

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter aims to discuss some issues related to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Subsequently, the chapter also reviews literature related to the notion of text, discourse and discourse analysis in addition to suggestions made on discourse analysis and the social perspective. The researcher further discusses research works related to computer-mediated communication conducted both locally and outside Malaysia. Finally, the chapter examines some textbooks on e-mail communication as well as some views on the nature of business communication.

2.1 Issues related to English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Some of the issues related to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) will be discussed in this chapter under the following headings:

2.1.1 ESP and learners' needs

2.1.2 ESP and discourse analysis

2.1.1 ESP and Learners' Needs

English for Specific Purposes, popularly known by its acronym, ESP is usually goal oriented as Robinson (1991: 2) rightly points out:

.... students study English not because they are interested in the English language (or English-language culture) as such but because they need English for study or work purposes.

Looking at ESP learners from the perspective that they are interested in learning English only because it meets their needs at work or in academia, it would therefore mean that ESP course designers and practitioners have to find out what their learners' needs are. Robinson posits that an ESP course is derived from a needs analysis which attempts to indicate as closely as possible what actually it is that learners "have to do through the medium of English" (Robinson: 1991). Taking this perspective, the study therefore attempts to explore e-mail communication at a local business community with an aim to gain some insights into what our tertiary students actually have to do using English in such a discourse. With such an aim, it is thus necessary to investigate the kind of e-mail communication that routinely occurs in a business community.

According to Strevens (1988, cited in Johns & Dudley-Evans: 1991), ESP consists of English language teaching which is designed to meet specified needs of learners, and it is related in content to certain disciplines, occupations and activities. It is also focussed on the language appropriate to those activities in terms of syntax, lexis, discourse and semantics, among others. In adopting this definition of ESP, an effective

ESP programme would therefore require the judicious research and design of pedagogical materials and tasks suitable for a particular group of adult learners within a specific learning context. Such a definition of ESP also brings into focus the two important components of ESP namely needs assessment and discourse analysis.

ESP practitioners and proponents advocate the necessity of identifying the needs and purposes of learners in designing materials (Hutchinson & Waters: 1987, Robinson: 1991, Johns: 1991). In its early inception, needs assessments in ESP began with the "pre-course procedures" (Johns: 1991) prescribed by Munby (1978, cited in Hutchinson & Waters: 1995). Munby (1978, cited in Hutchinson & Waters: 1995) has attempted to provide ESP practitioners with a detailed set of procedures to explore target situation needs of ESP learners. Munby calls this set of procedures the Communication Needs Processor (CNP). The CNP comprises a range of questions about key communication variables (topic, participants, medium, etc.) which can be applied to discover the target language needs of a group of learners. The Munby model provides a detailed profile of the learners' needs in terms of communication purposes, communicative setting, the means of communication, language skills, functions, structures etc. (Hutchinson & Waters: 1995). The implication of this model has drawn the researcher's attention to investigate the structures and functions of e-mail communication in a local business community.

The form of needs analysis based on Munby's model subsequently progressed to application of ethnographic principles of "thick description" to explore the diverse

components of the target situation in which learners will be using English (Ramani et al: 1988, Ainol H. Ibrahim: 1993, Le Vasan: 1996). Ramani et al (1988) attempted to describe the use of ethnographic insights and tools in “revising and redesigning English programmes” for advanced students of science and technology at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, South India. In their framework for analysing the needs of their ESP learners, Ramani et al carried out steps which include observing the learners in their natural academic environment, asking the learners about their communication practices, needs and problems, asking subject specialists, and finally, asking language specialists. The needs analysis was conducted over one month in four departments of the Institute. What is significant about their approach to data collection is the element of collecting data from the natural environment in which the target language is used, as well as from subject specialists.

Ainol H. Ibrahim (1993) carried out a ten-week ethnographic study of a specific discourse community in a department of a Japanese multi-national manufacturing company. Her study investigated the communicative events in that community, and the rules governing them, and she discovered how the Japanese management influences communication in a particular organisation. Ainol H. Ibrahim has stated that her study “stemmed from a curiosity of how people out there in the ‘real’ world communicate” (1993, 114). The researcher is similarly curious about how people in the ‘real’ world of business communicate through the e-mail system for work purposes.

