UIBE Importers. ✓ *good tone*

According *to* our company policy, the starting salary for new employees is 5,000 RMB per month, which we believe is a fair payment. Besides, our welfares *benefits*, such as year-end bonus, are very considerable. Therefore, I'm sorry to inform you that we can't grant you a 10% pay increase. *good tone ✓*

cannot

However, I can assure you that you will benefit a lot from our company welfares. The *our benefits are considerable* insurance and the opportunity for promotion make our company a very desirable place to work. I also want to remind you that the rapid expansion of our company has led to *already* opportunities for employees in the company moving into leadership roles. In addition, our working environment is pleasant and the hours are fairly flexible for non-busy times, so *and* our employee satisfaction is very high.

Now it's time for you to make your final decision. Looking forward to having an excellent candidate just like you join our stuff!

I really like your tone / attitude — very understanding & welcoming!

Sincerely yours,

Fig. 7.7 Lan's counteroffer letter with Sam's comments

comments on Lan's texts). Tim's comments may reflect the preference for impersonality in business plan writing. His comment on An's friendly approach to the order letter says it all about personal or impersonal approaches in business communication:

Thanks a lot. Have a nice day! (This is very friendly. Good personal touch, but isn't required if the writer doesn't feel comfortable to write this way.)

In other words, a personal and friendly approach in workplace texts may add value but is not compulsory.

7.5.3.3   Sticking to the Purpose

The practitioners commented on the purpose of writing, which is a key criterion for defining a genre (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Swales, 1990). For example, Sam reminded An of the pragmatic purpose of the business plan: "Remember the purpose of the plan is to get action NOT to have someone read it and think you are clever" (Sam's comments on An's texts). This is a reaction to An's listing of a range of advertising methods some of which may not suit her business case. Leo marked Mei's counter-offer and rejection letters down for the lack of persuasion or selling effort (Leo's comments on Mei's texts).

7.5.3.4   Handling the Writer–Reader Relationship Professionally

Positioning oneself in relation to the reader is an important part of rhetorical knowledge. Bill removed "I feel indeed honored" from the beginning sentence of Dong's cover letter. This may be related to the ideology of individuals in the business world as equals (Scollon & Scollon, 2001) even when one is applying for a job. He also took out the sentence "In addition, I am proud of myself as a man of responsibility." This may read like over confidence or even boasting, which is not appropriate for the applicant–employer relationship (Swales & Feak, 2000).

7.5.3.5 Deductive Versus Inductive Rhetorical Strategy

This subtle rhetorical issue involves the inductive or deductive organisational pattern of the moves (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Nan is an example of this strategy in action. He included some moves in his order letter, such as the following: greetings—*Hi, I'm …, the Senior Manager of U.S. Imports at UIBE Importers in China*; announcing the end of the advertisement—*That's all of the advertisement*; and stating the purpose of the job posting—*We hope to find some qualified applicants through it*. These three moves were deleted by Sam (Sam's comments on Nan's texts). Nan explained that he was following the format of greeting the reader and introducing himself (Interview #3, 14 January 2010). This may also be his attempt to avoid making the request without some "rapport management" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 102), which is common in performing directives in Chinese business writing (Kong, 2006). The professionals' preference to the deductive rhetorical strategy is also exemplified in Bill's revision of Dong's order letter (see Figs. 7.8 and 7.9). Not only were redundant words and expressions deleted but even some moves, for example the opening self-introduction (Bill's comments on Dong's texts). The deletions made the order letter more concise and closer to the deductive organisation of professional discourse (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

7.5.3.6 Summary

From the examples in this subsection, it is clear that while there are certain common expectations in business writing or genre conventions, business writing can be business-like in a variety of ways. Information needs to be shown in a positive light. The possible display of a human touch does not mean that a personal approach is acceptable in any form or situation. A fine line may be drawn that is made visible in the choice of words and expressions. Business discourse is thus a social action some of whose subtleties were yet to be learned by the Business English students.

Dear Mr. Smith,

I'm ..., the Senior Manager of U.S. imports at UIBE Importers in China. Would you please help us place an electronic advertisement for our recruitment information on your website?

We hope the advertisement could meet the following requirements:

- It can be accessible to all network users 24 hours a day for 7 days from March 26th, 2010.
- Both the content and format of the advertisement that will appear on your website should be identical to our design enclosed in the attachment.
- Please help us link the advertisement to our company's official website (www.uibe-importers.com).
- We would appreciate it if you could kindly post advertisement in an optimal location on your web page.

We would pay in due time through our deposit bank after receiving your bill.

Sincerely yours,

Senior Manager, U.S. Imports

UIBE Importers, China

Fig. 7.8 Dong's original order letter

7.5.4 Regarding the Subject-Matter Dimension

The subject-matter dimension of genre knowledge concerns conventions for what to include and exclude in business writing and assessment of information for inclusion or exclusion for a specific writing situation. The professionals attached a great deal of importance to this dimension, as indicated in their second largest number of comments on each of the five focal students (see Table 7.1). Their comments illustrate expected and relevant information for inclusion and generic and questionable information for revision or exclusion in business communication.

Dear Mr. Smith,

Please place the following advertisement for employment on your web site. The advertisement should meet the following conditions:

- It must be accessible to all network users 24 hours a day for 7 days from March 26th, 2010.
- Both the content and format of the advertisement ~~that will appear on your website~~ must be identical to our design enclosed in the attachment.
- Please ~~help us~~ link the advertisement to our company's official website (www.uibe-importers.com).
- We would appreciate it if you would post the advertisement in an optimal location on your web page.

Please send your bill to our business address.

Sincerely yours,

Senior Manager, U.S. Imports
UIBE Importers, China

Fig. 7.9 Dong's order letter after Bill's revision

7.5.4.1 Expected Information: Setting and Fulfilling Expectations

While the professionals recognised that the students "can follow the basic rules in a business plan such as segmentation analysis, 7ps, SWOT" (Luo's comments on An's texts), they found certain information missing. For example, Dong had aggressive expansion plans for his business. He mentioned expansion into other major cities in China but in his growth plan he did not take up the issue and only referred to his local expansion plan. He noted the high marginal costs but failed to discuss how the costs may be reduced with expansion. Rick suggested that Dong had to demonstrate "scalability" by providing detailed

planning and financial projections (Rick's comments on Dong's texts). Dong did not mention his employees, which was found to be a serious miss of information (Leo's comments on Dong's texts). Similarly, Mei's business plan identified the Life Of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) idea. Rick commented:

> It offers a specific and attractive platform on which real differentiation can be built. Unfortunately there is no detail. It should be expanded upon. What kind of products will this LOHAS identification make possible? On the next page, under Market Position, LOHAS is mentioned again like it was not already mentioned, with no further development of the idea. This should be developed more. (Rick's comments on Mei's texts)

This was also noted by Leo, who commented that Mei "didn't talk about the products" (Leo's comments on Mei's texts).

In his business plan, Nan provided figures for market trends and competitive analysis, which won favourable comments from Tim, who wrote: "Fantastic comparison information. This helps the reader put 'Quality' in perspective against other companies they may know" (Tim's comments on Nan's texts). However, he did not provide details to substantiate other claims. For example, when he specified the legal structure of his company, he stated, "This has the advantage of a corporation (limited liability)." Qian asked: "What is the advantage?" (Qian's comments on Nan's texts). That is, for ideas to count, they must be mentioned, and, once mentioned, they need to be elaborated enough to make sense.

7.5.4.2 Unnecessary or Irrelevant Information

The students produced information in their writing that was deleted as unnecessary or irrelevant to the specific genre or move. For example, An's personal statement followed the layout of a cover letter. Tim crossed out large sections of the text, in particular the account of her childhood with the following comments:

This section is irrelevant. It sounds like a poem or story. The student is try-ing to explain a personal connection, but this is a formal document. Direct, precise, information, otherwise, people reading this will lose interest. (Tim's comments on An's texts)

The sections discussing her perseverance and gratefulness were also deleted as irrelevant as these were either covered in the resume or dis-cussed in the interview (Tim's comments on An's texts). The sentence *With internet, nothing is impossible* from An's business plan, where she was commenting on the power of the Internet, was deemed irrelevant by Sam as the plan was intended to demonstrate the applications of the Internet to online teaching rather than to evaluate the Internet itself. In her order letter, Lan wrote: "Please bill us and we'd pay in due time." Tim commented that it is "not relevant to say you will 'pay in due time'" (Tim's comments on Lan's texts). Sam also crossed out the phrase "in due time" (Sam's comments on Lan's texts). The mention of payment time was deleted as it was considered unnecessary in the order letter since payment when due is a self-evident stage in the transaction. In her counteroffer letter, Lan wrote: "Now it's time for you to make your final decision." This sentence was removed by Tim because it was "irrele-vant" (Tim's comments on Lan's texts). Dong explained his decision for the rejection in his rejection letter, which the business professionals did not do. For example, Sam commented, "You do not explain your deci-sion" (Sam's comments on the writing by Yun, whose use of "perfect" in his rejection letter was cited earlier). Mei's offer letter opened with, "you have been employed for being qualified with our requirements," which was unnecessary as it was presupposed in the context of the offer letter. In her rejection letter, Mei mentioned that the rejected applicant will be "properly" kept on the file for future possibilities. The adverb was deleted by Tim perhaps because it did not enhance the company image as handling information properly is a self-evident must. Clearly, the information deleted as unnecessary or irrelevant was self-evident or obvious in the business interactions. Mentioning the obvious for professionals may cause them "nervousness" or invoke "some other thought," as was acknowledged by the business professional informant in Odell, Goswami, and Herrington (1983, p. 225).

7.5.4.3   Questionable Information

Business decisions are a high-stakes matter and no unwarranted chances should be taken. Many comments in the subject-matter dimension involve information that may cause concern or contravene business principles. In her counteroffer letter, An mentioned that the salary offered to the candidate was the average salary of the industry as an explanation for the refusal. This was taken as bad practice by Qiu, who thought that this may harm the company's image as a generous employer and also risk disclosing the salary criterion of human resources, which should remain confidential. The personal account in her counteroffer letter was judged to be inappropriate by both Qiu (Qiu's comments on An's texts) and Tim (Tim's comments on An's texts). In his discussion of the methods of advertising his business, Dong mentioned special TV programmes and tried to justify them by writing: "This may cost a lot, but it worth trying." Qian rebuked: "Only trying? So costly?" (Qian's comments on Dong's texts), indicating that the statement is risky or even rash. In his counteroffer letter, Dong offered to stand in the shoes of his reader by portraying future possibilities, which Bill thought may impress the reader as a promise. He also made reference to the age of the candidate, which Bill found inappropriate too (Bill's comments on Dong's texts).

