CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a review of studies that are relevant to the present study. It will firstly provide an overview of needs analysis studies for the purpose of determining the position writing and report writing occupy in target discourse communities. A discussion on text analysis follows to highlight the importance and value such analyses carry towards pedagody in ESP in that they bridge the gap between theory and practice. A discussion on the concept of 'interfacing' is then provided as the present study relates closely to report writing in the workplace. Studies on evaluation of writing based on target situation requirements are then reviewed. This is done to take note of several practices in evaluating and assessing written products, and at the same time accounting for a few considerations when doing so. Lastly, some studies on utilising professionals in the evaluation process will be discussed to lend support to the present study in carrying out a similar endeavour.

2.2 NEEDS ANALYSIS AND WRITING REQUIREMENTS

Needs analysis studies are relevant to the present study in two ways. One is that their findings provide useful information on the demands for writing in specific target situations. For this purpose, an overview of some studies on needs analysis will be provided below in order to gauge whether there is still good demand for written skills, and if so, in what way. Another is that findings of needs analyses provide good grounds upon which the present study has been undertaken, that is in determining more precisely the nature of the writing required in the workplace.

The Business English course in this study itself evolved from Ngeow's (1991) needs analysis of ESP learners at UKM and business personnels holding positions in Business Administration. Ngeow's study involved conducting structured interviews and examining a corpus of authentic documents to gain insights into the standard and style of writing employed in the business world at that time. That investigation resulted in the design of a proto-syllabus for a Business Writing course, where Report Writing formed one of the major course components based on the findings that reports represented a major constituent of the business personnel's writing activities.

However, the time at which Ngeow conducted the needs analysis somewhat dates her study. Although over the years the course has evolved into an integrated one with emphasis on all four major skills (thus the name English for Business), the syllabus

content for writing has not changed much. Innovations such as fax and e-mail, changes in the composition of discourse communities, changes in the country's goals and aspirations (Chitravelu, 1993: 28) not to mention the recent economic slowdown, may have changed the nature of written documents including reports, not only in their form and purposes but also in the standards expected. Thus far, there have been few changes in the Report Writing component to account for these. It is one of the intentions of the present study to make up for this lack. However, it will not be a needs analysis, per se, but an investigation into the precise nature of the skills expected in report writing in the workplace.

Another consideration with regard to Ngeow's study is in her choice of subjects. As the business personnels were randomly chosen, it was not clear whether they regularly practised the kinds of writing called for in the workplace. Therefore, their judgements on the need for, quality and standards expected of any written documents may not be truly reliable. Ngeow specifically pointed out the reason for not choosing those from the 'higher echelons' of the business organisations in that they 'had few opportunities or little need to actually produce business documents on their own'. Although this may have been true, and still may be so, the fact that reports are usually written for management decisions render these people's viewpoints valuable. This is due to the fact that they are usually the ones who set the standards required in a report that can best aid them in their decision making process.

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In relation to the above, Sargunan (1999) who investigated the notion of effectiveness in technical reports at KLM, differentiates between what she calls the 'experts' and the 'novices'; the former being engineers who have been members of the discourse community for more than two years, hence are 'familiar with the culture and conventions of the discourse community' and the latter being those who have not 'been absorbed by the culture' of the discourse community. Findings showed that there were differences in the views of these two categories of engineers with regard to what they saw as attributes of 'effective' reports. This fact supports the argument made earlier (on page 32) on selections of business personnels as informants and is accounted for in the intended study by considering the viewpoints of 'experts' in evaluating students' reports. It is hoped that their feedback on what constitutes an acceptable report can inform language teachers and course providers at UKM as to the extent to which the ESP course is effective in preparing learners for real language use beyond the confines of the classroom.

More recent studies on needs analysis include Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) large scale needs analysis (Yeo, 1996) and Nurahimah et. al's (1994 cited in Azlina, 1998) study on communication needs in local companies, which saw written and oral communication skills in English as the most important skills to have. Another important findings in the study is that a large percentage of employers (88%) felt that graduates entering the workforce were unable to write and articulate their opinions in English well. As the intended study focuses on selected gatekeepers' opinion on reports written by undergraduates, Nurahimah's study provides a good basis for

investigating the extent to which this is true, especially in relation to determining the actual features or characteristics of writing preferred by employers.

