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Flipping the L2 Business Writing Classroom. How Business Students Experience Being in an Investment Consultant Role in a Collaborative Research and Writing Task

Abstract:
Using corpus and student survey (n=71) data, this contribution analyses a complex writing task, and discusses how it is experienced by Business English students. Starting from the assumption that language use in the current business environment is often highly contextual and goal-oriented, we designed a writing task requiring collaborative content research and writing in an investment consultancy ‘frame’, aiming for realism, language use adequacy, traditional and transversal learning outcomes, and student involvement and empowerment. The instructor equally played a realistic role of both language coach and potential lay client. From the sampled students’ perspective, this assignment turns out to be highly involving and difficult as well as effective and mind-broadening. However, student comments also add a few critical notes to the claim that clarity and accuracy of content matter more than linguistic correctness, and that knowledge of business-specific vocabulary and genre conventions take precedence over general language mastery.

Introduction

For course developers and instructors of Business English for non-native speakers in an undergraduate business school, the question of effective and manageable writing tasks at different levels of the curriculum remains a relevant one. ‘Effective and manageable’ relates to a complex of contextual and learning process factors, most notably cognitive levels of students, and affective factors such as motivation, as well as desired learning outcomes meant to fulfill expected academic and workplace needs. Class size and dynamics, available time and workload for both students and instructors, learning methods, instruction tools, and so forth, are additional factors which could easily swing the balance in a particular direction. In what follows, I will first discuss how we have tried to deal with these contextual factors in an undergraduate course of Business English at the University of Antwerp, with reference to the literature on Business English and writing processes in the workplace, collaborative second language writing practices, active learning processes and task-based language learning. Then, I will ask the question of how a sample of students have experienced the writing task set for them, and whether their experience can add something to our more general understanding of meaningful and effective Business English course development at this level.

1. English in the workplace and the classroom

Even though university education is presumed to be broader and more general than vocational training, a general drive to be more efficient has required course developers to prepare their students specifically for their expected professional activities. The question about what the expected linguistic environment for business graduates will be is therefore a relevant one, taking into account that a large number of graduates end up in internationally operating companies. Large-scale empirical research projects reported in e.g. L. Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005), A. Kankaanranta, B. Planken (2010) and A. Kankaanranta, L. Louhiala-Salminen (2010, 2013) have shown convincingly that in our globalized economy, English is most often used as a *lingua franca* (BELF) in companies, while contacts with native speakers of English are less frequent. It also appeared that practitioners of BELF primarily associate language proficiency with being able to do business, using a common language that is clear, to the point and with an overall interpersonal orientation. Communicative success, therefore, is perceived to result from *business* competence chiefly. These findings have implications for the teaching of English for business purposes. A. Kankaanranta and L. Louhiala-Salminen (2010) say, in that the Business English curriculum should clearly incorporate business knowledge and context, such as real or realistic business cases. Linguistically, students should be trained to be flexibly competent, while rigid language norms according to the Native Speaker model could well be relaxed. This means that in teaching, less attention should be given to highly idiomatic expressions, complicated phraseology, and complicated sentence structures (A. Kankaanranta, B. Planken 2010: 392). On the other hand, more emphasis might well be placed on specialized business vocabulary, on relevant genres and on producing relational language (especially for members of a predominantly issue-oriented discourse culture, e.g. Dutch speakers).

2. Writing in the workplace and the classroom

In spite of having moved to a post-industrial post-print digital age, it does not look as if writing if going to be a thing of the past very soon. As J.P. Gee and E. Hayes (2011: 132) remark, most digital media require a good deal of reading (and hence writing). However, traditional inside-out cognitive models of writing—postulating the individual writer in front of her laptop, going through the moves of reflecting, planning, formulating and editing her text—seems to be a very incomplete picture of reality at best. We know now that writing takes place in “a rich ecology of mind, body and socio-material world” (T. Nishino, D. Atkinson 2015: 38), where outside elements often initiate or organize writing more than internal thought (cf. also B. Gunsberg 2012). Professional writing, particularly, often involves deeply collaborative processes and the reworking of information for different audiences, constructing digital text and graphics documents by using and processing many other digital text and graphics documents (e.g. S. Brenmer 2014; M. Leijten et al. 2014).