Lan did not realise that certain statements were questionable in business plans. She made two statements: "Cheapness is the best policy," when she discussed the unique selling propositions of her brand, and "We assure our customers enjoy the best quality at the cheapest price." in her SWOT analysis. Both statements were marked with a "?" by Qian. These statements were inappropriate because Lan had positioned her brand as a premium one implying that the products cannot be cheap. Lan's assurance was judged by Qian as questionable or possibly empty as it was against the business principle of premium price for the premium product. The two statements may contradict this positioning and impress her audience, Qian at least, as insincere.

In Mei's counteroffer letter, she made an explicit evaluation of the original offer in "which cannot be measured or substituted by money." Arguably, this evaluation may sound patronising and imposing like teaching the reader some criteria for evaluation. The use of "we," which

Mei chose to represent her company position (Interview #3, 14 January 2010), only served to enhance this impression. The evaluation was not a good tactical move as it made explicit something negative, actually the very cause for the current communication. Tim crossed it out. Figure 7.10 is a reproduction of Tim's annotated text.

Mei seemed to take statements in her business plan lightly. In her SWOT analysis, she stated a major threat: "Some consumers don't drink coffee." Yet she cited statistics earlier in the text:

> The percentage of citizens in Beijing who accept coffee is about 90% while it is 57% Beijing citizens who consume in café, which indicates that coffee and coffee shop as a kind of culture has penetrated into people's daily consumption.

Assignment 3

Subject: Reply: Pay raise

Dear Mr. Porters,

We appreciate your interest in joining us and we have considered your request of *a* 10% pay raise.

We regret to have to inform you that your request is not acceptable as we have *a* strict salary system of employees. *training*

Our company contributes to train each employee to stretch their abilities and get proper positions of their own. The job position offered by us is desirable because it is entitled with social benefits and great potentials for promotion, which cannot be measured or substituted by money.

Although you may not be very satisfied with the payment, you can explore great job satisfaction by getting opportunities of playing leadership roles.

So, we hope that you can take careful consideration and seize this good opportunity.

Please keep in mind that our deadline for acceptance is June 10, 2010. We are looking forward to your reply soon.

Yours sincerely,

too strong
eg. "cannot be accepted"

Fig. 7.10   Mei's counteroffer letter with Tim's comments

While the original statement of the threat may be a fact, putting it in the SWOT analysis was out of place, as "A threat which you list should be serious" (Rick comments on Mei's texts).

7.5.4.4   Generic Information

The professionals faulted the students with the generic statements in their writing in the business genres. For example, in her business plan for the online education service branded I CAN, An included a wide range of advertising media for marketing her business including personal marketing and TV advertising. Sam deleted the TV advertising and added the comment that An should

> [a]void generic statements but make everything specific to I CAN even if it means omitting certain things. Remember the purpose of the plan is to get action NOT to have someone read it and think you are clever. (Sam's comments on An's texts)

Tim found a similar problem in An's mission and vision. He noted that her mission and vision statement had "impressive words" but "honestly means very little" and advised her to "[m]ake points relevant and easier to understand" (Tim's comments on An's texts). Another example of generic information is noted by Qian, who commented on Nan's methods of promoting his business practice in his business plan such as advertising in the yellow pages, referral services, advertising in the newspaper, and visits to clients. By doing this, Nan intended to make his business plan 全面 [comprehensive] (Interview #4, 7 July 2010), but Qian dismissed advertising in the yellow pages for Nan's practice was a local one and did not need to be in the yellow pages for the general public (Qian's comments on Nan's texts).

7.5.4.5   Socioculturally Appropriate Information

It is highly relevant to bring up the issue of socioculturally appropriate information in intercultural communication at this point. When Bill read the mention of age in Dong's counteroffer letter, he said that it was

inappropriate as in the United States this sentence is likely to violate the law that people are not to be prejudiced on the basis of age, gender, and race (Swales & Feak, 2000). Luo and Qian kept it. Tim and Leo also kept it. Regarding the mention of future possibilities in Dong's counter-offer letter, Bill deleted it while the other professional participants either kept it or commented differently. For example, Tim made the comment that it was "not required" (Tim's comments on Dong's texts). Luo, Qian, and Leo made no changes to it. It is also worth noting the profession-als' responses to the students' use of their personal experience in their persuasion. Without the benefits of knowing the professional practices, the students extrapolated from their real-life experiences, for example younger students seeking the advice of their senior students or alumni, as a strategy for constructing a persuasive message. While this approach of illustration with one's own example is a recognised practice in Chinese rhetoric, it was discredited by some of the business practitioners, for example Tim who advised An to use facts to persuade the dissatisfied candidate in her counteroffer letter. The variation among the profes-sionals in the evaluation of the information in student writing suggests that intercultural rhetoric (Connor & Rozycki, 2013) is complicated in practice and needs to take into account the interactants involved in the specific scenario.

7.5.4.6   Summary

The large amount of unnecessary, questionable, or generic information the business professionals spotted suggests that the students hadn't gained insights into the subtleties of the subject-matter dimension of genre knowledge yet. It is useful to look at the positive and negative comments on the subject-matter dimension closely. What is commended on is the more observable information in any sample texts, such as the topic areas of market segmentation, marketing mix, and the like. What is found to be weak concerns evaluating information for inclusion as appropriate for the specific situation. That the students went generic in their writing sug-gests that while the student writers were crossing the boundary between university writing and workplace writing, they had yet to work out what

to put down to paper and what to allow for intelligent inferences by the readers. This is where the immersion in professional practices and situated learning would come in.

7.6   Discussion

The reaction of the business professionals to the five Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity in their writing in the eight business genres yields several insights into professional identity construction in international business. One major finding of this study is that the business professionals drew on the business genre knowledge the Business English students deployed in their writing in evaluating the students as employable, capable, or amateur. This finding confirms business genre knowledge as the source of indexicals for the business profession and thus validates the approach that is taken in this study for exploring the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity. International business is a discourse system (Scollon & Scollon, 2001) or community of practice (Wenger, 1998) with its shared repertoire—the genres and genre knowledge. As the repertoire of genre knowledge constitutes the knowledge, skill, and discourse of the community of practice, it is an important indexing device for the "knowledgeably skilled identities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55), or professional identity in the professional context. The extent to which the writer is aware of the genre knowledge and capable of displaying it in situated writing thus provides the means of exploring the construction of professional identity by writers such as the Business English students. The five focal students displayed considerable knowledge of the business genres of cover letters, resumes, order letters, job postings, offer letters, counteroffer letters, rejection letters, and business plans. The international business practitioners' generally positive response to the students' deployment of business genre knowledge is a recognition of their discursive construction of professional identity. The irregularity in the co-occurrence of the students' indexicals that were noted by the practitioners, for example the choice of lifeworld vocabulary instead of technical terms, inadequate referential intertextuality, projection of information in a non-positive way, overuse

of indirectness in realisations of speech acts, and inclusion of generic, unnecessary, or questionable information, indicates the lack of necessary subtlety in the Business English students' understanding of the business world and its practices and the developmental nature of their professional identity, or a sign of their "novice status" (Giltrow & Valiquette, 1994, p. 52).

Another major finding is the diversity among the international business professionals in responding to texts in their profession. Their different reactions can be taken as evidence of the diverse practices in "international business," which itself is a broad umbrella term covering a wide range of commercial and organisational activities (Chen & Wang, 2009; Zorn & Simpson, 2009). The diversity in the aspects of concern of the eight international business professionals may also be a reflection of the broad field of activities that span across the organisations and institutions in which they operate. The professionals were in different industries and may thus have different concerns for the same piece of writing. For example, Rick, a specialist in the insurance sector, was sensitive to safety issues as he identified the casualness in Dong's approach to the safe operation of machines by children customers in the DIY shop. Sam, who was also in the insurance business, accepted the human touch in Lan's counteroffer letter. Leo, a financial analyst and business writing teacher who believed in personality in management, encouraged the students to inject their personality in their writing. Arguably, international business is a rather heterogeneous field and there is unlikely to be a uniform or universal discursive practice that characterises it. It may thus be futile to search for a prescriptive identity of an international business professional.

This finding, however, does not contradict the "shared repertoire" (Wenger, 1998) of the community of practice of international business. The professionals' comments and their rationale for the various revisions made to the students' writing reveal their professional concerns and practices and provide valuable insights into the writing competence of international business professionals. International business professionals have a characteristic way of manipulating the linguistic resources, for example, boosters, thematisation, the use of media and modes, the move structures, and the linguistic realisations of face-threatening speech acts. They also demonstrate their approach to handling referential, generic, and

functional intertextuality. Their handling of the rhetoric situation is characterised by the balance between impersonal and personal, preference for the positive over the negative, calculation of the relative obligations and rights in the situated interaction. They go for specificity and evidence in selecting information to include in their genre production. While they follow mutual intelligibility as the criterion in intercultural/lingual communication, they are aware of the importance of the linguistic code which would reflect positively or negatively on the user. All these features point to the institutional and goal-oriented nature of business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2013; Gunnarsson, 2009). As institutional artefacts, business genres are part of the resources or shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998) that are exploited by members of the community of practice of international business for their various professional purposes.

One more important finding is related to BELF for international business. BELF is a complicated issue. The international business professionals recognised that English is used differently across nations and acknowledged mutual intelligibility rather than native-likeness as the criterion for international business interactions where English serves as a lingua franca (Connor, 1999; Koester, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). They expressed considerable tolerance or appreciation of the students' discursive practice of adopting a Chinese perspective and rhetorical preference, for example, personal touch, when writing in the global language for business. This may be taken as a recognition of the students' "pluralized identities" resulting from "interactions between diverse local and global discourses" underlying globalisation discourse (Starke-Meyerring, 2005, p. 469). From this point of view, the Business English students were actually in possession of a type of resource—that is, their local perspectives and knowledge—that would enable them to transcend their novice status to some extent. This sense of empowerment seems to be alive among the students when they were writing in the business genres in English. While Dong, An, and Lan expressed some concern that their English was not native-like, Nan and Mei were not worried about the linguistic code of English and gravitated towards knowledge of business in their evaluation of their writing. It may also help explain An's conclusive remark that she was comfortable with possessing an inter-

national perspective and cherishing being a traditional Chinese. On the other hand, they were also concerned with the linguistic code and identified accuracy, connotations of words, and Chinglish as particularly weak areas for the students. Linguistic proficiency was also among their criteria for evaluating a writer as a professional communicator. There is therefore the need to recognise both the transactional function and the relational function of BELF (Koester, 2010) and its potential for indexing international business professional identity.