Leong (1998) conducted a study investigating the communicative needs of sales personnel in a selected local organisation. Her study is perhaps one of the few studies that utilised an ethnographic approach to examining workplace communication demands. Therefore, it was more comprehensive and provided a better picture of how language was used by members of the organisation. Her investigation revealed that in addition to other skills, writing was seen to be very important in the sales personnels' job. It is reported that the sales personnels' writing activities involved writing letters, memos, faxes, reports and proposals, making it necessary for them to have good writing skills. The importance of good writing skill was agreed upon by the Group Executive Director especially 'in the midst of an economic downturn when frequent disputes and disagreements arose. It was crucial for terms and conditions to be clearly and explicitly stated' (Leong, 1998: 113). These needs, however, may not be easily met because Leong's examination of written documents revealed a lack of writing skills among the sales personnel.

Again, the findings of this study echo that of Nurahimah's in relation to an evidence of poor writing skills among employees. The Group Managing Director (GMD) was reported to have expressed his dissapointment over the time wasted in vetting the letters and faxes written by sales personnels to their foreign principal in UK, saying that 'the sales personnel generally have poor writing skills'. Even though the GMD's

comments did not refer specifically to reports, one's best guess would probably be that the reports and proposals could have problems as well.

With reference to the letters and faxes, again, little information is provided on what was regarded as poor writing and what constituted good writing. It would be interesting to find out what changes the GMD made in the letters because they would indicate his general expectations on the kinds of writing deemed 'suitable'for the transaction intended. This 'missing' piece of information could be regarded as a limitation in Leong's study. Since she looked at all four skills, the scope of her study, despite being comprehensive and informative did not permit such thorough analysis.

Most needs analysis studies, by nature, are limited in this sense, that is, in providing information on the exact nature of the specific genre required. Dudley-Evans (in Tickoo, M.L, 1988) states that needs analyses can tell us what tasks the student needs to perform but it cannot tell us very much about the nature of those tasks. Evans goes on further to say:

> Materials writers need detailed analyses of the rhetorical and linguistic organisation of the tasks if they are not to be over-reliant on their own intuition. (As an example) Munby's chapter entitled Language Skills Selector (which) lists 54 language skills....on the basis of an earlier analysis of 'communicative events' the students need to be proficient in is at first sight extremely comprehensive...Closer examination reveals that in fact the skills are very general (1988: 28).

Findings of the studies discussed thus far tell us what kinds of skills are needed but do not indicate how and in what appropriate manner they are to be realized. There is a need to go a step further than needs analyses by employing investigative strategies that can help us better understand and describe phrases such 'write well', 'poor writing skills', and 'good writing' as they are used by employers in the workplace when describing written performance. This requires examining the genre in question to determine the norms characterizing the nature of writing tasks. For reports, this requires an investigation into not only recent trends in writing reports and the types of frequently written reports but the nature of their contents, language use and rhetorics deemed acceptable by members of the discourse community.

The present study intends to fill this gap. Although the genre in question is reports written by non-professionals, that is, students, it is believed that in deciding 'acceptability' of the reports, the gatekeepers will draw upon their knowledge and expectations of good reports within their organization. That kind of information is what is needed to enable language instructors, course designers and materials writers to better utilize them in their practice. It is necessary at this point to bring in insights from the field of genre analysis because they closely describe the practical utility that text analyses bring to the ESP teaching-learning situation. Dudley-Evans (in Tickoo, 1988: 28) believes that genre analysis enables the materials writer and teacher to do the following things:

1. Understand the conventions and expectations about content and organisation associated with texts or events.

2. Understand the features of particular examples of these texts or events that are considered to be 'good' examples.
3. Use the insights gained through the analysis to develop appropriate teaching materials.

As the present study aims to investigate the criteria gatekeepers in a business organisation employ in characterizing an 'acceptable' report, genre analysis is thus relevant because one of the ways in which the research objective is to be realized is by understanding some of the conventions and expectations of 'good' reports within the organisation. The study is made more pedagogically relevant by using reports written by students as the 'genre' in question. In many ways, it is evaluative in nature because insights gained from the investigation can be used to explore the effectiveness of the English for Business course in question.

This study adopts the standpoint that since it has been established from needs analysis studies that written communication is regarded as an important skill and that individuals in business organisations write reports as one of the necessary writing activities, there is a need now to closely examine the nature of reports. This is important in order to determine what kinds of criteria are looked for in an 'acceptable' report so that the course can better adapt to present day target requirements.

2.3 ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN TEXTS AND TARGET SITUATION REQUIREMENTS

Many of the studies on investigating the nature of written texts in the writing for professional purposes have been on aspects of genre analysis. One that is clearly relevant to the present study is Chitravelu's and Sitravelu's (1992) preliminary analysis of annual reports of 20 local public listed companies in Malaysia. It was found that the writing of annual reports was a highly conventionalized activity. The corpus of annual reports examined showed little variation in content, organisational structure, in the kinds of information presented in each sub-category of content, in the rhetorical moves as well as the language used to realize these moves.