2.1.2 ESP and Discourse Analysis

The second element that is closely linked to ESP is discourse analysis, which Johns (1991: 299) defines in the ESP context as referring to "the examination of written or oral language, generally for purposes of designing curricular materials". This study has chosen to conduct a discourse analysis of e-mail messages in a business community as it is hoped that findings would assist in designing curricular materials for business communication in English.

In discussing discourse analysis in ESP, it is perhaps also pertinent to mention what Robinson (1991) says about linguistic analysis for ESP. In her book, *ESP Today: a Practitioner's Guide*, Robinson (1991) brings to our attention three approaches to linguistic analysis for ESP which have, to a certain extent, influenced the focus and research design of this study. The three approaches reviewed by Robinson are what she refers to as frequency studies, the rhetorical approach and genre analysis.

The frequency studies approach to analysing discourse involves looking at "significantly frequent occurrence of certain speech elements, forms or structures that characterizes" that discourse (Hoffman: 1986, cited in Robinson: 1991, 23). Statistical methods therefore play an important role in this kind of analysis, and the research premise is based on the rationale that "lists of typical lexical items ... may serve as a highly effective teaching / learning minimum" (Hoffman, cited in Robinson: 1991, 23). According to Robinson (1991, 24), the frequency studies approach, however, has been criticized as being "only descriptive, not explanatory". To overcome this inadequacy,

Robinson suggests that description should be combined with explanation of data:

Ideally, the two approaches should be combined, the description leading to an explanation, the explanation backed up by descriptive data.

(Robinson: 1991, 24)

Another significant approach to discourse analysis in the ESP context was what Robinson (1991, 24) refers to as "the rhetorical approach". This approach was initiated by Selinker et al (1970, cited in Robinson: 1991, 24) who suggested that "what was important was not so much the frequency of feature *x* or *y* but the reason for the choice of *x* rather than *y* in the developing text". This approach is therefore directed towards examining the writer's purpose rather than merely the form. A noteworthy contribution to this approach was made by Tarone et al (1981, cited in Johns: 1991, 300) who examined journal articles on astrophysics to identify the occurrence and functions of the passive form of verbs claimed as being characteristic of English for science and technology. In their findings, Tarone et al revealed that the plural pronoun "we" with an active verb occur at least as frequently as the passive, thus disputing assumptions made earlier that 'scientific English' mainly consists of the passive (Robinson: 1991). Robinson thinks that those researchers' attempt is significant in identifying "the rhetorical reasons for the choice of active or passive, reasons that relate to the developing text and to authorial meaning and not to any prior stylistic decision" (1991, 25). In their investigation, Tarone et al (1981) also sought validation for their assumptions from an

expert in the astrophysics discourse community. Theirs was one of the earliest attempts at using subject specialists to "suggest and confirm needs and discourse analyses hypotheses" (Huckin & Olsen: 1984; Selinker: 1979, cited in Johns: 1991). The role of 'subject specialist' is significant in their approach and has contributed to the research design of this study. Just as Tarone et al used subject specialists to suggest and confirm needs and discourse analyses hypotheses, the researcher has also sought information on the subject investigated, that is e-mail messages in a local business community from the key informant who has 8 years of working experience in that community as well as in e-mail communication for business.

A third approach to analysing discourse which is also relevant to ESP is genre analysis which like all technical terms in ESP, has several interpretations (Robinson: 1991). According to Robinson (1991, 25), for some writers, the term 'genre' seems to be similar to 'text type'. In addition, as is characteristic of the rhetorical approach, a genre analysis also looks at the manipulation of language within a complete text, seeing the "text as a system of features and choices" and "selection is made according to the communicative purpose of the text producer" (Robinson: 1991). Adopting this perspective, this study intends to look at e-mail messages as texts with language features and choices dependent on the communicative purpose of the producers of those messages.