A theoretically significant observation may be that indexicality works metonymically. Like a metonym, part of genre knowledge is able to evoke association between indexicals and relevant social meanings. The professionals spotted a number of appropriate and inappropriate aspects of genre knowledge and, on this basis, ascribed to their respective users certain identities, for example employable for Dong and someone capable of business writing for Mei.

The most significant finding from a Business English education point of view relates to the various gaps that were identified between the students' business genre knowledge and professional practices. The professionals recognised that while the students had developed a level of business genre knowledge that enabled them to handle business tasks in a considerably business-like manner, they were yet to take a specific approach to each task in the way of selecting the linguistic resources, putting the principles for business communication such as the C-B-S principles into practice, attending to the procedural matters, relating to the business partners, and covering the information specific for the interaction setting. Despite their high level of genre knowledge, the Business English students were found to lack an understanding of the more subtle aspects of genre knowledge, in particular understanding the nuances or connotations of words and expressions, perspectives and thematisation, certain procedures of genre production and distribution, and proper selection of information for inclusion in their texts. There was an imbalance in the students' mastery of business genres in the sense that they were proficient with some business genres but not with others and knew some dimensions of business genre knowledge better than other dimensions. This suggests that as writing in different genres involves responding to different rhetorical situations, it may not be accurate to judge one's genre competence based on genre production for

one particular situation. It is also worth noting that the growth on the formal dimension may not keep pace with the growth on other dimensions.

This study adds to research which draws on the knowledge of professional and academic informants to enhance our understanding of professional discourses. It supports the earlier observation that business practitioners indeed view texts in their profession pragmatically (Forey, 2004) and are also concerned with the quality of language, which is clear from the professional participants' emphasis on mutual intelligibility and attention to linguistic accuracy when commenting on BELF.

The business practitioners' positive reception of the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity through the business genre knowledge in their writing provides valuable evidence for the portability (Artemeva, 2009) of Business English education. The divide between the academia and the workplace as is often voiced (e.g., Beaufort, 1999; Bhatia, 2004; Dias et al., 1999) has the bright prospect of being effectively narrowed through ESP education. Meanwhile, the differences identified between the students and the professionals in enacting the business genres make salient the gap between the classroom and the profession. The business professionals' comments give us a glimpse of the 'true' picture of writing in the workplace, which provide a clue to bridging the gap. For example, they shed light on handling impersonal versus personal tone (adding the target audience's first name), taking a positive stance (positive message and suggestions for possibilities to handle barriers), and balancing brevity and clarity (removing redundancy but adding words or even clauses to improve clarity of information). These insights may be drawn on to develop a scheme for teaching and feeding back to student writing in business genres. As has been shown in this chapter, the four dimensions of genre knowledge represent indexicals for professional practices and should therefore be the basis of assessing student writing. A scheme is proposed which may be used and verified in further studies. There are four general categories representing the four dimensions of genre knowledge. Each general category has a number of subcategories representing the specific features of genre knowledge. This does not mean that any exercise of feedback should respond to all the categories and subcategories. Actually, they can be used selectively depending on the purpose and students under question. Nevertheless, all the four dimensions should be addressed because of

the importance of all four dimensions to genre knowledge. The categories and subcategories are included in Appendix 7.1. Examples are provided to illustrate the categories and subcategories.

7.7   Conclusion

Identities are a two-way construction involving one's performance and the recognition by others (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Blommaert, 2005). In the case of the Business English students, their construction of professional identity should be examined with reference to both their discursive practices and the reception of their discursive practices by expert members of their target community of practice. The five focal students' discursive construction of professional identity was generally well received by the professional participants, which to a substantial extent validates the approach taken in this book in the investigation of Business English students' learning experiences and professional identity construction through business genre knowledge. The range of inadequate grasp of business genre knowledge by the Business English students marked their emerging professional identity as novices. The professionals' evaluation of the Business English students' texts also informs on a scheme for making feedback on student writing in business genres.

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8

Towards a Model of Learning Business English and Professional Identity Construction

The four preceding chapters have addressed the four research questions proposed in Chap. 1. This chapter reviews the results and discusses them in relation to professional identity construction, communities of practice building, and business genre knowledge and indexing competence development in Business English education. It concludes by proposing a model of learning Business English and professional identity construction and outlining several questions for further research.

8.1 Professional Identity Construction

This study examined the experiences of the cohort of Business English undergraduate students undertaking the four-year Business English programme at IBSU, a prestigious university in China. While the multiple-case research design and the small sample of cases in this study may not support definite conclusions, the study does provide evidence for us to describe their professional identity construction in substantial detail and depth.

The Business English students were experiencing a transition in social space where their image of the international business world and

its inhabitants evolved from being intuitively general to being scientifically mediated. They were developing an increasingly sophisticated understanding of international business professionals, or the professional role, as well as of themselves in relation to it, for example viewing themselves as embodying the professional role. The understanding was given an expression by the students in their professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence whose various configurations marked their emerging professional identity. As their professional goal kept changing, their values and perspective on international business professionals were enriching, and their technical and discursive competences were strengthening and broadening, so was their professional identity varying accordingly. Their professional identity was dynamic, emergent, and also directional. What has been reported in this book should thus be viewed as "snapshots" of their ongoing professional identity development. The four constituting factors for professional identity may be used as terms of reference for monitoring the dynamic process.

Professional identity played an important role in the process as both the goal and motivator for the Business English students. The Business English programme has international business professionals as the default or preferred professional identity for the students. This study shows that professional identity as the Ideal or the Ought-to L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009) was the driving force or the investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) for all the students, at least for some periods of their learning. Its power was compromised when it occurred to the students that professional identity was not neutral but socioculturally loaded. The study indicates that while technical and discursive competences were important to professional identity, values and perspective on international business professionals and professional goal were pivotal for the students' emerging professional identity. As Watts's (1987) study of black PhD medical students demonstrates, professional identity typically has a sociopolitical orientation. For the Business English students, the social space of international business they were accessing was complicated by the political economy underlying globalisation, national culture, gender, and a host of other sociocultural factors. In particular, their stance on gender in the workplace, their Chinese background, and the hierarchy in transnational businesses

tinted their values and perspective on international business professionals and in effect shaped their emerging professional identity (see also Zhang, 2013b). For example, the factor of values and perspective on international business professionals (low evaluation of the inhabitants of the business world) coupled with the factors of discursive competence and technical competence (technicalities) offset Dong's aspiration for working as an international business professional.

Professional identity is observable in discursive practices through business genre knowledge as its indexing resource. The examination of the Business English students' discursive construction of professional identity indicates that they developed considerable awareness of the link between genre knowledge and professional identity and were able to index their professional identity through their genre knowledge on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions, which was also recognised to a substantial extent by the international business practitioners. In other words, their genre knowledge was the resource of indexicals for their professional identity and also cues that invoked expert recognition (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008). The study corroborates current research for indexicality as the mechanism underlying the link between the use of language and other semiotic resources and social meanings such as identities (Bucholtz, 2011; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert, 2008) and illustrates a way to "operationalise the notion of identity" (Llamas & Watt, 2010, p. 3). This study also demonstrates that there is no monolithic or uniform manifestation of professional identity in discursive practices, which is evidenced by the diversity among the eight international business practitioners in their reception of the students' discursive construction of professional identity. This study therefore supports the social constructivist stance on identities as performative, fluid, and multiple and also demonstrates the fluidity of professional identity and its multiple manifestations in action.

Professional identity is thus not merely an analytical construct but has been found to have rich psychological reality and to be describable in terms of four constituting factors for Business English students and researchable through business genre knowledge as the indexing resource. This study provides an answer to the question of what Business English learning may bring to the students. They experience a process of transformation

characterised by a change in their understanding of international business professionals and of themselves in relation to the international business world and are enabled to enact their professional identity by mobilising the indexicals on the formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions of genre knowledge of their target profession.

This study contributes to the applied linguistics literature by arguing that when English learning takes place in an ESP setting, it is appropriate to consider the construction of professional identity as an indispensable component of the learning process and learning outcome, rather than general learner identities. Business English education involves much more than acquiring the language of business. Learning in ESP settings is usually conceptualised as preparing students for the target performance situation, which is one major reason for the starting of this tradition of English-language teaching in the 1960s (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Research and practice in ESP have shown that the learning of the English language is just part of this pursuit. The five focal students' learning of Business English bears this insight out by demonstrating learning ESP as a process of professional socialisation. They participated through engagement, imagination, and/or alignment in their mediating, transitory, and target communities of practice in various ways. They acquired the experiences and resources that allowed them to perform the social role—the process of identification, and to develop their own understanding of and/ or take on the social role—the process of negotiability. Their emerging professional identity was diverse due to the different configurations of the factors of professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence. Their access to the communities of practice and their agency complicated their participatory learning and emerging professional identity.

This study therefore endorses a refocus on learners as social beings or, more exactly, whole and rounded persons rather than as a mere reference/ starting point when analysing the target performance situations and the associated language, skills, and knowledge, or examining their discursive practices. It is crucial to consider the perception aspect of identity for learners of ESP and what it really means by "putting the learner front and center" (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011, p. 73). While the prevailing view of identity as performance in and through discursive practices (e.g.,

Blommaert, 2005; Butler, 1990; Cain, 1991; Cheng, 2007; Dressen-Hammouda, 2008; Erickson, 1999) is recognised, this study incorporates both the performance aspect of the role of international business professional through the analysis of the students' discursive practices and the perception of self in relation to the professional role through the narrative analysis of the students' lived experiences. The analysis of the students' discursive construction of professional identity includes considering not only their display of business genre knowledge but also their insights into the associations between such knowledge and professional identity. In this way, this study is able to uncover the students' lived experiences of identification and negotiability (Wenger, 1998) and their transformation from "the interpersonal into the intrapersonal" that characterises human development (Holland & Valsiner, 1988, p. 247).

8.2   Communities of Practice Building

The Business English programme at IBSU was designed to prepare students for a career in international business (ADIBSU, 2007). As the five focal students' lived experiences testify, the construction of professional identity is a realistic goal in the university setting via the teaching of professional expertise (Bhatia, 2004) and relevant professional genres (Zhang, 2007). Meanwhile, that the programme ended up with multiple trajectories for the students' professional identity development including the outstanding student opting out of the target community of practice is worth reviewing.