It is quite easy to see why annual reports should be conventionalized, at least in their organization and general content. These reports are normally written for a varied audience both internal and external to the organisations; stock holders, investment consultants, large investors, potential investors , 'lay' investors, accountants and journalists. Therefore, there is the necessity to convince various stakeholders of a company's 'credibility and continued liquidity' (1992: 3) and their financial well-being and position. Conventionalized structures allow these audiences to read, compare and analyze between companies and to pick out certain parts of the reports relevant to their needs. Such tasks are possible when these corporate documents are fairly uniform in nature.

This 'conventional schema' found in written documents seems to hold true for proposals too, where Nair (1994) found clear regularities in the macrostructures of six proposals which she examined in her study. If this is the case, it would seem that Chitravelu's argument on 'well-formedness of structure and acceptability of content' over what to include and how to organize when writing reports is clearly significant. It would also seem that her argument that in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) country, practising a conventionalized form ensured at least minimum adequate standards are maintained is, to some extent, acceptable.

It would be interesting to see whether a conventional schema exists for other types of reports that are somewhat different in their communicative purposes than annual reports and proposals. How might 'well-formedness of structure' be operationalized in reports that involve not only presenting facts and projecting sales but also evaluating and recommending measures for improvement (that is, features that are characteristics of analytical reports)? In addition, annual reports are based on data and information collected from many kinds of corporate reports, for example, informational, analytical, progress and periodic reports (Hager, 1992: 85). It would seem that other corporate reports have to meet certain acceptable standards for them to assume an important role in management decision making. These standards may involve more than meeting the 'least minimum adequate standards' that a conventionalized form ensued. For an EFL country, writing reports in English then may be quite a task especially for those that have low proficiency in the language.

The present study looks at analytical reports on the basis of this reasoning. Furthermore, analytical reports are written by individuals and teams who may not themselves be expert writers or copy writers with a flair for writing. Chitravelu and Sitravelu (1992) found that most annual reports are written by copy writers employed by organisations to do the job of enhancing the corporate image. This luxury may not apply to other reports used internally such as an analytical report; therefore investigating its role and position in the workplace and skills and qualities associated with its writing may prove to be more pedagogically relevant especially in light of the current standards of English among employees in the country. Hager (1992) states that analytical reports are considerably more complex, comprehensive and sophisticated than other types of reports, and most closely model traditional academic research studies in structure and function than the other kinds. This last point adds on to the viability of researching into analytical reports especially in relation to exploring the effectiveness of tertiary level education in equipping graduates or would be professionals with the necessary skills essential to undertaking the task of writing one.

Thus far, only one research has been carried out to look into 'standards' in written documents in the workplace. Sargunan (1999) conducted an extensive ethnographic study in which she investigated the notion of 'effectiveness' in Technical Report Writing (TRW) at KLM from the perspectives of three main stakeholders; the discourse community in the organisation, the language specialists who teach TRW at KLM and the 'straddlers', that is university lecturers who teach technical courses at

the organisation. Her study is clearly significant to the present study as it looked at actual characteristics and features of reports which achieved target standards for success, as they are realized within a specific discourse community. This was done for the purpose of 'establishing an effective and efficient partnership between language service industry (LSI) and its customer, that is the business community through the correct identification of the standards of performance held to be excellent by the customers' (Sargunan, 1999: 6).

Sargunan's study involved an analysis of reports submitted for presentation at two events, namely the Technical Excellence Award Competition (TEAC) and the Nepcon Conference, administration of questionnaires and interviews to the three main stakeholders as well as observations of KLM's discursive practices. The findings of her study are significant to the present study in providing a good point of reference in discussing and describing standards associated with reports. Basically, it was found that there were differing views concerning the notion of effectiveness with regard to the technical reports at KLM. Within the discourse community itself, the 'experts' and 'novices' held quite different views concerning 'effectiveness' in a technical report. The 'experts', which comprised the Technical Committee (TC) and writers of reports, seemed to place more emphasis on Content rather than Language and Presentation (five main areas of Content were detailed). Factors such as Language, Style and Layout did not receive much emphasis because the reports submitted to the TC were read and judged according to 'the quality and implications of the contents, and reference to technical excellence and the interests of the business organization'

(1999: 444). How and in what manner the message was conveyed did not matter much in this regard.