Swales (1990: 58) defines genre as comprising:

a class of communicative events, the members of

which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style.

The above definition of genre confirms the necessity of exploring whether the purposes of the participants in a discourse influence the schematic structure of that discourse and affect their choice of content and style. This seems to parallel Robinson's (1991) view that the genre analyst should attempt to explain the writer's purpose with reference to the wider professional culture. The present study has adopted this strand of the genre analysis approach towards discourse study, that is purposes of participants in a discourse have to be investigated to see whether they influence choice of content and communication style.

Some suggestions by another proponent of genre analysis, Bhatia (1993) are also taken up in the present discourse analysis. In his suggestion to the genre analyst on levels of linguistic analysis, Bhatia (1993) proposes that a text can be analysed quantitatively by studying the particular features of language that are dominantly used in the genre through a corpus-based statistical analysis of a representative sample of the genre. He quotes Barber's (1962) work as an example. The latter conducted a study of Some Measurable Characteristics of Modern Scientific prose, and revealed figures of statistical significance

in relation to the use of various tenses in the corpus. Barber's findings revealed the use of the present simple tense in the active voice to be 64% and in the passive voice, 25%. A similar analysis was conducted by Gustafsson (1975, cited in Bhatia: 1993) in the context of legislative genre which she calls English Law Language. Gustafsson noted that relative clauses occur in 47% of the legislative genre while adverbial clauses, 31%. In Bhatia's view, such linguistic analysis of the frequency of syntactic properties in different genres provide vital empirical evidence to confirm or refute some of the "impressionistic statements" (Bhatia: 1993, 25) that one tends to make about the high or low incidence of certain lexico-grammatical features of various genres. However, Bhatia (1993) also points out that such an analysis should be accompanied by investigation into the rationale underlying choice and distribution of surface linguistic features in the particular genre. Although this study has not conducted a corpus-based statistical analysis to support its findings on occurrences of grammatical features in the corpus, its frequency count of such occurrences has a similar aim, and the researcher has adopted Bhatia's suggestion to investigate the rationale underlying choice and distribution of surface linguistic features.

Azirah Hashim (1996) in her study of the syntactic choices and text organisation in medical research articles, uses frequency counts to identify the distribution of mood, transitivity and theme in such articles. This method to support her findings as well as her focus on the number of clauses as a measure of "syntactic complexity" (Azirah Hashim: 1996) have contributed to the research design of the present study. Both the method and focus seem to be sound instruments to adopt for this study in view of the nature of the

data collected.

The different approaches to discourse analysis in ESP discussed so far offer some significant ideas to ESP practitioners and researchers, and have provided some insights to the researcher on what to explore and analyse in the present study of e-mail discourse, some of which are the importance of examining the purposes of writers, discourse features as well as the application of frequency analysis of linguistic features to investigate discourse.

2.2 Text, Discourse and Discourse Analysis

According to Brown and Yule (1983), the analysis of discourse is, "necessarily the analysis of language in use". Thus discourse analysis cannot be confined to the description of linguistic features independent of the purposes or functions which those features are created to serve in human activities. As Brown and Yule have stated:

.... the discourse analyst treats his data as the record (text) of a dynamic process in which language was used as an instrument of communication in a context by a speaker or writer to express meanings and achieve intentions. Working from this data, the analyst seeks to describe regularities in the linguistic realizations used by people to communicate those meanings and intentions.

(Brown & Yule: 1983, 26)

This view seems to echo the suggestion of Selinker et al (1970, cited in Robinson: 1991)

and Robinson (1991) on the importance of examining writer's purpose, and not just the forms in a discourse as discussed earlier in Section 2.1.2. Brown and Yule have also defined *discourse* as language used in a context to convey meanings and fulfil purposes, and the aim of carrying out a discourse analysis is to describe 'regularities' in language used to convey meanings and intentions. In the definition of Brown and Yule, 'discourse' is distinguished from 'text'. They see *text* as a "technical term" which refers "to the verbal record of a communicative act" (1983, 6) while *discourse* is seen as "language in use" and as an "instrument of communication in a context" to convey meanings and to fulfil the intentions of a speaker or a writer. This difference in the definition of text and discourse is echoed in Nunan's view that *text* refers to "any written record of a communicative event" while *discourse* refers to the interpretation of the communicative event in context (1993, 6 – 7). The present study adheres to this distinction between 'text' and 'discourse'.