The study demonstrates that the qualitatively different emerging professional identity each student constructed for themselves may be accounted for by their mode of participation, access to, and agency in the mediating community of practice, the transitory community of practice, and the target community of practice. Through their engagement, imagination, and alignment in their three communities of practice, the students became aware that Business English was a distinct field of study and were acquiring resources and experiences on the basis of which a professional identity was emerging for them. The mediating community of practice for the Business English students was unique due to the programme design

features as well as the work of the teachers such as Leo, the business writing instructor, who helped strengthen the apprentice training element in the mediating community of practice (see Zhang, 2016 for detail). The transitory and target communities of practice were no less crucial and would therefore deserve more integration with the mediating community of practice in programme design and implementation. As the three communities of practice are rather structured in the sense that student access to participation in the various communities of practice is afforded and constrained by the sociocultural space in China in the age of globalisation, the translation from the programme to student learning experience is not automatic. Much complexity is involved in the process and gives rise to the need for curricular intervention (Allen, 2010), or intervention in the building of the three communities of practice (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001) to maximise learning opportunities for students.

8.2.1 Mediating Community of Practice

The mediating community of practice which modelled on professional expertise for international business and recontextualised professional practices provided the Business English students with the resources for knowing about the profession as well as negotiating a personal take on it, or, in other words, a vicarious experience and a prototypical professional identity. Several issues also arose, in particular the scope of the programme, the duality underlying the mediating community of practice, and the modes of participation. These issues need to be taken up in building the mediating community of practice.

The scope of an ESP programme has been discussed in terms of a wide-angle or narrow-angle perspective (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The wide-angle perspective allows a wider coverage of purposes and/or material, an approach that is often followed in teaching a clientele that is diverse or has no specific goal. The narrow-angle perspective is often taken when the learners have very specific learning goals to achieve and responds to the call for specificity in ESP curriculum design. Specificity necessarily requires specialised content. In the ESP literature, specialised content involves specialised materials that are taken as the carrier content

for teaching the real content of language and language use (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). For the Business English major students, both the specialised carrier content and language are objectives of learning. Pickett's (1989) description is useful for understanding it. He describes Business English in terms of a twilight zone straddling communication with the general public at one end and specialised technicalities at the other end. Dong's and Mei's internship experiences indicate that both ends are legitimate content to cover in a Business English programme, particularly if it has the goal of preparing students for handling the technicalities in a specific field, such as at international financial institutions. A narrow-angle approach is thus likely to be optimal for an undergraduate ESP programme like the Business English programme at IBSU. Given the broad interpretation of international business (Chen & Wang, 2009; Zorn & Simpson, 2009), the speciality areas that are intended for the cohort of Business English students need to be clarified and adequately addressed for them in the curriculum, including both the specialised disciplinary knowledge and specialised genres.

A related issue is the coverage of the content. International business involves both the procedures and communication for transaction and an understanding of the processes of designing, manufacturing, and promoting a product. While this view on international business has been the wisdom of veteran international business professionals (Li, quoted in Luo, 2009), it is unfortunately often overlooked in ESP teaching where the manufacturing process is excluded in the curriculum. This may be the cause of Dong's claim that international business professionals just perform the apparently unchallenging and uninspiring operations of "press the button" (Interview #1, 17 November 2009). It is also necessary to note that the contemporary business workplace is more complicated and demanding, for example involving multitasking in a digital working environment (Nickerson & Planken, 2015).

Another key issue related to specificity is the extent to which professional practices are recontextualised in the ESP classroom. It is clear from the professionals' comments on the students' process dimension of business genre knowledge that the students had not been exposed to aspects of the professional practices such as the procedures for business operations and as a result produced texts that did not reflect professional

practices. As Bhatia's (2004) argument for professional expertise suggests, professional practices are an integral part of professional expertise and are the context where the two other parts—disciplinary knowledge and discursive competence—function. What this means for the ESP classroom is that students should be exposed to the true picture of their target professional or workplace practices to the necessary depth and breadth.

The duality that is inherent in the Business English programme offers an opportunity for an enriched experience for the Business English students when the in-built tension is properly handled. As the professional socialisation process is embedded in the academic programme, students are encountering two sets of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. While it is advantageous for students to be experiencing different discursive practices which would give them valuable exposure to linguistic processes in different social domains, they need to be alerted to the domain in which they are located, including its frames of reference, acceptable ways of engaging with each other, and conventions of using semiotic resources. For example, in the academic domain, accuracy in the linguistic code is important while in the business world, Business English is a lingua franca (Koester, 2010; Nickerson & Planken, 2015) and mutual intelligibility seems to be the criterion for professionalism. This caution would have saved An from the frustrating experience in her Year 3 writing courses and Lan from developing and retaining the sense of inadequacy. Likewise, students need to be reminded of the professional socialisation side of their programme and respond to its set of joint enterprise and ways of engagement and semiotic operation.

Although engagement in the mediating community of practice was vital for the Business English students in their learning, imagination proved to be another significant mode of participation. Imagination should be encouraged as well as guided. With imagination, in particular when one imagines himself or herself playing a professional role, the transfer of antecedent genre knowledge (Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Devitt, 2004) is legitimised and one's resources for handling a novel genre are expanded. For example, students like An and Mei appropriated slogans from corporate advertising pamphlets and adopted the use of templates as commonly practised in the workplace, which gave them the resources to deal with unfamiliar situations. Some imagination is less helpful and needs

some guidance to redress. For example, Lan's image of international business professionals having strategic decision-making brains contributed to her sustained sense of diffidence. Furthermore, while templates and samples are useful for analysing the way the situation was considered and the rhetorical response accordingly made, it would be counterproductive to imagine superficial similarities between writing scenarios and fall slavishly on templates in learning to write in business genres as each instance of writing is a particular response to a social situation and requires a specific rhetorical response.

Since the mediating community of practice provides a prototypical professional identity, which is describable in terms of the constituting factors of professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence, the relevant factors may be explicitly addressed and monitored over time. Understandably, the technical and discursive competences receive focused attention in Business English teaching, but professional goal and values and perspective on international business professionals are also significant as they are pivotal for professional identity construction. ESP programmes need to address the values and perspectives on the target community of practice explicitly rather than waiting for their students to hit and miss in their learning. For example, in the teaching of business disciplines, business practices, and business discourses, the ways of thinking, behaving, and languaging should be critically discussed in relation to the underlying business ideology and beliefs. This would allow Business English students to be informed in developing their professional goal. The programme goals which shape the students' professional goal for their professional identity need to be more proactively clarified and the students are provided access to a broad spectrum of the target community of practice so that they can deepen and broaden their cognition of the target community of practice.

As the mediating community of practice served to provide the Business English students with access to practices and resources of international business, which became resources for use in shaping the students' professional identity, it is an opportunity for equity and equality in education, in particular for students from disadvantaged backgrounds with no comparable cultural capital to their advantaged peers (Lillis, 2001).

Given that the mediating community of practice is also interlocked with the transitory and target communities of practice, it is an ideal site where students may bring in their experiences and issues encountered in the other communities of practice for a critical review to share, validate, and possibly expand their learning in the mediating community of practice.

8.2.2   Transitory Community of Practice

The transitory community of practice was the space where the Business English students rehearsed their emerging professional identity when interacting with the external and often business world. This community of practice needs no less attention as a haphazard approach misses out on the opportunity for a significant part of their learning experience. While the student clubs and associations are available, access to them is not guaranteed. Students need to be guided as to how to access them, select the appropriate ones for themselves, and exercise their agency to enrich their exposure to the business world. As this community of practice has the potential to provide resources for appropriation in the mediating community of practice and beyond, the students' experiences are useful for revisiting in classroom discussions.

8.2.3   Target Community of Practice

As the target community of practice is the site where the Business English students' emerging professional identity is put to test and validated, it has to be within the purview of curricular intervention in the sense that the type, access, and agency should be considered on a student by student basis. Dong's frustration during his internships is likely to result from a mismatch between his learning in the mediating community of practice, which focused on international trade, and the expectations of interns at the international financial institution where specialised genre knowledge of financial documentation was required. In other words, he was not prepared or channelled to the appropriate workplace site. Students going on internship experiences should be guided on how to access internship

opportunities, select the appropriate ones, and exercise agency when undertaking the professional experience on site.

Similar to the transitory community of practice, the target community of practice offers material that may be suitable for inclusion in classroom discussions. Unfamiliar genres encountered in this community of practice may be a useful resource in classroom teaching.

8.3   Business Genre Knowledge and Indexing Competence Development

The analysis of the students' writing in the business genres and the international business practitioners' reactions towards it sheds light on business genre knowledge and its power for indexing professional identity. It also feeds back on discussions of genre teaching and learning in the classroom and professional identity construction.

8.3.1   Insights into Business Genre Knowledge

What the international business professionals have to say about the students' writing in business genres supports business discourse as "how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organizations in order to get their work done" (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken, 2013, p. 3). For the practitioners, writing in a business genre has the primary goal of achieving a business purpose like selling a product, service, or concept in a business plan. They handle each goal-oriented interaction in specific terms by employing business genre knowledge on all four dimensions and also considering situational constraints such as time, location, and their own market position. Their use of business genres illustrates the insights various genre research traditions have contributed, in particular the Rhetorical Genre Studies, ESP approach to genre, and the Sydney School genre theory. That is, genres are social actions to respond to the exigency of recurring social situations (Miller, 1984), goal-oriented, staged, social processes (Martin, 1992), or sets of communicative events to achieve communicative purposes in a discourse

community (Swales, 1990). These insights capture three salient aspects of genre: social situation, social purpose, and social action. An effective use of a genre requires a proper understanding and treatment of each of these three aspects of genre.