Moreover, P. Lentz (2014) found that business interns and graduates quoted *time* as the single most threatening factor to good writing on the job, not any particular skill, nor—as is often suggested in the media—graduates’ lack of grammar skills. P. Lentz concludes that if little time is a reality on the job, what students must learn in the classroom is not so much a set of discrete skills, but a *habit* of good writing (2014: 385). In other words, practice and feedback are needed more than anything else. Furthermore, survey participants suggested that peer review, web resources, and templates would also be helpful on the job. Other specific areas of useful (business) classroom writing suggested in the literature includes practicing "stance" (taking a professional perspective rather than writing from a personal or consumer frame, see e.g. M.A. Mathison et al. 2014) and (self) assessment, feedback, evaluation and reflection (H. Lawrence 2014: 195).

If we take the previous on board and set up realistic business writing projects for students, with an emphasis on learning by doing and business accuracy rather than form-focused language instruction, collaboration, the use of all possible relevant sources and peer feedback, are students not going to resort to their L1 then to "solve" all these problems? It has been observed before that collaborative L2-writing between students with a common L1 encourages them to use that L1 to discuss or better grasp content or solve problems, including L2-problems. Does this then work against actually learning the L2? L. Yang (2014: 86), studying collaborative ESL writing processes in Canadian business schools, confirms again that a common L1 allows students to generate ideas and explain problems to each other, select a proper target product and generally facilitate their writing in L2. The higher the L2 proficiency, the more occasional this reliance on L1 explanation becomes, which seems to support the view that "judicious use of the L1 can indeed support L2 learning and use" (M. Swain, S. Lapkin 2000: 268, quoted in L. Yang 2014: 86).

3. Active learning processes and task-based language learning

Taking into account assumed workplace practices in one's instruction practices is one thing, but does emulating workplace practices also lead to better *learning* results than traditional teaching? In other words, are so-called active learning processes in which the student is involved in doing something, collaboratively, on a problem-solving basis, rather than just taking in information, also more effective? In non-language educational environments as well as in language teaching, there is broad support that active learning has a great deal of merit, without being a cure for all educational problems (e.g. M. Prince 2004: 7). In language teaching, task-based pedagogical work has for some time become mainstream. R. Ellis (2003: 16) defines the concept of task as follows:

> A task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes (R. Ellis 2003: 16).

As R. Ellis confirms, whereas task-based teaching can consist of having students do a task, pre-task and post-task activities may "serve a crucial role in ensuring that the task performance is maximally effective” (2006: 20). Sensible pre-task activities include framing the activity, the outcome, time-planning, etc., but also doing similar tasks (or parts). Post-task activities include feedback and consciousness-raising, and possibly a repeat.

With this framework in mind, I will now turn to one particular semester-long task in which we have tried to implement most of the guidelines emerging from workplace and learning environments mentioned higher. Moreover, we will try to add something to the body of knowledge on this subject by showing how a sample of students perceived the task, its process and its outcome, and what their expectations are in connection with what they should learn in a language class.

4. A collaborative research and writing task with a consultant role

In this section it will become clearer what kind of task was designed for the particular group of students enrolled as undergraduate business and economics students at the University of Antwerp. Some clarification about the course participants and their needs is necessary too.

4.1 Participants

Students enrolled as undergraduates in the Faculty of Applied Economics at the University of Antwerp are required to select 18 ECTS points of language courses. In practice, the overwhelming majority of students selects two consecutive courses of English for Business and Economics, which counts for one third of the total language requirement. Most of them then select two other languages for two consecutive courses to complete that requirement. A typical course of study for these students would be three bachelor years, and one or two master years, with final degrees in specialty areas such as marketing, management, accounting, etc. Alumni typically go on to be employed in a variety of businesses, most often in the service industry and frequently also in international contexts.