The 'novices' also saw 'Content' to be important but their description of the attributes of Contents were not as detailed. Other aspects such as Presentation were emphasized. This is, according to Sargunan, 'largely fashioned by what they had learnt in their technical communication courses while in the universities (Sargunan: 515). The Language Specialists held the same views as the 'novices'. However, their evaluation of the contents of the reports were limited to mentioning (as opposed to describing) the aspects and attributes that were seen to be necessary in a technical report.

Sargunan's findings lend particular support to Chitravelu's and Sitravelu's (1992) where importance of 'Content' in reports are concerned. This seems to illustrate the preference for 'rhetoric of facts to the rhetoric of words' (Chitravelu, 1993: 31). In addition, the TC which judged the quality of the technical reports in Sargunan's study consisted of senior staff whose time was spent predominantly in safeguarding the business interests of the company, therefore reports which met with their expectations were considered 'effective' enough. Could it also be the case that because the reports themselves were written by members who had achieved full competence in the workplace and who were generally proficient in the language, there were few major language errors that warranted few comments from the TC?

Both Chitravelu's and Sargunan's studies are good examples showing the benefits of analysing target texts in allowing language practitioners to study elements, both stable and invariant, in the texts and applying that knowledge to pedagogic needs. Sargunan's study, especially, provided a 'value-added' benefit to this purpose by considering factors beyond the texts themselves that are 'centripetal and centrifugal' factors which exist in the community (Sargunan, 1999). It is worth noting at this juncture one point of consideration pertaining to current studies on target discourse communities. They have been mostly concentrated on multinational organisations that are known to set very high standards upon achievements in order to establish a competitive edge over their competitors. Would the same standards exist for smaller medium sized and locally-owned companies which also aspire for excellence but may have pitched their standards of excellence at a different level?

In this regard, the researcher would like to share the opinion of Leong (1998) in saying that studies on smaller, locally-owned companies have been overlooked and that they should be carried out because, economically, they are the ones targeted to grow in line with Vision 2020. These companies are also the ones where graduates would most likely join upon completion of their studies. Unlike Sargunan's study, the present study intends to study reports in line with the expectations of gatekeepers of a locally-owned company. It will be much less limited in scope, and is operating within some practical constraints. Firstly, the reports to be examined are not written by professionals but by students currently taking an English for Business course in preparation for workplace communication tasks. This somehow lessens the direct

link between addressor-audience in the writing process. To add to this, the language specialists in Sargunan's study are those that form the teaching team in the language training programme held at KLM, Motorola. They therefore served the discourse community directly and can be regarded as informed members of that community. This is not so with the language specialist/course instructor and writers of reports in the present study, hence, the situation lessens the link between course provider and customer.

It is perhaps convenient to think of the rationale for the intended study in terms of the Report Writing objective of the course, that is, in helping students write an effective report. As the course instructor and coordinator are not *bona fide* members of the business community, their understanding of an 'effective' report may be different than that of members of the discourse community. It is thus necessary to see whether the reports written are effective as seen by the gatekeepers. If the course professes to equipping students with workplace specific writing skills, steps should be taken to see that it does so by looking at students' written products and whether they are considered to be acceptable to gatekeepers. This rationale should serve to establish the missing link between course provider-customer in an indirect way.

Some simulation is necessary in order to minimise the other limitation of the study. The gatekeepers were asked to set the writing assignments for the students so that in a way, the written products are directed to them. In this regard, students were also told to imagine a hypothetical situation where they were supposed to be working for

the organisation. Details about the organisation's line of business were given to them. The gatekeepers were also made aware that the situation is one where they are examining and evaluating reports written by 'novices' new to the organisation and who possess some kind of entry point capabilities on the job in terms of written communication skills. The present study best illustrates a joint-evaluation of written reports produced by students. It can be regarded as an 'interface' between academia and the industry towards determining the appropriacy of the Report Writing component of the course in terms of its objectives and content. Getting an external observer's perspective on these should be valuable for pedagogic purposes.

2.4 INTERFACING BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND THE INDUSTRY

The concept of 'interfacing' is not uncommon in ESP. It involves addressing directly the tasks confronting students in their professional lives in order to clearly define the precise nature of the tasks and skills required. However, it involves more than needs analyses in initial course designs. Chan (1994) sees interfacing with industry as continually updating our knowledge and keeping abreast with developments so that any changes which have affected communication can be taken into consideration in course designs. King (in Williams, 1984: 37) advocated an analysis of demands that will be made upon students in their future careers stating that ' any communications contribution which fails to relate closely to these demands invites all the problems from which general studies suffer. For the teacher of communications, the cost of battling against student apathy and the charge of irrelevance can be enormous'.