Brown and Yule (1983, 22) suggest that the regularities which the discourse analyst describes "are based on the frequency with which a particular linguistic feature occurs under certain conditions in his discourse data." This study attempts to identify the regularities of e-mail discourse in a business community, based on the frequency with which a particular grammatical feature occurs in the data. Brown and Yule further postulate that the frequency of occurrence need not be as high as 90% to qualify as a regularity (1985, 22). This is because, according to them, the discourse analyst is mainly concerned with the level of frequency which is significant in "perceptual terms" (Brown

& Yule: 1983). The discourse analysis attempted in this study has adopted this view, as well as the two authors' suggestion to determine the regularities in the e-mail discourse by describing the linguistic forms in the data, relative to the contexts in which they occur.

Halliday (1985) emphasizes that a discourse analysis should be based on grammatical description when he says that a "discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all but simply a running commentary on a text". This is reinforced in McCarthy's statement (1991, 34) that without a "command of the rich and variable resources of the grammar offered by a language, the construction of natural discourse is not possible. Thus, one of the methods of data analysis in this study is what is referred to as the analysis of grammatical features of e-mail messages in the selected business community.

2.3 Discourse Analysis and the Social Perspective

Faigley (1985, 241) suggests that a research program that examines writing from the social perspective would first investigate what comprises a discourse community. Such a program would explore how a particular discourse community is "organized by its interactions and by the texts it produces" (Faigley: 1985). Writing is perceived as an act closely linked to its functions in a particular discourse community. This study intends to explore how the executives in the selected business community organize their interaction and the kind of e-mail texts they produce. It is hoped that in doing this, functions of e-mail writing in the particular business community would be identified.

Odell (1985, 250) asserts that writers who are members of an organization "may have internalized values, attitudes, knowledge and ways of acting that are shared by other members of the organization". Thus, it seems necessary to explore the organizational context in which non-academic writing is done. It is for this purpose that relevant documents of the company, ASC, and information from the key informant are examined to see whether these aspects of the organizational context have influenced language in the e-mail communication. No further information could be gathered through an ethnographic inquiry as permission to do so was not granted by the management of the business community selected for this study.

2.4 Research on Computer-mediated Communication (CmC)

This section reviews research works related to computer-mediated communication conducted both locally and outside Malaysia. The review is discussed under the subheadings:

- 2.4.1 Different forms and salient features of computer-mediated communication (CmC);
- 2.4.2 Functions and text features of commercial e-mail;
- 2.4.3 Research on e-mail in the local business community.

2.4.1 Different Forms and Salient Features of CmC

In a study that focuses on the use of the computer as a medium of communication in a business environment i.e. an IBM community in the United States of America, Murray (1988) discovered 3 different forms of CmC within that community. She summarises the characteristics of the different forms of CmC as follows:

- a. *e-message* which refers to the exchange of on-line messages between 2 or more participants simultaneously logged on to computer terminals;
- b. *e-mail* which is a tool that allows people to type extended messages at computer terminals and have those messages electronically transmitted to recipients which can answer, use or file them. The sender keeps a copy in a computer file;
- c. *forums* ('*fora*') which refer to mail-type files (usually on a technical topic) with a wide distribution list to which a recipient can append another piece of information. Like e-mail, *forums* do not require simultaneous log on.

(Murray: 1988, 5-6)

In her study, Murray (1985) also reveals that since computer-mediated communication cannot make use of channels of communication such as facial expressions, tone of voice and hand signals, conventions are developing to represent paralinguistic cues. The paralinguistic cues discovered by Murray include expressives used in comic strips e.g. 'humpf', multiple vowels to represent intonation contours e.g. 'soooo', and multiple punctuation marks e.g. 'how well did things go yesterday????'.