The social situation involves both the physical and sociocultural environment in which the genre is used. Each instance of human interaction is situated (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999). In a workplace setting, for example, it is situated with reference to "personal factors" such as personal ideological orientation towards work and workplace practices, personal ability to use discursive resources, and personal style of socialising and communicating with others along with "non-personal factors" like time, place, and routine practices, functions and goals of the particular workplace (Gu, 2002, p. 153). In the age of globalisation, the sociocultural environment of a social situation attains prominence. In his discussion of the orders of indexicality, Blommaert (2005) highlights the need to see the deployment of semiotic means, for example a variety of language or genre, in "a wider sociocultural, political, and historical space" (p. 74) because the value, meaning, and function of semiotic means are determined by the prevailing orders of indexicality and their "real or potential 'market value' as a cultural commodity" (p. 72). When the international business professionals' comments on the Business English students' writing in the various business genres are reviewed from the point of view of social situation, it is clear that these practitioners were invoking a range of situational and sociocultural factors. For example, they considered the time constraint for processing a cover letter in the workplace (e.g., little time for human resources staff to read a cover letter), the workplace practice of showing professionalism without being overly polite, the safety cautions at a workshop, the local municipal policy of operating hours for coffee shops, and the fact that the use of English as a lingua franca for international business varies from place to place and some forms of its use are stigmatised as Chinglish. Pathos may vary in value from a sociocultural context to another. For example, it is highly valued in Chinese business communication while discouraged in English business interactions (Zhu, 2005). It follows that indexicals are not neutral but socioculturally loaded with differential valuation according to the orders of indexicality in the social situation.

The social purpose of a genre in the workplace is to get some work done by means of the genre. As part of the joint enterprise of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) or the object in the activity system (Engeström, 1999), it represents the social expectations of the community of practice. For example, in the view of the international business professionals, writing the cover letter and the resume serves to obtain an interview opportunity with the employer, composing a kind rejection letter is to retain or gain the goodwill of the unsuccessful applicant, and preparing a business plan is to promote a business concept, a product, or service to prospective clients. Although it has been pointed out that users of genres may have "private intentions" which are achieved by mixing genres or bending genre norms (Bhatia, 2008, p. 36), genre production without observing its social purpose and convention may risk being ill received as in the case of the professional's criticism of An's cover letter which took the form of a personal statement.

The social action is the production, consumption, and distribution of the genre to fulfil the social purpose in the social situation. Indexicality through genre knowledge is the key in the process. For example, Hyland (2004) identifies discipline-specific genre knowledge by showing that academic writing in social sciences and natural sciences differs considerably in the way academic writers in each discipline make their arguments. For example, citations in social sciences tend to be more frequent, come from a wider range of sources, and favour the cited authors as the subject of the sentence, while in natural sciences there tend to be fewer citations and the role of the author cited is downplayed. This difference in discursive practices is related to the priority accorded to the scientific procedure rather than the human actor in natural sciences research in contrast to the emphasis on the perspective of the human actor and their judgement in social sciences study. Gee's (2011) analysis of the same author writing for an academic journal and for a popular science publication illustrates the use of linguistic features in constructing professional practices. The subject matter for the two texts concerned the self-protection of an insect by laying some egg-like substance on its host plant. The two texts differed remarkably in the choice of subject and verb in the sentences. For example, the subjects of the sentences in the journal article indicated the role of the nominal group in a scientific theory, whereas the subjects of

the sentences in the popular science publication were everyday words in analogy to everyday life. In effect, the journal article portrayed an institutionalised world while the popular science publication a "lifeworld" (p. 208). The social action of academic and professional publication is accomplished through the indexing practices of the citations and the deployment of the select linguistic features.

Similarly, the international business professionals' comments provide clues to social actions in international business. A case-specific deployment of business genre knowledge on all four dimensions was expected in writing in business genres. For the practitioners, producing a professional business text requires in-depth understanding of the procedures of a business activity, the roles of the reader and the writer in the activity, the hard content of the activity, and, crucially, the linguistic resources required to textualise them. They faulted the students with presenting generic information in their business plan or including information that would contravene business practices. They advised on taking into account the specifics of the interaction in question, for example the role relationships, tasks, and industry-specific practices or concerns in applying the general principles of business communication or human interaction as discussed in pragmatics, for example the C-B-S style of business communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

8.3.2   Building Indexing Competence

This study illustrates the Business English students' understanding of indexicality as a key aspect of their learning. They were picking up both textual features and the association between such features and the professional expertise in international business. Therefore, business genre knowledge should be introduced as a source of indexing devices for professional identity. The indexing competence, or the ability to both understand the link between genre knowledge and professional identity and enact the link in discourse production and consumption, is one goal of Business English teaching. As the international business professionals evaluated the Business English students as employable, capable, or amateur with reference to their deployment of business genre knowledge on

all four dimensions, the formal features, process knowledge, rhetorical purpose and strategy, and subject content are all indexing devices or indexicals for professional identity that need to be acquired in learning Business English. The discursive construction of professional identity also requires the configuration of semiotic resources on the four dimensions of genre knowledge and requires them to be compatible with each other. As Blommaert (2005) argues, (professional) identities are constructed by means of "specific configurations" of indexing devices. The teaching of business writing should therefore help students build up effective indexicals or associations between aspects of genre knowledge and their meanings in the business world and furthermore develop them in a way that will result in patterned co-occurrences of the indexicals.

8.3.3   Bridging the Gap Between the Classroom and the Profession

To bridge the gap between the classroom and the profession requires a clear understanding of the differences between the two settings and the outcomes achievable in ESP classroom learning. The Business English students' experiences of writing in the business genres demonstrate several insights into genre learning. First, some aspects of genres are easier for students to grasp than other aspects. For example, observable features like the move structure, layout, and certain lexicogrammatical choices are picked up much better than the subtle ways of realising politeness through indirectness, perspective through thematisation, and functional intertextuality. Second, as they seem to have developed a script of writing in business genres from textbook learning or the templates they fall on, they follow the script in addressing politeness concerns, interpersonal relations, and information requirements in a hyper-correct or generic manner without being able to handle the interaction as a specific case. For example, they had difficulty in selecting case-specific information for inclusion in writing and gauging the level of imposition of a face-threatening speech act and the level of indirectness appropriate for mitigating the face threat in the speech act. Third, they are employing features of genres without being able to judge their suitability for their

writing situation. For example, they demonstrated some understanding of interdiscursivity (Bhatia, 2008) when they resorted to personal accounts in their counteroffer letter to help persuade their reader while professionals would use factual exposition for the purpose. Finally, their emerging professional identity has a role to play in their discursive practices. Although the five Business English students were responding to the same writing tasks, their approaches varied remarkably, creating different types of texture and images of themselves. The differences seem to derive from their individual mastery of genre knowledge. For example, Dong developed and displayed a more sophisticated genre knowledge than the other four students, which was also recognised as professional by the international business practitioners. Another cause of the diversity is their emerging professional identity, which may well have been the autobiographical self (Ivanič, 1998) the Business English students brought along with them that mediated their discursive practices. This explains, for example, why Dong introduced personal opinions into his counteroffer letter (for his perception of the importance of relationship building in the workplace), why Mei expressed congratulations to the successful candidate and wished him happiness and progress in her offer letter (for her belief of staff in global businesses being creative individuals rather than mere followers of orders), and why Nan included the detailed analysis of the market in his business plan (for his image of international business professionals possessing excellent analytical skills). It is thus helpful to read the text in relation to who wrote it and why to fully understand the student writing and writing development.

The students' difficulties derive from their lack of exposure to and understanding of the social purpose and situation and language for international business. For the business professionals, the different dimensions of business genre knowledge are integrated to give them the genre expertise. The process dimension of genre knowledge is often tacit in the sense that it is embodied in business practices so deeply that insiders use the knowledge at the operations level—with no need for thinking or conscious effort—while it is often opaque to outsiders and operates at the action or even activity level (Leont'ev, 1981). For the students, they were still amassing the resources for performing the professional role, trying to take ownership of them in the sense of developing a personal take on

their indexing power, and learning to coordinate them for enacting the professional role in a somewhat artificial business setting. That is, they were learning the different dimensions of genre knowledge as actions or even activities all at the same time and subject to the heavy processing load.

All five students' lack of comprehensive grasp of the business genres draws attention to the limitations of classroom teaching for preparing students for the target performance situation. What is achievable as far as authenticity is concerned includes providing students with the experience of handling tasks that draw on both their real-life experiences and business practices to develop the insight into an authentic approach/mindset for responding to business tasks, for example considering the relevant rights and obligations of parties to the situated transaction. Business writing should, from the outset, be regarded as performing a business activity where the four dimensions of genre knowledge are equally relevant and important. This involves discussing the activity-specific business matter to be handled, with reference to the specific industry, business sector, or task under question, the purpose or goal of the activity and the interpersonal relations, real professional practices such as procedures for operations, and linguistic features and textual organisation. Instead of being rigid jackets, genres are a guide as they are flexible rather than fixed (e.g., Bawarshi, 2016; Devitt, 2004; Hyland, 2011; Schryer, 1993, 2011). Genre exemplars that are drawn on in an ESP course are not to be slavishly followed because they were produced in response to likely different rhetorical situations. While antecedent genres or students' prior genre knowledge (Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Devitt, 2004) is an advantage, we should also be warned that there is no guarantee that the knowledge may be transferred into genre performance in a new rhetorical situation or appropriately applied.

Several approaches have been proposed for teaching genres. Although the classroom setting is recognised as having the constraint of being different from the real-life world of writing in a genre, there have been successful attempts to address this limitation by exposing students to professional practices in their teaching. A notable example is the teaching for generic transference (Cheng, 2011). Students are guided to search for genre exemplars in their discipline and analyse the genre features as well

as their rhetorical functions. In this way, students are assisted in noticing the link between the text and the context and acquiring genre awareness and genre performance.

The approach of creating "a temporary analytical space" following the Rhetorical Genre Studies tradition (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 195) is also useful for understanding the link between text and context. Students take a situation to genre and back to situation route in a way that they first identify why a genre is used in the situation and then examine how the genre exemplifies the situation including the attitudes, values, and actions. Through this process students develop genre learning skills that relate genre and situation to each other.

Encouraging students to adopt an approach in which they view themselves as researchers or ethnographers (Johns et al., 2006) provides the opportunity for them to develop the awareness and strategies they require to manage unfamiliar situations. For example, by interviewing their lecturer about their assignment, including the purpose of a university assignment and stylistic requirements, students become aware of the rhetorical and formal dimensions of genre knowledge required of them and are able to approach their assignment in an informed way.

The five-step "sociocognitive approach" in intercultural business communication (Zhu, 2005, p. 162) is also helpful. Students are brought to understand the sociocultural contexts around a business text, analyse the discursive features in the text, write in real-life situations such as during an internship, study the authentic sample texts and experts' comments on them, and apply this cross-cultural generic competence to other cross-cultural settings. This methodic approach to teaching business discourse relates linguistic features to the epistemological considerations of the business world to build the students' awareness of what language is used in intercultural encounters and how and why.