The concept of 'interfacing' above, however, should extend from its use in course design to evaluation. The reason for this is that if ESP courses serve to meet the needs of industries, ESP practitioners are accountable , whether directly or indirectly, to the industries. Bhatia (1993: 193) has this to say concerning evaluation of attainment in ESP:

> The real test of success of any ESP course should be based on the performance of learners in actual target situations, academic or professional, for which they have been trained.

Miller (in Fearing, 1989) lends support to Bhatia's viewpoints. She reported that a writing programme evaluation conducted at the University of Texas reached similar conclusions in that 'before any college writing programme can be judged effective or ineffective, it must first have value to its graduates in later life. Like any educational programme, the overall effectiveness of a writing programme must be judged according to the needs of the population' (1989: 25). Likewise, a university-industry collaborative effort on research and curriculum development in professional writing at Fort Wayne University, USA found academics-practitioners cooperation useful in ensuring that students are adequately prepared for the workplace.

Although Bhatia's statement implies looking at student capabilities as they enter the workplace and not before participation in the workplace, it nevertheless has direct relevance to the purpose of the intended study. The framework upon which this study is based can be synonymous to a situation whereby the students are newly recruited member of an organisation, and thus possess course 'exit point competence and job entry point capabilities' (to use the term coined by Chitravelu, 1994). Studying students' written reports will be an example of 'interfacing' with the workplace. It involves what King (in Williams, 1984) advocated as a collaboration between education and industry in assuming responsibility for producing graduates that are better prepared to adapt to the demands of the workplace.

2.5 STUDIES ON EVALUATION OF WRITING

A few studies have been carried out to evaluate texts written by students as would-be members of a discourse community for the purpose of determining the degree of conformity to target situation requirements and expectations of an adequate and acceptable writing. Two of the studies to be discussed here are one on EOP and another on EAP. They both reflect an underlying principle that ESP writing courses, either for academic or professional purposes, should ensure maximum transferability of written skills required to perform in the target situations. In addition, as both involve writing which requires feedback regarding its acceptability and accuracy, it is common practice to include reactions and perceptions of professors and professionals in the evaluation of written texts because their feedback can provide insights into not only the effectiveness of the ESP course but also the students' potential for success in the target environment. These studies will be reviewed in the section that follows based on their relevance to the intended study in both their rationale and methodology.

One recent study relevant in scope and purpose of the present study was conducted by Sydow Campbell et.al. (1999). Her study looked at whether teaching style has any impact on the acceptability of the quality of written documents students create in the workplace. Her argument was that since business communication classes educate students about writing as professionals, it is important to assess whether instruction works (1999: 72). Sydow and her team undertook to examine two informative

memos written by 29 junior and senior level undergraduate majors at the University of Alabama in response to the same business case. The memos were written first at the first class meeting and the other at the last class meeting of the same course.

Analyses were carried out to see whether there were differences in the two memos with regard to style, based on the opinion of three writing specialists and three non specialists. In addition, three panelists analyzed the style of the memos to see whether there was a relationship between style and writing quality. According to Sydow, the choice of a panel rather than objective test to measure writing quality is an important methodological advance over previous studies in the area (1999: 8). The study made used of holistic ratings of the memos along the following categories:

- memos that should be sent (mailable in present form) earned a score of "1".
- memos that could be sent with minor changes (mailable with minor revison) earned a score of "2".
- memos that should not be sent (unmailable) earned a score of "3".

Sydow Campbell's study is relevant to the present study in its purpose and methodology. Firstly, both attempt to examine writing qualitatively, using professionals as assessors to determine whether the writing that students produced are acceptable. To Sydow and her team, evaluating writing this way is similar to assessing writing in the workplace, that is naturally by people responding to real business messages. It is the purpose of this study to do so on the grounds that people

in business organisations judge the 'acceptability' of written documents, not by a formal test but the extent to which they are useful for organisational purposes.

Secondly, the present study attempts to use holistic rating as a measure of students' success in producing a report that meets with 'acceptability' standards of the workplace. This is considered to be important because the study involves a qualitative exploration of students' performance, and the work carried out by Sydow Campbell and her team lend support to the use of holistic scales in writing on the basis that holistic assessment may be a more realistic assessment of writing quality in the workplace (1999: 8). In addition to all this, the present study is similar in its purpose to Sydow Campbell's in obtaining information that could be used to explore the effectiveness of the business course students took in preparation for the workplace. In the case of the present study, the students' ability to produce a report that meet at least a minimum requirement of an acceptable report would indicate that the report writing instructions students received in the business course have worked to a certain extent.