Besides drawing our attention to paralinguistic cues in computer-mediated communication, Murray (1985) also discloses another salient feature of e-mail messages – simplification of language. This feature includes syntactic simplification, abbreviations and the use of quotation marks. In syntactic simplification, the e-mail sender may delete auxiliaries, determiners and copula. According to Murray, some common abbreviations in electronic communication include *u*, *ur*, *u r*, *r u* for *you*, *your*, *you are*, *are you* respectively; *BTW*, *YW*, *CUL* for *by the way*, *your welcome*, *catch you later*. Single quotation marks or upper case in such communication are used to indicate either a system, a command, a name or a repeat of something either partner has already said.

This study attempts to determine whether the above characteristics found in American e-mail discourse noted by Murray are prevalent in the e-mail messages of our local business executives. If they are, what are the common characteristics found in the local data?

2.4.2 Functions and Text Features of E-mail Communication in Business

In his study of 116 e-mail messages written in the context of commerce and academia, Jonathan Gains (1999) discloses that 92% of the commercial e-mail (messages written for commercial purposes) he examined did not use any opening greeting at all to begin the message. He suggests that this phenomenon could indicate a convention which might have developed from the very clear heading format and the large proportion of messages for multiple distribution.

Gains' findings reveal that two particular methods of closing commercial e-mail messages seem to evenly dominate the convention for signing off (Gains: 1999). In 42% of the data, only the sender's name was used to close the message, and in 40%, some variation of 'thank you' was employed (Gains: 1999, 86). Gains claims that these figures correlate loosely with the number of information and request messages in the data (28 and 20, respectively) and suggest a link between *information - name only*, and *request - thank you*.

Gains' study has shed some light on text features of e-mail samples in his corpus such as openings, closings, stylistic register, conversational features, compression, abbreviation and word omission, and topic reference. However, as the researcher himself has mentioned, the study, being only a "limited investigation into the features of real examples of e-mail messages from both academic and commercial sources" (Gains: 1999, 82), did not consider the e-mail messages examined in terms of the grammatical features inherent in them.

2.4.3 Research on E-mail in the Local Business Community

On the local front, Le Vasan's (1996) findings from her ethnographic and case study approach to investigate computer-mediated communication in a Malaysian manufacturing company, reveals that e-mail was not more or less formal than face-to-face interaction or standard written language. However, according to Le Vasan, the degree of formality in the e-mail discourse in the company depends on many factors and

is largely controlled by context of situation, field and tenor (1996: 31). Le Vasan listed out the uses of e-mail in the manufacturing company as short messages, solidarity, technical diagrams, writing of memos, global market information, and negotiation.

Another local researcher of e-mail, Zubaidah Alsree (1997) examined 141 e-mail messages produced by executives of different management levels in a multinational corporation to see how directives are realized, and why they are realized. In other words, she examined the forms and functions of the e-mail messages. The types of communication she examined were downward communication (from superiors to their subordinates), upward communication (from subordinates to superiors) and lateral communication (between colleagues of the same level in the company's organisation chart). She selected the e-mail messages based on interaction, direction, duration, length and tasks.

Adopting a critical discourse analysis approach combined with an ethnographic inquiry and a pragmatic perspective, she examined her linguistic data for cues and markers that reflect the presence of power relations in language behaviour. She drew out frequencies and patterns of surface linguistic features in her data to identify such cues and markers. Zubaidah Alsree's work has provided the impetus to the present study for examining forms and functions in e-mail messages of business executives. Unlike Zubaidah Alsree's work however, the e-mail messages examined in this study are mostly related to the lateral kind of communication as the writers of the messages in the corpus and most of their recipients are colleagues on the same level in the company's

organization chart. Tertiary students upon graduation would usually have to be involved in a lot of lateral communication with their colleagues, perhaps in terms of liaising or "networking". Thus, examining e-mail messages which occur in lateral communication between executives at the workplace may help to enlighten students on the discourse involved. As a contribution to research done so far on CmC in Malaysia, this study is aimed at investigating e-mail discourse between the executives and their clients, as well as with their company's business partners.