On entering, the typical student profile includes Dutch as L1 or at least as the previous language of instruction, and a fair degree of multilingualism, with 3 to 5 years of general English in a secondary school as a second or third language. When students select English as part of their undergraduate courses in Applied Economics, they start with a first level of English for Business and Economics, which is oriented towards bringing students from various backgrounds and proficiency levels to roughly the same level. In order to pass the final exam for that course, they acquire a set of business vocabulary items in various specialized subfields. They also gain awareness of common grammar errors made by users of Dutch, demonstrate sophisticated reading comprehension skills as well as listening comprehension skills, and finally—demonstrate sufficient proficiency in spoken English to conduct a conversation on a subject of economics.

In the second level of English for Business and Economics, taken after a pass grade in the first level and likely also the final level in business English language coursework, a different approach is taken. There is no longer a final exam, but year-long coursework in a workshop format for three main assignments. A global pass grade for these assignments will give the student three ECTS points for the course. The assignment we will discuss here, i.e. a written business report and an accompanying email, takes 40% of the global grade. Class sizes for language courses are substantial in this faculty and easily run up to 40. Moreover, language teaching staff have up to ten such groups to teach, and more dramatically, to mark their coursework.

4.2 The task

The original task, designed more than ten years ago by a former colleague[1], was adapted and modified over the course of time to cater for ever-growing student numbers and changing conceptions about teaching and the use of contact hours.

At the beginning of the semester, the class is divided in small groups (typically two or three members), and all of them are given the role of junior property consultants working for a large international firm. Working on behalf of international clients, they are requested to look into the Belgian property market and produce a report, including a budget and forecast, for two or three properties suitable for investment, with good potential Return on Investment (ROI). The clients have a set amount at their disposal, for instance 100,000 euros, and are willing to loan an extra amount to be repaid in, for instance 20 years. This suggestion is to be formulated in an (electronic) report, accompanied by a cover email, both in English. The students are also told that there is a company "format" which they have to respect in their communication with the clients.

The report consists of set parts, covering 1,000-1,500 words in all: 1) an overview or rationale statement (250-350 words), 2) descriptions of each property and the costs/ expected returns involved in them (500-750 words), 3) a concluding comparison of the properties and relative profitability (250-350 words). In parts 2 and 3 of the report, the running text is accompanied by tables and/ or charts to make the numerical information clearer and more digestible. In appendices, students are encouraged to add references, calculations and illustrative materials. Moreover, since the word-limit is maintained fairly strictly, the text has to be information-focused, impersonal and concise, and written from a professional perspective. This report is finally accompanied by an email in which the students alert the clients to the report in attachment, mention its highlights, and offer further help or advice should the client need it.

All of the above elements are presented as non-negotiable in a kind of template form, at the beginning of the semester. During about four weeks of two contact hours each, the groups coached by the instructor explore this assignment further, mainly exploring the topic of real estate investment through reading tasks, viewing, and spoken interaction, and discussing, for instance, property investments versus other investments, loans, the housing market, insurance and tax questions, the importance of location, etc. During those workshop hours, students and instructor also exchange views and information on adequate internet sources for the research and how they could be used. Gradually, as the students explore the available sources for their project more closely, they "grow" in their role of adviser in matters of content. Of course, as second-

[1] Peter Thomas, now a successful independent entrepreneur, and still very active in real estate.

year students of Applied Economics, they usually already have technical skills and calculation techniques which the language instructor does not have. This encourages the students to take the floor in the ongoing conversation in the classroom. In order to deal with the large number of students, the entire 40-student group is occasionally split up to ease interaction.

As soon as the small groups have decided which properties they would like to suggest in their proposal (typically half-way through the semester), the writing workshops start. The latter are approached by inviting students to either write in class, engage in peer review or offer their own work to class. In that process, instructors introduce linguistic tools and guidelines, for instance for the sectioning of text, for the condensation of information into a restricted number of words, for instance by integrating clauses in complex sentences and using impersonal constructions; other likely topics might be using conditionals and epistemic modals to formulate forecast results, using connectives to compare and contrast options, etc. None of this is done through lecturing and is in fact very much dependent on whether students generate enough writing to discuss. The responsibility for a successful class and learning process, therefore, is to a large extent also on the students' shoulders. At the end of the semester, and if all goes well, the small groups are only left with some final review and editing, and are ready to send their reports to the client—in this case to the instructor who reads and assesses the report as a potential client and as a language specialist. In the first instance, he or she assesses whether the information presented is clear and adequate and serves the purpose of aiding decision-making. In the second instance, he or she assesses whether the language used would be acceptable in the equivalent real-world situation.