Sydow Campbell's study, however, is limited to examining only the style of written documents. Although her rationale that style is an important topic in business communication class and within textbooks on business communication may be true, it is doubtful whether Malaysian teachers actually place enough emphasis on style for it to warrant an investigation on its own. In addition, teachers in classrooms in which English is a foreign language for the students may concentrate on things other than

improving professional communication skills such as language on its own in terms of grammar and mechanics. Therefore, the present study will attempt to measure writing quality in general, not associated with any particular aspect of written communication. It is hoped that the results will show particular aspects of writing which can be addressed more extensively in future.

Santos (1988) looked at professors' reactions to the academic writing of non-native speaking students (NNS) in the US. He looked at the ratings of two essays written by two NNS students each to see what the professors' judgements of and subjective reactions to, errors in the students' essays were. He contended that due to an increase in ESL writing programmes to cater to increasing NNS population in the US, there was a need to 'establish firmer instructional priorities in the teaching of composition'. According to him, one way to do this was 'to investigate the reactions of the audience to whom the writing of NNS students is directed: their professors' (1988: 69).

Six 10-point scales, which were derived from previous analysis of NNS' writings, were used to ask the professors to rate the compositions : three on content (holistic impression, development and sophistication) and the other three on language (comprehensibility, acceptability, and irritation). Santos utilised what he termed a 'split-plot' design to obtain the data. This involved achieving a balanced representation in the compositions selected, in the choice of professors selected and the number of professors to rate the composition (basically two compositions written

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by a Chinese and a Korean student, two sets of ratings, two types of professors and an equal number of professors rating each of the composition). This ensured a balanced view of the quality of the compositions.

Findings showed that content received lower ratings than language and that language errors were found to be 'academically acceptable' indicating that the content was judged more severely than language. This also showed that the professors ' were willing to look beyond the deficiencies of language to the content in the writing of these NNS students' (Santos, 1988: 84) – an aspect which Sargunan also saw as being prominent in her investigation of effectiveness in technical reports. Depite being comprehensive and valuable in the area of error gravity, Santos' findings may not be truly indicative of students' potential for academic success in his academic life at the university.

This limitation originated perhaps in the choice of writing topic given to students and its relevance to the students' major disciplines. The topic on 'Culture' may not in some ways be truly 'academic' in nature because important aspects of academic writing such as paraphrasing, summarising and synthesizing sources might not have been assessed. These skills are considered to be integral to students' academic discipline in tasks such as academic reading and writing, which require from students the ability to take notes, make notes and synthesize facts, ideas, concepts and theories related to their disciplines.

In the case of Santos' study, little, therefore, can be judged concerning the students' academic writing ability in its true sense of the word. Their writing can be seen to be more reflective of their general essay writing skills instead of academic writing skills. This fact is important to the present study in that when evaluating writing, the choice of topic should provide for a common ground between writer and assessor to better link the 'addressor-addressee' relationship in the writing process. This will ensure content validity in the assessment process. In the present study, the gatekeepers were asked to set the report writing assignment for the students for the purpose of ensuring a valid assessment/evaluation of the reports.

Another related issue with regard to Santos' study is whether the professors, as part of their normal reading of assignments at the university, read and evaluate such essays in the first place, thus making them the appropriate audience for the kind of writing assessed in the study. Since the professors in the study came from different disciplines, it is questionable whether they were able to focus on specific aspects of written performance with which they might not have been qualified to deal. Although Santos' study lends support to the practical utility of using target requirements in judging quality in a written piece, it does not tell much about whether that writing met with the requirements of actual academic writing.

The present study would like to adopt Santos' definition of 'acceptability'. He has defined it as ' the degree to which the interlocutor regards the speech or writing of the NNS as approximating the target language norms'. In view of Chitravelu's and

Sitravelu's (1992) and Sargunan's (1999) findings as well as the implications drawn from Santos' study on the importance relegated to Content, the term 'acceptability' has also been extended to 'acceptability' of Content. No specific rating scale, however, has been drawn up for the present study because the specific criteria relating to the reports are largely dependent on what the gatekeepers in the selected organisation regard as acceptable and unacceptable in its written communication norms. As people are culturally conditioned as to what linguistic forms and features are acceptable in a community, and what nuances and connotations are assigned to each of them (Soo, 1991: 24), the way the gatekeepers view language may also be totally different than the professors' in Santos' study. It is the intention of the present study to draw these 'norms of acceptability' from the gatekeepers themselves. However, the researcher sees the need to provide certain guidelines in order to guard against extreme variations in the gatekeepers' evaluation of the reports. This guideline will have to be in the form of holistic, subjective rating as it would be quite impractical to expect managers to use the full range of linguistic assessment categories for which they are not trained.