2.5 Textbooks on E-mail Communication

This section summarises salient points related to e-mail messages in some textbooks on e-mail communication in business and for general purposes, such as *The Elements of E-mail Style* (1994) by Angel & Heslop, *Using Electronic-Mail: The Complete Reference to Electronic-Mail* (1994) by Gibbons et al, *Successful Communication for Business and the Professions* (1994) by T. Melra, and *Business and Administrative Communication* (1997) by K. O. Locker. A close look at the books mentioned reveals discussions on the following:

- 2.5.1 advantages of using e-mail;
- 2.5.2 office e-mail etiquette;
- 2.5.3 guidelines on writing e-mail messages;

2.5.4 format for e-mail messages.

2.5.1 Advantages of Using E-mail

In the textbooks mentioned, e-mail communication is compared to other forms of communication such as ordinary mail sent by postage (also labeled as 'snail mail') and telephone communication in terms of its advantages. Some of the advantages in using e-mail include:

- reducing mailing time;
- enabling the attachment of files;
- allowing mass mailing.

2.5.2 Office E-mail Etiquette

Dave Gibbons et al (1994) in their textbook on using e-mail claim that electronic communications in business "follow certain rules, most similar to the business letter but slightly less formal" and e-mail users "should use the same polite professionalism when writing e-mail as they would for any other memorandum or business letter". Some of the tips they provided in the textbook are:

- Be wary of being funny;

- Be concise;
- Even when arguing an idea, be sure not to say anything insulting;
- Do not send messages you do not want forwarded.

2.5.3 Guidelines on Writing E-mail Messages

Angell and Heslop (1994), the writers of *The Elements of E-mail Style*, state that the e-mail medium makes "different demands on writing style and has its own unique conventions". Angell & Heslop (1994) also recommend to their readers how to structure their e-mail for impact, choosing the right words to convey the appropriate tone for e-mail writing. Their tips have actually provided some insights to the present study in the course of analysing data.

In her article in Locker's (1997) *Business and Administrative Communication*, "Managing E-Mail", Gloria Pfeif (1997) who is a Group Program Manager at the headquarters of Microsoft in Washington (1997), states that good e-mail is "short and direct". She recommends to e-mail writers to use "two or three paragraphs for basic communications". She also suggests that subject lines for messages should be "specific, concise and catchy".

2.5.4 Format for e-mail messages

According to Gloria Pfeif (1997), most e-mail systems start by asking the e-mail

user to indicate whom the message is for and what the subject line is, and the computer puts in the date, time of day, and the sender's name and address automatically. Thus, e-mail messages generally follow a standard format with regards to these features.

Although the textbooks mentioned above provide some useful tips on using e-mail, authentic e-mail texts if at all used, seem to be those from "English-speaking native context(s)" (Bhatia: 1997) in the United States of America. Furthermore, most of the books tend to discuss e-mail communication used for general purposes and do not provide much detail on the language use involved in the e-mail communication of the business community. As has been discussed earlier, the focus of those books is usually on the advantages of using e-mail, office e-mail etiquette, guidelines on writing e-mail messages and format of e-mail messages. Most of our tertiary learners would already have known the advantages and format of e-mail, being themselves familiar with e-mail communication for social purposes. The office e-mail etiquette discussed in those books is helpful to a novice of e-mail communication at the workplace, but guidelines given on writing e-mail messages seem rather general. Since studies have shown that e-mail is widely used in the commercial world (Le Vasan: 1996, Chan: 1994) and there is a need for students to learn e-mail writing (Chan: 1994), the researcher sees a need to investigate the grammatical features and discourse features of e-mail communication in a local business community.

2.6 Business Communication

This section aims to review some textbooks on business communication in local tertiary institutions. In addition, it also brings to our attention some views expressed on the nature of business communication.