8.4   Methodological Significance

This study has developed an approach to examining Business English students' professional identity construction by building on research in discourse and identity, professional socialisation, communities of prac-

tice, and business genre knowledge. It provides a description of professional identity in terms of four constituting factors, which facilitate the understanding of this key component of ESP learning.

The triangulation of the data and the analysis used in this study is also worth noting. Regarding data triangulation, multiple sources of data were collected which were found to confirm each other and thus enhanced the reliability of the study. The three sets of data, namely interviews with the students about their lived experiences of learning Business English in various communities of practice, their writing in a variety of business genres, and text-based interviews about their process of writing, were used in a complementary way. This approach allows the interpretation of the performance of professional identity in the texts to be traced to the students' perceptions of genre knowledge as indexicals for professional practices and expertise in their target community of practice. It also addresses the criticism of narrative analysis as "interpretive recounting" (Hyland, 2010, p. 162) by relating the students' emerging professional identity to 'hard' textual evidence, that is, the students' writing in various business genres. This way, the students were shown to be not only claiming a professional identity but also enacting one in their discursive practices.

Regarding analysis triangulation, the identification of the data for analysis was informed by the literature and validated by the participants. For example, the features on the four dimensions of genre knowledge were first brought to the attention of the researcher by the literature and also related to by the students in the text-based interviews. The categorisation of the professionals' comments on the students' writings was also based on the participants' own explicitly articulated rationale, for example the professionals' attitudes towards BELF were derived from their use of the derogative term "Chinglish" and explicit comments on instances of Chinglish in the students' writing. Therefore, the emic perspective and the etic perspective help validate the analysis. Linking narrative analysis with discourse analysis through theoretical concepts such as mediation and indexicality provides for an in-depth analysis of data. The study has in a way addressed Schryer's (2011) call for investigating texts in their social contexts and has resulted in a substantially enriched view of the construction of professional identity by the Business English students and contributes to research in professional identity methodologically in

that it provides a way of operationalising professional identity by examining the indexicals which are a link between the text and the context.

8.5   A Model of Learning Business English and Professional Identity Construction

This study shows that through learning Business English the Business English students were developing a professional identity which emerged in their participatory learning in the form of engagement, imagination, and alignment in the three distinct and interlocking mediating, transitory, and target communities of practice. Their emerging professional identity was shaped by their access to and agency in the communities of practice and underlay their discursive construction of professional identity, which was mediated by their business genre knowledge and to a considerable extent validated by expert members of their target community of practice. All this takes place in a historicised sociocultural space where the learning persons navigate the political economy, the Utilitarian discourse, gendered discourse, cultural discourse, educational discourse, and other social discourses in their professional identity construction. These insights may be graphically presented by appropriating the cultural–historical activity theory (Engeström, 1999, 2001). The Business English students as the subject with incredible agency participated in the three communities of practice to undertake the objects of learning Business English and fulfilling their extracurricular and professional experience requirements, through which they developed a prototypical professional identity, rehearsed it, and validated it. Their participatory learning was mediated by a range of cultural tools including their curriculum and academic or business genres. Each community of practice had its rules, including the often tacit way to access it. Their engagement, imagination, and alignment as modes of participation in the communities of practice materialised the division of labour in the cultural–historical activity theory. The resulting diagram (Fig. 8.1) may also be taken as a model of learning Business English and professional identity construction for Business English students at Chinese universities and settings where a similar educational programme is implemented.
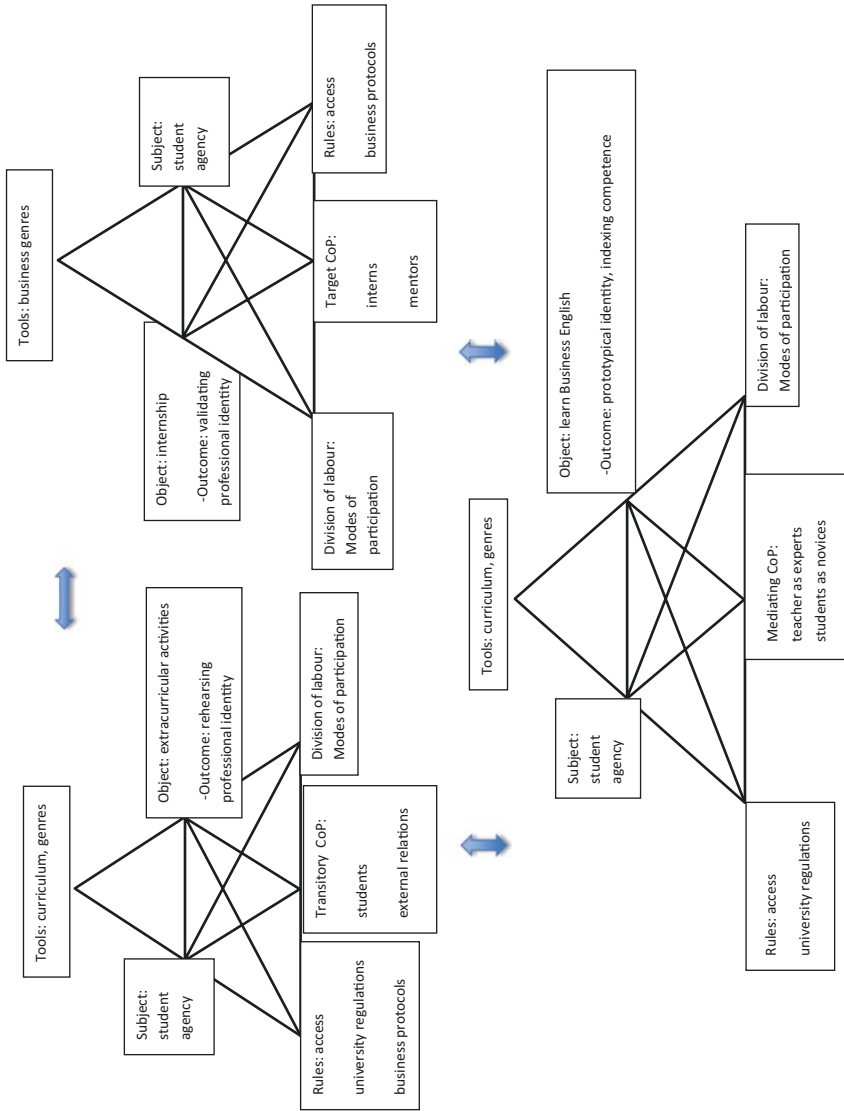
Fig. 8.1 Model of learning Business English and professional identity construction

8.6   Issues for Further Study

This study raises several issues for further research. One is the site of observing professional identity construction for Business English students. While this study is based on the Business English students' business writing classes, their emerging professional identity may also be observed in other classes, for example classes that focus on spoken business communication to explore their use of multimodal resources and/or business disciplinary knowledge. Zhang's (2005) study of the use of phonetic features as indexing devices for professional identities by Chinese employees in multinational companies operating in Beijing is indicative of the importance of speaking in performing professional identities. The students themselves, Nan and Lan for example, considered persuasive speaking as one of the traits of international business professionals. Multimodal indices of identity performance are useful to investigate (see, e.g., Zhang, 2015). As Dong demonstrated in his job posting, multimodal resources such as images and pictures along with words can be important indexing devices.

As professional identity is dynamic and evolving subject to the four constituting factors—professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence, these factors may be used as reference points in ongoing tracking of professional identity construction.

The formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter dimensions of business genre knowledge may also be the reference points in ongoing monitoring of genre knowledge development. This exercise of tracking genre knowledge development may help identify the emergence of indexicals for professional identity. More importantly, it may shed more light on the relationship between emerging professional identity and its enactment in discursive practices, that is, how the four factors for professional identity project onto the discursive practices via business genre knowledge. A further pursuit in this line of inquiry may include looking into students' learning of interdiscursivity, which involves the appropriation and exploitation of generic and professional practices in genre production in professional contexts (Bhatia, 2016).

There is also a potential value to explore the externalisation of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), or the professional identity the students constructed while learning Business English. This pursuit could look at the transition from university to the workplace. The students themselves acknowledged the worth of their learning at university for their participation in the target community of practice as interns. This is an important issue to pursue as it is related to the "portability" (Artemeva, 2009, p. 158) of university education, in particular an ESP education. Research so far supports the transferability of classroom learning of genre knowledge to the target situation (e.g., Artemeva, 2009, 2011; Smart & Brown, 2002; Zhang, 2013a). Yet, more research is required to increase the evidence for this, considering the complexity in the workplace in contrast to that in formal schooling (Beaufort, 1999; Dias et al., 1999; Freedman, Adam, & Smart, 1994; Park, 2001; Russell, 1997) to answer the questions of what is transferrable and what is less easy to be achieved through classroom instruction. This would entail a longitudinal design collecting students' lived experiences from admissions to the Business English programme through to their employment. In this design, the weakness of snapshots' view of students' lived experiences could be avoided. The role of professional identity in the transfer of genre knowledge across communities of practice could also be confirmed and clarified because assuming a professional role seems to empower the speaker or the writer when they are engaged in discursive practices, which is most likely the case where students transit to the workplace.

This study has been focused on the students in the ESP learning process. What is also worth investigating is how their teachers contribute to their learning and professional identity construction. The Business English programme at IBSU entails content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and English-medium instruction (EMI). How the teaching staff cope with the requirements for integrating business disciplinary knowledge, business practices, and business discourses along with English-language learning in their course planning and delivery expects to contribute immensely to research and practice in CLIL and EMI which are responses of the English-language teaching profession to the trend of education internationalisation, in particular English-medium instruction

at the tertiary level (Airey, 2016; Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Zhang, 2016).

8.7   Concluding Remarks

This book explored Business English students' construction of professional identity by investigating the lived experiences of the cohort of Business English undergraduate students at a prestigious Chinese university. Drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), who conceptualise learning as identity formation and transformation in communities of practice and current scholarship concerning professional socialisation, discourse, indexicality, and identity, and business genre knowledge, it sets out to explore four issues: (1) the professional identity that emerged for the Business English students over the course of their studies; (2) the students' participation in various communities of practice and the impact of their participation on their emerging professional identity; (3) the students' discursive construction of professional identity; and (4) the reception of the students' discursively constructed professional identity by international business professionals.