4.3 The results

The second level course has an annual enrollment of c. 400 students, 95% of whom usually submit their written work. In the year 2012, which is the year of the small survey we did, the overwhelming majority of these students stuck to instructions concerning text types (report and email), approximate length (if anything, the texts were longer), the internal structure of the report (texts and tables), and to a lesser degree—to professional perspective.

The differences among the reports were most clearly visible in three areas: 1) the amount of detail in the research (partly made visible through notes, appendices, etc., but also apparent from tables and text); 2) the presentation of the report (ranging from professionally glossy to careless and slapdash); 3) the language and text quality, including paragraphing, consistency of perspective, information density, vocabulary, clause integration, grammatical correctness and even mechanical things like the consistent use of currency symbols versus currency words and punctuation. We were especially curious about this third category of differences. Indeed, although not all the students participated in the writing workshops or offered their work for peer or instructor feedback during contact hours, the dividing line between better performers and worse performers did not exactly run parallel with the line between faithful participants and occasional shirkers.

Even though students are polled for general course evaluations every semester by a Quality Control Committee, information about particular assignments rarely emerges from these polls, unless students feel particularly traumatized about something. We already knew that most students got highly involved in this assignment, but also that some were really disappointed with their marks, and that was mostly due to substandard levels of language use, not the occasional mistake. It was decided then that a random sample of the students would be polled about their experience with doing this particular assignment, in the hope that we would learn something. What we learnt will be explained in the sections following.

5. Student experience

5.1 The survey

We used a written, anonymous student survey, sampling 71 random students out of the 441 taking the course[2], a few weeks after they had submitted the report. In it, we used a 7-point Likert Scale for students to rate the assignment with a set of global evaluative labels, positive as well as negative, and ranging from very subjective to more objective ones. Then we also asked them to rate a set of learning outcomes they had possibly experienced (language, business as well as general). To that we added another set of 5 open questions asking what students liked best, least, what they found most difficult and easy, and what they would like to see changed.

We note, of course, that Likert scales may well be subject to distortion for various reasons. Respondents may avoid using extreme response categories (central tendency bias), agree with statements as presented (acquiescence bias), or try to portray themselves in a more favorable light (social desirability bias). We tried to design in some balanced keying (a number of positive and negative statements), which should deal with the problem of acquiescence bias.

5.2 Results

The results of the first Likert scale are presented in Chart 1. Whereas the central tendency seems to be present, the social desirability tendency may have been diminished by the statement that we were polling for suggestions to *improve* the assignment, i.e. that the survey welcomed criticism.

The students obviously felt most strongly about the task being “time-consuming” (6.2), “difficult” (5.6), “extensive” (5.3) and “challenging” (5.3)—all fairly negative labels[3]. The only outlier among the negative labels is “boring” (3.0), and in fact it is the least endorsed of all labels. On the whole, clearly positive terms obtained lower scores

[2] See the appendix for the actual survey questions.
[3] It could be argued that “challenging” is not a negative label, but it is unclear whether that is also true for these Flemish undergraduate business students who usually expect Business English to be one of the easier courses in the curriculum. As L. Yang (2014) also remarks, there is a strong drive among business students to be efficient in gathering the necessary credits for the degree, and this may be stronger than a desire to get a complete learning experience. “Challenging” is therefore interpreted as leaning towards the negative.

than the negative ones, while the more objective labels such as “realistic” and “cooperative” held the middle ground. However, we could say that there appeared to be more than average agreement with all the labels, perhaps except for the label “boring”.