2.6.1 Textbooks on Business Communication

Most textbooks on business communication published so far tend to focus on business letters, memorandums, reports, oral presentations, meetings and job applications. If they were published in the 80s and 90s, it is understandable that e-mail communication for business is not included in any of these books. If at all e-mail communication for business is included, it is usually not discussed in detail, especially where language use is concerned.

Standard textbooks used at local tertiary institutions like Alistair King's *Effective Business Letter-writing* (1997), Martin Wilson's *Writing for Business* (1987) and Malra Treece's *Communication for Business and the Professions* (1989), just to name a few, usually prescribe and show samples of the different types of business letters. Such letters include letters of enquiry and reply, order and acceptance letters, collection letters, letters of complaint and adjustment, sales letters, goodwill letters and letters of application. Wilson's (1987) book even includes a chapter on telexes and cables, but this researcher has discovered from members of a local business community that sending telexes is not

commonly practised anymore in business today due to the limited use allowed by a telex machine. In comparison, a fax machine or the e-mail system of a computer provides more flexibility in the sending of different types of documents. In the light of this, there is a need to supplement existing business communication textbooks with information on language use in e-mail communication at the workplace.

2.6.2 The Nature of Business Communication

According to Ghadessy & Webster (1988), the purpose of every business communication is to obtain some material and immediate response or action. They further add that it is for this reason that business communication is designed to create the proper impression upon the recipient, and thus to evoke the proper action, response and result. For this reason, business communication is often spoken of as a kind of persuasive communication (Ghadessy & Webster: 1988). Business communication may thus contain elements of language that would convince the recipient to take a certain course of action or meet a certain requirement stated in the communication.

Le Vasan (1996) suggests that knowing how to perform actions in particular ways is characteristic of business discourse. In other words, to communicate effectively in business, one must usually do it the accepted way or what is seen as a norm by members of that community. Le Vasan further adds that the language used in the business community cannot be considered as fixed or as having a distinct set of words as words on

their own do not carry the meanings of business discourse. Thus, learners need to master the system of meaning relations and its ways of thinking within the context of everyday usage if they wish to operate in business discourse. Le Vasan proposes that if we want to understand the language practices of the business community, we need to investigate *the way* in which something is said as well as *what is being said*. This study has taken up her suggestion to look at the way things are conveyed to recipients of the e-mail messages in the business community under study as well as the subject matter of those messages.

Alistair King (1997) claims that conciseness is a key word in business communication. According to him, when a piece of communication has "an intelligible minimum of words" (King: 1997, 6), then it can be said to be concise. He recommends that for business communication to be concise, one should avoid tautology, verbosity and circumlocution. Tautology is defined as unnecessary repetition through the use of extra words which do not contribute to the sense of the piece of communication, for instance "the *most* perfect solution ..." or "the two firms are co-operating together" (King: 1997). Verbosity means the use of too many words, and is often used by writers who feel that a big number of words gives others a good impression of their communication, for example "I am of the strong opinion that we should decline" or "In the event that your payment does not arrive on time...." (King: 1997). Circumlocution is also a type of verbosity and means talking or writing around the point. King says that it often involves the use of "*not*" with a negative word, for instance, "We were *not* at all unaware of the faults in the system" (King: 1997). Conciseness is thus a principle of business communication.

The above discussion on some textbooks on business communication as well as of some views on the nature of business communication, has shed some light on how to go about analysing the e-mail messages collected from a business community for this study.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the relationship between ESP and learners' needs in addition to the relationship between ESP and discourse analysis. The terms "text", "discourse" and "discourse analysis" have also been defined, based on definitions of writers like Brown and Yule, Robinson, and Nunan. The chapter further draws our attention to the premise that a discourse analysis should look for regularities based on the frequency with which a particular linguistic feature occurs in the data as proposed by Brown and Yule, and Bhatia. In addition, the review has considered Halliday's and McCarthy's emphasis that a discourse analysis should be based on grammatical description. The later sections of this chapter bring to the fore, research studies on computer-mediated communication (CmC) conducted in the 80s and 90s. The studies have provided information on the characteristics of CmC. The chapter closes with a discussion on some textbooks regarding e-mail communication and some views on business communication.