On the basis of an in-depth and contextualised investigation of five focal student participants, the study demonstrates that the Business English students were developing a professional identity which was marked by the configuration of four constituting factors—professional goal, values and perspective on international business professionals, technical competence, and discursive competence. Their professional identity was shaped by their patterns of participation in three salient communities of practice including the mediating community of practice engendered by their Business English programme, the transitory community of practice by their student clubs and associations, and the target community of practice which was constituted by the companies or institutions in which they interned. The interplay between access and agency complicated their pattern of participation. The student participants demonstrated a level of business genre knowledge in their discursive construction of professional identity which was underpinned by their emerging professional identity and was generally well received by the professional participants.

This study sheds light on the complexity of the processes of ESP learning as professional socialisation of learning persons through the theoretical perspectives of communities of practice and professional identity. Communities of practice prove to be a useful tool for investigating ESP learning processes. Examining Business English learning from the perspective of professional identity construction yields a broad and deep description of the students' lived experiences including both the outcome and the process. It testifies to the portability of ESP education while also making explicit several key issues to address to ensure a productive participatory learning experience for students.

To return to Dong's intriguing opening question about what he had learned over three years at IBSU, this book demonstrates that through learning Business English, he was transformed into an employable person. His frustration was as much an anxiety a novice in the professional setting would demonstrate as one consequence of several mismatches between his mediating community of practice and the target community of practice. Such frustration could be alleviated through communities of practice building where students are treated as whole and rounded persons and equipped with the integrated genre expertise that will allow them to participate confidently in English-mediated sociocultural practices of international business.

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Appendices

Appendix 3.1: Interview Schedule

Questions to Student Participants on Their Business English Learning Experiences

Q1: I'd like you to talk about why you are learning Business English. (Why did you choose to learn Business English?)

Q2: Now that you've been learning Business English for two/three years, describe some of your memorable experiences/moments.

Q3: Share with us some of the experiences that you feel really good about. How are these experiences significant for your understanding of international business professionals?

Q4: If you've experienced particular difficulties in learning Business English, would you describe them to me? What's the significance of this experience for your understanding of international business professionals?

Q5: Do you remember certain moments when you felt you were becoming an international business professional? When was that? What happened then?

Q6: Did you experience any cultural conflict in learning Business English? Would you describe what happened?

Q7: You said xxx, would you expand on that?

Q8: Are there any people who have had a significant influence on your experience of learning Business English?

Q9: Would you name them and discuss in what specific ways they have influenced your understanding of international business professionals?

Q10: You said xxx, would you expand on that?

Q11: What do you think makes an international business professional?

Q12: You mentioned xxx (e.g., knowledge, face systems, forms of discourse, and ideologies), are there other important aspects?

Q13: What beliefs and values do you think are important to international business professionals? What is your opinion of these values and beliefs?

Q14: Are you aware of how international business professionals deal with each other and their customers/clients?

Q15: Do you think international business professionals have a special/different way of talking and writing in English?

Q16: What is your understanding of international business culture?

Q17: You said xxx, would you expand on that?

Q18: What is your plan for/dream of a career in the international business world?

Q19: How does this plan or dream affect your way of learning Business English?

Q20: What seems to be your plan for fulfilling your dream?

Q22: What seems to be preventing you from fulfilling the plan/dream?

Q23: How are you going to overcome these difficulties you have just mentioned?

Q24: You said xxx, would you expand on that?

Q25: If you go over your Business English learning experiences, in what ways do you think they have changed the way you view international business professionals?

Q26: How have your experiences of learning Business English changed your way of viewing yourself?

Q27: What do you think you have become now?

Q28: You said xxx, would you expand on that?

Questions to Student Participants on Their Business Writings

Q1: Who was the audience for your text (letter, memo, email, report, etc.)?

Q2: What impression did you want to convey to your audience?

Q3: Why did you choose the word, expression, sentence structure, the way of organising the text, and the content?

Q4: What values, beliefs, and practices of international business did you consider when you were writing the text?

Q5: What did you find difficult in producing the text?

Q6: You have made revisions, why did you do so?

Questions to Business Writing Teachers on Their Views of the Students' Business Texts

Q1: What is your impression of the text?

Q2: Do you feel the text reads like professional writing?

Q3: What in the text, for example choice of words, expressions, sentence structures, rhetorical organisation, content, and so on, conveyed your impression about it?

Q4: If you were asked to revise the text, what changes would you make? Why?

Questions to Business Professionals on Their Views of the Students' Business Texts

Q1: What is your impression of the text?

Q2: Do you feel the text reads like professional writing?

Q3: What in the text, for example choice of words, expressions, sentence structures, rhetorical organisation, content, and so on, conveyed your impression about it?

Q4: If you were asked to revise the text, what changes would you make? Why?

Appendix 3.2: Business Letter Writing Assignment

Business Writing Final Exam

Four Letters

You are the senior manager of US imports at UIBE Importers in China that needs to hire a new employee to help support a new contract with a company in the United States. They will be corresponding with the vendor, preparing analysis on the account, forecasting future activity, and monitoring actual sales for the account. They will be required to give monthly presentations to the staff and assist you in miscellaneous analysis. It is your job to hire the new employee. The candidates must have a bachelor's degree, must be fluent in both Chinese and English, must have a business background, and must be able to use Microsoft Office for spreadsheets, presentations, and letters.

UIBE Importers was founded in 1999, in Beijing, China, and has grown from 5 employees to 50 employees over the past ten years. The company has displayed strong growth over the years and is expanding significantly in the area of importing goods from the United States. The culture is kind of strict due to the professionalism required to maintain business relationships with companies in the United States, but the expansion has led to opportunities for employees in the company moving into leadership roles. The pay for the new employees will be average (5000 RMB per month) for the industry, but the insurance and opportunity for promotion make it a very desirable place to work. There will be some overtime required at busy times, but the hours are fairly flexible for non-busy times.

Assignment 1 Write an email to William Smith, Jobs posting manager, at Jobs China, requesting him to place an electronic ad that will be available/open for seven days starting 26 March 2010. Include the job posting text and format in the email. (The words appearing in the job posting ad should include a description of the company, a job description, desired

skills, and job skill requirements. Make sure that the format of the advertisement is attractive! Remember to use the guidelines for an order and a request.) (40 Points).

The job posting was a success! You have two candidates to choose from that are both well qualified. It is a very difficult decision to make, but you must make the decision. Information about the two candidates is as follows:

Cathy Smith—Cathy is going to graduate from UIBE in June of 2010 with a Business English degree, which is OK. She received excellent grades, has great computer skills, is ambitious, and is the perfect job candidate except for experience. You think that she will be good for the company in the future, but are a bit worried about her lack of experience. She speaks English well, but her written grammar is not so good. With a little work, Cathy will be great for the company.

Bill Porter—Bill has a degree in business and seems like a strong candidate as well. He has a lot of experience that is perfectly suited for the job. His computer skills are satisfactory, but not as strong as Cathy's. His English-speaking skills are OK, but his written English is very nice. Bill would fit into the position right away. He is not quite as ambitious as Cathy, and you worry a bit about if he has the potential to move up in the company. He may, however, be a strong performer in the current opening.

Assignment 2 It is now 1 May 2010, and you have made your decision! The job will be active starting 15 June. Write an email offer to one of the candidates for the job. (Remember to use the guidelines for a positive response and an offer.) (20 Points).

To your surprise, the candidate responded with a counteroffer requesting a 10% pay increase. You cannot offer them the money, but you really want this candidate to be an employee. You decide that you can possibly get this candidate to accept the position if you stress the positive points of the job that aren't pay related.

Assignment 3 Write an email to the candidate expressing your inability to provide the pay requested and selling the positive aspects of the job that aren't related to pay. Give them one final chance to accept the offer. (Remember to use the guidelines for a negative response and offer/counteroffer.) (20 Points).

The candidate has decided that the job has wonderful future potential and has listened to your advice. He or she apologises for asking for more money and is truly grateful for your guidance. He or she is very happy to be working for you!

Assignment 4 Now comes the hard part. You have to write a rejection letter for the candidate who didn't get the job. You think that your company will be expanding soon and may need another employee in August, so you want to be kind. Write the rejection email. (Remember to use the guidelines for a negative response.) (20 Points).

Appendix 3.3: Lecture Slides with Instructions for the Business Letter Writing

Final Exam

- Bring it to class on January 8th
- Include the cover page, the final exam submission and the grading sheet (stapled together).
- Remember to follow the guidelines in the book for the exercises.

Assignment 1 - Part 1

- Request the placement of the posting
  - Order
    - Direct Opening
    - Meticulous detail
    - Specific requirements

Assignment 1 Part 2

- Job Posting
  - Description of the company
  - Description of the job
    - Tasks
  - Desired skills
    - Helpful for the job
  - Job skills requirements
    - Necessary for the job
  - Close the document properly

Assignment 2

- Positive response and an offer
  - Directly positive
  - Specific details
  - Sales sidekicks
  - Courteous close
- This is a firm offer

Assignment 3

- Negative Reply
  - Start with a buffer
  - Provide reasons for your negation
  - State the bad news
  - Offer suggestions or alternatives
    - Provide your counter offer
  - Close on a positive note
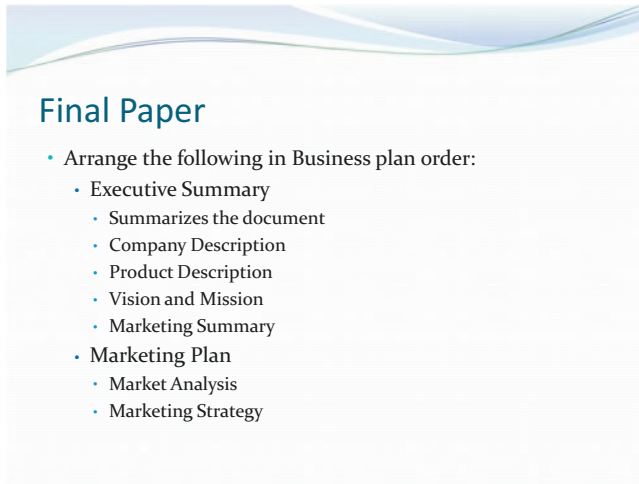
Assignment 4

- Negative Reply
  - Start with a buffer
  - Provide reasons for your negation
  - State the bad news
  - Offer suggestions or alternatives
    - Provide your counter offer
  - Close on a positive note