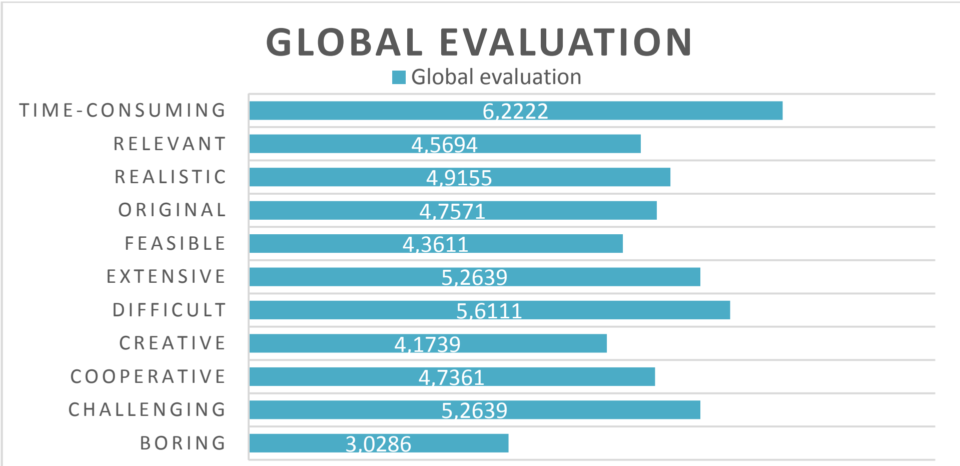

Chart 1: Students’ (n=71) average global evaluation of the writing assignment

It is interesting to compare these results with those of students’ estimates of what they learnt, which is represented in Chart 2. There seems to be more of a central tendency here, whereby the highest score is for “vocabulary” (4.8), closely followed by “property market” (4.79) and “budgeting” (4.76); “writing paragraphs” (4.51), “ROI“ (4.48), and “consultant role” (4.42) follow closely. The lowest scores are for “grammar” (3.9) and “spelling” (3.9).

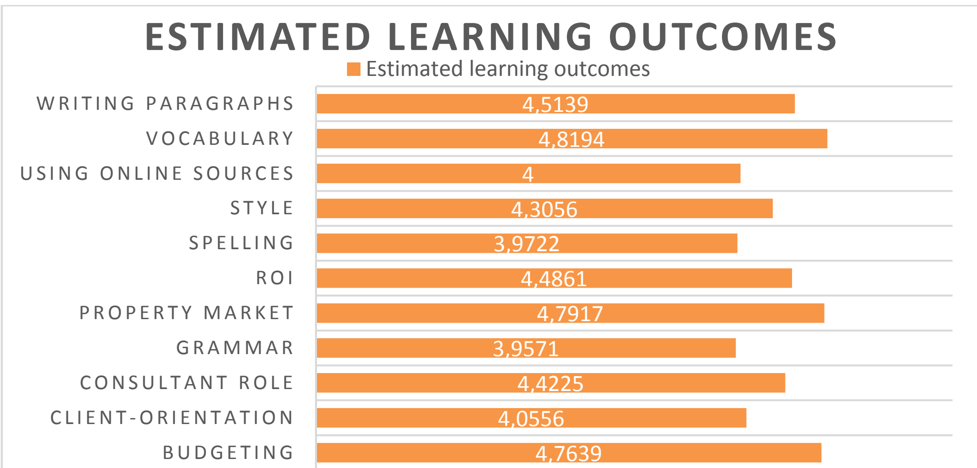

Chart 2: Students’ (n=71) average estimates of their learning outcomes after completion of the writing assignment

For the open questions, the answers were coded and grouped into emerging themes. Table 1 represents students’ answers to the first open question which probed into what the students liked most about the assignment. Many students mentioned more than one thing.

Real estate, property market, a suitable property	33	46.4%
(Re)searching, looking for, choosing, strategy	21	29.5%
ROI, calculations, financial plan/market, investment, budgeting, prices	13	18.3%
Learning [about the above, writing, “something”]	10	14%
Cooperation, working with a partner, working together	7	9.8%
Putting together the text, paragraphs, style, using specialized vocabulary learnt previously	5	7%
Realism, usefulness for later, “practical” case	5	7%
[Blank]	4	5.6 %
Creativity, originality	4	5.6%
“The subject”, “general concept”, “relevant topic”	3	4.2%
The accompanying email	2	2.8%
Achieving finished report /hard work paid off	1	1.4%

Table 1: Answers to “What did you like most about the assignment?” grouped into concepts, absolute and relative frequency (many students mentioned more than one thing)

The *field* of real estate is markedly most popular about the report with more than 45% mentions. Second is a process element, i.e. the fact that students were able to search and find their own best suggestions and find/suggest a strategy to the investor. In third place are the more technical aspects of the report such as calculating break-even points or returns and drafting a budget for each property. What is striking here is that more than 75% of the answers are about elements that are not per se associated with writing reports, or English, but have a great deal to do with business contexts, or general skills and processes. Not even 10% of the answers refer to language or writing.