A quick review of studies which evaluated performance tasks, both written and spoken, reveal a tendency to use holistic, subjective scales as guides. (see Santos, 1988; Soo, 1991; Lumley, 1998 and Gill, 1998). To summarise, Santos and Soo made use of subjective scales for both Language and Content. Lumley, on the other hand, required his occupational experts to make only a single holistic judgement of 'overall communicative effect' when assessing the speaking component in an

Occupational English Language Test. Guidelines along a six-point Pass/Fail continuum on how to interpret overall communicative effect were also provided.

2.6 PROFESSIONALS AS 'EXTERNAL' OBSERVERS

Many of the studies discussed above illustrated the necessity and viability of enlisting the help of professionals in the evaluation process. Viewpoints of these professionals are important because they are gatekeepers to the target discourse community, and being gatekeepers they 'possess the decision-making powers in business organisations' (Gill, 1998). They are the ones who decide on standards of performance and the threshold levels which standards should reach. They are the ones who set the necessary requirements for success. Bhatia (1993) termed these gatekeepers/professionals as the 'specialist informants' in a study. They are, generally, practising members of the disciplinary culture in which the 'genre is routinely used' (1993: 34).The specialist informant will bring in relevant explanation and valid insights to the researcher's analysis due to their degree of familiarity and expertise in an area which the researcher, being a non *bona-fide* member of the discourse community, would be less-informed with. Some studies in evaluating performance using professionals are discussed below .

Gill (1998) conducted a study in which she asked several gatekeepers to assess the speeches of several select Malaysian speakers to determine whether their speeches were appropriate for delivering business presentations to different audiences.

Although her study focuses on speaking skills, it is a good example of the kind of evaluation that the present study attempts to undertake. Gill conducted the study to investigate whether the speeches of Malaysian executives, in all their sub-varieties of English, are regarded as acceptable and appropriate for use in formal situations in the workplace. Hers is a study on standards of language and how they are viewed within the context of a formal setting. It involved classifying the speeches of selected Malaysian executives along the modified lectal range of sub-varieties of Malaysian English . The samples of the speeches were taken when the executives were delivering business presentations during a training programme. Opinions of the gatekeepers were then sought to determine the acceptability of these sub-varieties.

Although relevant to 'speaking', the use of external observers in the evaluation process in Gill's study demonstrates the benefits of a professional orientation to evaluation. It is necessary to cite a few findings to support this contention. Two of the speakers in the study were categorised by the linguists to be in the mesolectal category (that described to be speeches with a markedly thick Malay accent and greater syntactical variation). The gatekeepers found persons with these speech characteristics to be suitable only for internal presentations at the level of colleagues but not to the senior management and to those external to the organisation. Likewise, a speaker who was classified as possessing medium syntactical variation had been found to be acceptable for presentations external to the company due to 'confident phonological style' and good voice projection. It can be seen that the gatekeepers' insights provided what Gill termed as 'linguistic reality and pragmatism'

to issues of standards in spoken English. They show that there are varying 'norms of acceptability and appropriateness', and that there is 'greater linguistic tolerance and flexibility' in the workplace with regard to performance in 'speaking.'

Could the same situation also be true for Writing ? As it is, research has shown that Content seems to be a more important criterion in gauging the 'acceptability' of written texts, therefore, is 'greater linguistic tolerance and flexibility' also practised in judging written texts, especially with regard to technical reports? What implications are there for individuals who are less proficient in the language but who aim for career advancement? What characteristic features of a report are considered acceptable for organizational purposes? These questions are posed in the light of Gill's study and are not in any way the intended outcome of the present study. They do, however, necessitate an investigation into 'norms of acceptability' for professional writing which the present study undertakes.

Another related study is Lumley's (1998) which investigated the perceptions of language-trained raters and occupational experts in a Test of Occupational English Language Proficiency (OET). He conducted the study in response to criticisms of the standards applied in the OET test, whereby 'candidates were passing the test with inadequate proficiency in English to cope with the demands of their profession' (1998: 352). This claim has direct relevance to ESP teachers because the rating of test performance is conducted by qualified English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. The concern is whether ESL teachers can be expected to make valid

judgements about language proficiency in occupational contexts such as the health profession.