Appendix 3.4: Course Outline for Business Marketing Writing

Week of	Topic	Text	Reading	Assignments
2010-3-1	Introduction	None		
2010-3-8	Vision mission objectives—values	None		Values and passion
2010-3-15	Advertising	R.I.B.E. II	Part 1, 1–4	Company
2010-3-22	Advertising II	R.I.B.E. II	Part 1, 5–11	Quotes from masters
2010-3-29	Marketing	R.I.B.E. II	Part 3, 1–6	Target market
2010-4-5	Marketing II	R.I.B.E. II	Part 3, 7–15	Customers
2010-4-12	Marketing plan	B.E.W.	Chapter 3	Product
2010-4-19	Marketing plan	B.E.W.	Chapter 3	Price and place
2010-4-26	Marketing plan	B.E.W.	Chapter 3	Promotion
2010-5-3	Mid-term			
2010-5-10	Analysis	B.E.W.	Chapter 2	Competition
2010-5-17	Analysis	B.E.W.	Chapter 2	SWOT
2010-5-24	Analysis	B.E.W.	Chapter 2	Market Analysis
2010-5-31	Executive and company summary	B.E.W.	Chapter 1	Mission and vision
2010-6-7	Executive and company summary	B.E.W.	Chapter 1	Company summary
2010-6-14	Executive and company summary	B.E.W.	Chapter 1	Executive summary
2010-6-21	Operation and financial plan	B.E.W.	Chapters 4 and 5	Business plan
2010-6-28	Final			

Appendix 3.5: Lecture Slide with Instructions for the Business Plan

Final Paper

- Arrange the following in Business plan order:
  - Executive Summary
    - Summarizes the document
    - Company Description
    - Product Description
    - Vision and Mission
    - Marketing Summary
  - Marketing Plan
    - Market Analysis
    - Marketing Strategy

Appendix 3.6: The Transcription Notations

1. Capital letters for stress in the utterance, for example HIS representing stress put on the word by the speaker
2. Bold for stress on the first-person pronoun in the utterance, for example **I** representing stress on the pronoun by the speaker
3. Comma "," indicates a perceptible pause in the utterance by the speaker
4. Question mark "?" indicates rising tone by the speaker
5. "…" indicates elliptical parts of an utterance
6. Chinese characters indicating original data in Chinese with English translations provided in brackets following the original data
7. The utterances of the study participants are transcribed verbatim without editing. (When names and places are likely to reveal the identity of the study participants, they are replaced with "..." in this book.)

Appendix 7.1: A Scheme for Commenting on Genre Knowledge Development

General categories	Subcategories	Examples
	Subcategories and examples	
Formal dimension	Deletion (redundant words or expressions)	will be available, **open** (deleted)
	Addition or expansion	To ask for your help **with** (placing) an advertisement
		Thanks (again) for your trust
		(We) **Wish** (wish) you a very successful future in your career!
		Thank you for your **recent application to UIBE Importers** (interest in UIBE Importers and taking your time to participate in our recruitment process)
		whose **background** (better) match our needs
		their average expense is **RMB300** (per year, per course, per…?)
	Technical term	a job as **manager assistant** (assistant manager)
		our company **welfares** (benefits)
		money managing (asset management) programmes
		a negative evaluation of your **accomplishment** (qualifications)
		[Commenting on a resume] **Proficient** (good term) in Microsoft Office
		Good (exceptional) written … skills
	Boosters of self (boosting the writer, own obligations)	in which better performer (performers) **will be** (are) awarded
		by your **distinguished** (too strong) university
	Boosters of the other (boosting the reader, the reader's obligations)	I hope I could get the **pretious** (precious?? Sounds too desperate) opportunity
		[Requirements in the job posting] **Be able to use** (A bit better to say proficient with Microsoft Office)
		Your experience and capability is **perfectly** (Use well. "perfect" is too constraining—can you fire a "perfect" employee?) suited for the job
		Interested applicants **can** (must) send resume to

Appendix 7.1 (continued)

General categories	Subcategories and examples	
	Subcategories	Examples
	Perspective and thematisation	[I perspective from the beginning of the counteroffer letter] **We'd like to** (I'd like again to) take **To use the knowledge I learned from my professional training in Business English** (Based upon my education in Business English) **I believe our cake shop can be widely successful** (Based on the encouraging growth and success of our first two stores, we believe that we can profitably enlarge our business) There are lots of **other reasons for the customers** (other customers who have a reason) to make a cake by themselves
	Realisations of speech act	**Would you please help us place an electronic advertisement for our recruitment information on your website?** (Please place the following advertisement on your website.) **We hope the advertisement could meet the following requirements** (The advertisement should meet the following conditions).
	Move structure	(The I CAN programme does not have a table of contents which makes it less professional) (No transition by a marketing summary)
	Layout (standard and optional parts of the document; length; formatting fonts, sizes, shading; listing vs. prose)	[Commenting on two-page resume] [Too long and cluttered]
	Medium and mode (delivery by means of speech vs. by writing; visuals vs. verbal text)	[Commenting on business plan] [Additional use of graphs would be good when giving actual statistics]

Appendix 7.1 (continued)

General categories	Subcategories and examples	
	Subcategories	Examples
	Verbal versus nominal group	**I have lots of daily affairs to handle** (I handle many daily affairs)
		If your company is **in search for** (searching for)
	Mechanics (punctuation, spelling, abbreviation, contraction, capital letter)	**SIFE** (What is SIFE—will the reader know?)
		I'm sorry to inform you that we **can't** (cannot) grant you a 10% pay increase.
		low prices and fast **deliver** (delivery)
	Linguistic code (grammar such as plurals, articles, subject-verb agreement, preposition, comparative structure)	I have excellent communication **skill** (skills).
		According (According to) our company policy
		an introduction to **business world** (the business world)
		People **has** (have) shown
	Linguistic code (use of general vocabulary)	retail and trend analysts **scour** (search for/look for) to find emerging brands or trends
		I am an **easygoing** (Be very careful I like "easy-going," but some people may see "lazy") and proactive boy with good communication and persuasive abilities
		understand your **considerations** (concerns)
		I formed a **mind** (mental) picture
	Linguistic code (formal vs. informal/everyday expressions)	We will not be able to offer you **the pass ticket** (not a formal expression; a position) at this moment.
		for **kids** (kids is slang—children)
		[Commenting on business plan] [First, it should always maintain a formal tone.]
	Linguistic code (verb in the main clause delimiting the perspective of the subordinate clause)	So, we regret to inform you that **you are not to be recruited by our company** (we cannot offer this position to you)

Appendix 7.1 (continued)

General categories	Subcategories and examples	
	Subcategories	Examples
	Linguistic code (a chain of often simple sentences combined to make a clause complex)	**When bringing the opportunity for students to learn more skills, it creates a new form of education. It's neither merely online learning nor traditional training. I CAN is more than a bridge** (I CAN combines the best of traditional and online learning by a unique use of web technologies and person-to-person contact— a click and mortar concept).
		So **we don't want too many discounts and low price spoil the brand** (Chinglish → We don't want to spoil the brand by offering discounts and low price from time to time).
	Chinglish (literal translation of ideas in Chinese, coined expressions, unaware of expressions with negative connotations in English, Chinese way of organising thought)	**Second** (other) foreign languages
		SIS Winter Holiday **Propaganda** (To a Western person, this doesn't sound positive.)
		Cultivate **elites** in new digital age (in the United States with bad/wrong connotations— perhaps "to develop highly effective people with digital age skills")
		Cake shop is never something small business as most people consider (intelligible but weak grammar)
		for its **petty-bourgeois sentiments** (This statement is "political" and potentially offensive)
Process dimension	Practices in text production, distribution, and reception	[Commenting on cover letter] (Remember—the employer is possibly looking at 100 s of Resumes + cover letters. If the cover letter is too long, they will skip it and go straight to the resume.)
		[Commenting on counteroffer letter] [Even in the process of negotiation on terms of benefits, I think the way of communication should be either through face-to-face talk or by phone call, seldom by email.)
		[Commenting on attaching offer to email] (My understanding is that an offer can only be sent separately as attachment if by email, due to confidentiality …)

Appendix 7.1 (continued)

General categories	Subcategories and examples	
	Subcategories	Examples
Rhetorical dimension	Positive versus negative projection	**we still have a long way to go** (not very positive … perhaps → "which we are working towards over time") [Commenting on counteroffer letter] (Some of these points are negative and might persuade Cathy NOT to work at …)
	Task or purpose	[Commenting on business plan] [Remember the purpose of the plan is to get action NOT to have someone read it and think you are clever.) [Commenting on counteroffer letter] (Persuasion—absent)
	Brevity	[Commenting on order letter] (Good concise/direct request letter)
	Impersonal versus personal	Miss Corporation dedicates **herself** (itself; the writer is trying to give the company a personality … but it doesn't work. Better to use "it," "itself") [Commenting on counteroffer trying to persuade the candidate] (Don't make it too personal.) to join **our big family** (UIBE Importers) **Performance Bonuses: There is great opportunity for promotion if you are competitive enough and fit the position quite well** (performance bonuses may be given depending upon job performance).
	Deductive versus inductive strategies	(Commenting on resume) (Good resume! Direct points about each category. Quick + easy to read.)

Appendix 7.1 (continued)

General categories	Subcategories and examples	
	Subcategories	Examples
Subject-matter dimension	Expected information	[Commenting on order letter] [Missing the price.]
		[Commenting on business plan] [In the competition section, they mention the leading competitors, but give only the briefest descriptions. There is no mention even of how many branches any of them have. I would expect more detail here.]
		[Commenting on business plan] [Exact figures are good—but you must also quote where the figures came from—gives authenticity + makes the reader feel the details are objectively qualified.]
	Unnecessary information	We'd pay **in due time** (deleted, unnecessary)
		[Commenting on cover letter for a position in marketing] I am creative, **rational,** (deleted) and ambitious
		With Internet, nothing is impossible. (deleted)
	Questionable information	**A 24-hour service** (immediate question is whether there is some municipal regulation against 24-hour service. Better check that before putting it in a proposal)
		but **the hours are fairly flexible for non-busy times** (this is dangerous to include here, I'd omit it)
		Cheapness is the best policy. (?)
		Your background is impressive, and you certainly have what it takes to do the job (may lead to misunderstanding in a content of rejection)
		[Commenting on marketing strategies in business plan] [Is TV advertising in conflict with your position in 6.2.1?]
	Generic information	[Commenting on business plan] [Avoid generic statements but make everything specific to I CAN even if it means omitting certain things.]

Note. Each subcategory is illustrated in the third column. The extracts for the original writing are reproduced with the professionals' suggested changes or comments in parentheses. The section of the extracts that are commented on is highlighted in bold. The contextual information for each extract is provided within brackets [ ].

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