For the next open question, “what did you like least about the assignment?”, it is striking that fewer elements were mentioned and that there were more blanks. In addition, the financial aspect of the work, which some students liked best in Table 1 (13 answers), is liked least in table 2 by more than double the number of students (30 answers). Another stumbling block was the time spent on the assignment (18 mentions), and the relative indeterminacy of the “outcome” of the assignment “problem” (9 mentions): there is no narrowly “correct” property suggestion, ROI or even text. Note also that an equal number of students left the answer blank, but there again the social desirability bias might play a part.

Calculating, budgeting, financial part, too many numbers	30	42.25%
Time-consuming	18	25.35%
Uncertainty (lack of straight-forward information, finding the “correct” insurance, “right” figures, forecasting a fictive return, unsure about expectations)	9	12.7%
Blank answer	9	12.7%
Writing the paragraphs, explaining only the most important thing, word limit	5	7%
Imbalance calculations/writing	3	4.2%
Dealing with real estate	2	2.8%
Working in pairs, not getting enough help from the partner	2	2.8%
Conversion euros into pounds	1	1.4%
Difficulty	1	1.4%

Table 2: Answers to “What did you like least about the assignment?” grouped into concepts, absolute and relative frequency (several students mentioned more than one thing)

In the next question, we probed for the students' assessment of the difficulty of the assignment, leaving open the possibility that degree of difficulty and dislike do not always coincide. Table 3 shows the answers:

Realistic estimates, finding correct figures, believable numbers, lack of background	21	29.6%
Balancing all the figures, budgeting, doing the financial part, dealing with complexity of input	35	49.3%
Presenting the (relevant) information, vocabulary, writing within word-limit, writing persuasively, presenting conclusions	18	25.3 %
Blank answer	1	1.4%
Graphs	2	2.8%
To get started	2	2.8%
Lay-out of the document	1	1.4%

Table 3: Answers to "What did you find most difficult about the assignment?" grouped into concepts, absolute and relative frequency (several students mentioned more than one thing)

If we consider what students found most difficult, we find again that it is the business aspect or the contextual elements they find most difficult to get together (almost 80% of the answers): on the input side it is finding realistic and believable and data and numbers, and on the output side it is a question of balancing all these elements into a coherent proposal. Only a minority of the answers are about presenting and formulating the information. Note also that the number of blank answers is much lower here, which could be related to the answer in principle being less face-threatening to the reader.

Next we probed for the opposite feeling and asked what students thought was the easiest part of the assignment. The answers are represented in Table 4.

Introduction/rationale, description of properties and area	26	36.6%
Finding the properties	17	24%
Writing the email	8	11.3%
Working out details, including Calculations, budgeting	6	8.5%
Writing paragraphs, conclusion	6	8.5%
Lay-out	2	2.8%
Blank answer	2	2.8%
Choosing the area	1	1.4%
Set structure of the assignment	1	1.4%
Determining rent	1	1.4%
Working together	1	1.4%
Using online sources	1	1.4%

Table 4: Answers to "What did you find the easiest part of the assignment?" grouped into concepts, absolute and relative frequency (a few students mentioned more than one thing)

The question about what students found easiest to deal with in the assignment complements the picture presented above: describing the properties as well as the reasons for selecting them was overwhelmingly thought of as the easiest part, whereas the more (business) technical aspects of the assignment were only mentioned by a small minority. Writing the email follows closely as an "easy" part of the project. Finally, we asked the students what they would change, if they could. The answers are shown in Table 5.