Lumley set out to investigate this problem by determining the extent of agreement found between ESL trained raters and doctors on the 'speaking' component of the OET. A secondary objective was to establish a new criterion level for performance on the test. Therefore, the two groups of raters were asked to listen to twenty audiotapes of candidates performing a clinically-based simulated interviews. Rating was done using a six-point rating criteria designed for use in the test. Findings showed that at a global level, there was a reasonable agreement between the two groups, thus refuting earlier claim made concerning the competence of ESL raters. There was also considerable variation in the 'relative harshness or leniency' of individual raters. This was attributed to possible lack of training among doctors in using the scales. All in all, Lumley's findings show that professionals in other fields besides ESL can be reliable informants in judging the quality of performance in a specific task.

Despite differences between Lumley's study and the present study in the skills focused upon and the methodology used, both can be seen to be operating under similar premises in that:

1. It is common practice to utilize occupational experts/professionals as informants in evaluation and assessments.

2. Judgements about language proficiency in occupational-specific context has been reliant on ESL/ESP specialists. The concern is whether they can make well-informed judgements concerning the occupational language proficiency of the students and the effectiveness of the courses the students took to prepare them for communication in the workplace.

Since the present study is a preliminary investigation into standards of business reports written by students, no comparisons between course instructor's and gatekeepers' evaluation of the reports will be done. However, any variations and similarities that surface from the studies will be an interesting and useful point of reference, upon which further investigations can be conducted either in looking into interrater reliability between ESP specialists and occupational experts or in course or programme evaluation.

Course or language programme evaluation in ESP have long been known to acquire services of professionals who are learners' potential customers. Alderson and Scott (in Alderson and Beretta, 1992) conducted a large-scale evaluation project in 1986 which investigated an insiders, outsiders and participatory evaluation of a nationwide Project in ESP in Brazilian Federal Universities. In the evaluation, Alderson looked at aspects such as the context of the situation, Project methodology, implementation of the methodology and Project achievement that comprised learning outcomes and impact on outsiders (mostly subject matter specialists and ex-ESP students).

Jansen (1993) carried out a joint evaluation of short ESL courses between course instructor at a Swiss language school and clients of a large Swiss bank. She undertook the study based upon some prior negative feedback given by the clients about the course, and saw a joint-evaluation as a good means of improving course quality. She found that joint evaluation developed mutual trust and respect between both parties. The client's attitude to the course also changed as 'instead of 'farming out' the trainees for whatever English instruction the school would provide, he became aware of the fact that he had a vital contribution to make by helping to define precise Target Situation Requirements' (1993: 71).

In the above studies, although the evaluation practice was comprehensive, it produced mainly perception data. This was viewed with some reservation by Alderson and Beretta (1992), in that there was no independent data, such as test scores, to corroborate the findings gathered from questionnaires. His viewpoint has an important implication to the present study. In the absence of any measures of achievement in students' writing in the form of test scores, there needs to be some kind of a benchmark or yardstick against which performance can be measured. It is believed that by assessing students' reports against a required set of criteria (the gatekeepers') the study will be much more meaningful in gauging the quality of the ESP course in question.

In summary, Alderson and Scott (1992), Jansen (1993), Lumley (1998) and Gill (1998) made use of persons not directly involved in the teaching-learning situation.

Jansen made use of bank clients, Alderson utilized subject matter specialists and ex-ESP students' perspectives on the Project, Lumley made use of doctors and Gill acquired the assistance of executives. Russell and Willinsky (1997) state that the focus of evaluation studies at present is on the involvement of all relevant stakeholders to ensure wider participation in the evaluation process and to ensure better collection of information from reliable sources. It is hoped that by collaborating with gatekeepers in evaluating students' reports, the study can obtain vital information that can confirm the appropriateness of the Report Writing syllabus in equipping students with the necessary skills in writing a business report.

2.7 SUMMARY

To summarise, this chapter has looked at five important elements related to the study. They are needs analysis, which was discussed to show the role writing occupies in the workplace, text analysis to consider its role in the teaching and writing of business texts and the concept of 'interfacing' to emphasize the necessity of bridging the gap between academia and the workplace. Most closely related to the present study were discussions on the evaluation of writing, using target situation requirements as a measure of success and the practice of utilising professionals in the evaluation process.

The studies examined under these different topics indicate that since report writing occupies an important position in business organisations, actual features of reports should be examined to determine what features are looked for in a business organisation. The studies reviewed in this chapter indicate that utilising professionals in the assessment of writing is beneficial because as *bona-fide* members of the discourse community, they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to decide whether a written document meets with the requirements and expectations of the workplace. Certain other considerations in undertaking this study include the use of holistic ratings of writing quality and addressor-audience relationship in topic selection for validity of tasks.