Fewer numbers, less about finance	19	26.7%
More text, more writing, longer text, more emphasis on English	18	25.3%
Blank answer or “nothing”	17	24%
More background information, more help with financial part	10	14%
Topic different from real estate	3	4.2%
Less time-consuming	2	2.8%
More marks for the financial part	2	2.8%
Bigger budget	1	1.4%
More feedback	1	1.4%
Differential scores for partners	1	1.4%
Larger cooperative groups	1	1.4%
More grammar instruction	1	1.4%
Fewer details	1	1.4%
Clearer instructions	1	1.4%
Change to informal style; oral presentation	1	1.4%
More realistic	1	1.4%
Peer reviewing	1	1.4%
Only one property	1	1.4%
Less realistic and easier	1	1.4%

Table 5: Answers to “What would you change about the assignment if you could?” grouped into concepts, absolute and relative frequency (several students mentioned more than one thing)

Responding to the question about what they would like to see changed, the students followed up on their previous concerns about the financial part. Striking is also that a good portion of them would like to see *more* text to be written (condensing text was felt to be difficult), and *more* instruction on how to write well in English. The large number of blank answers here is also remarkable, but might be partly explained by the combined effects of the difficulty of thinking about improvements on the spot and, again, a social desirability element.

Discussion and Conclusion

What appears from this sample survey is that students do get involved in this type of task, and see it as time-consuming, challenging, not so boring at all and—in certain respects—too difficult. On the other hand, whereas reservation and dispreference is expressed for/ of the more technical and less straightforward elements in the task (e.g. complex budgeting as well as writing in within a strict word limit), students also grant on several counts that they learn much about language use in this context (vocabulary in the first place) as well as about experiential fields that are relevant personally (nearly everyone has a stake in “housing” and “investing”) as well as professionally—the mechanisms and tricks of the property market as a potential area of investment and profit. What they would like to see improved goes into the direction of what they consider “easier” and more traditional; in a way—less real life input (and especially output) and more writing instruction.

This seemed surprising at first. The writing instructions and feedback in class were much more explicit and specific than the ‘real life’ real estate input instructions where students were left great freedom of choice and balance. Instructors also noticed more student interest in class activity concerning the real life context than in giving feedback to writing practice, except the case of some very diligent students. On the other hand, it is also true that students often start from the assumption (and maintain it until they see their marks) that "language" is easy, but when they later notice how many mistakes they make or how their language compares to standard written language, they suddenly feel that they were lacking instruction. The specific area that seems most in need of more emphatic practice is probably "grammar", which in this case would be writing constructions allowing a clear and concise information flow. In connection with the task described above, it would make sense to practice such constructions more extensively during the pre-task activities.

On another level, the frame of consultant/ client roles for student and instructor provide the students with a realistic parallel to the liminal space that is inherent in role-play and simulation; the transversal skill of being able to investigate, analyze and communicate from the perspective of someone else is inscribed in the role of consultant itself. This frame also provides an adequate space for the instructor who is a linguist by training, and not a financial specialist. He or she can evaluate the product both as a language and discourse specialist, but also as a potential client. Students, on the other hand, may still have to get used to the idea that their readers will be more interested in whether their products "make sense" pragmatically than in whether they are correct in an academic sense. What is more, they also have to get used to the fact that real clients will judge their sensible proposals partly on the basis of their linguistic shape. A report full of formulation or spelling errors will hardly be taken seriously.

That is why instructors should not be discouraged too much from advising students on more sophisticated formulation than is strictly necessary for a *clear* understanding, contrary to what A. Kankaanranta and B. Planken (2010) claim. Clarity and accuracy of content are of course of primary importance in business, but for written communication, linguistic adequacy and 'correctness' may well figure beside knowledge of business-specific vocabulary and genre conventions on the instruction agenda.

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Appendix 1: The student survey

Property investment budget report: a survey

Take your time to complete this anonymous survey. It can only help to make student assignments better.

How would you rate the budget report assignment for the following features?
1=not 7=very much

Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Challenging	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cooperative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Creative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Difficult	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extensive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Feasible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Original	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Realistic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Relevant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Time-consuming	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In which areas do you feel you learnt something?

1= nothing 7= a great deal

Budgeting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Client orientation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Consultant role	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Property market	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ROI	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Style	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Using online sources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Writing paragraphs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What did you like most about the assignment?

What did you like least about the assignment?

What did you find most difficult about the assignment?

What did you find the easiest part of the assignment?

What would you like to change about it if you could?