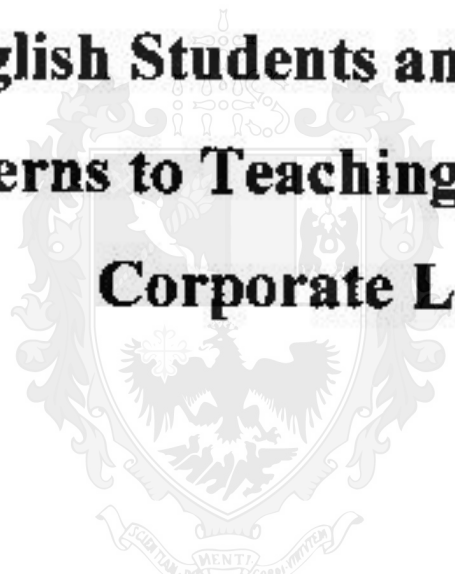


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UNIVERSIDAD DEL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY & LETTERS

**The Preferred Sensory Learning Patterns of
Business English Students and the Application of
such Patterns to Teaching and Learning at
Corporate Level**



DOCTORAL THESIS
USAI
UNIVERSIDAD
DEL SALVADOR

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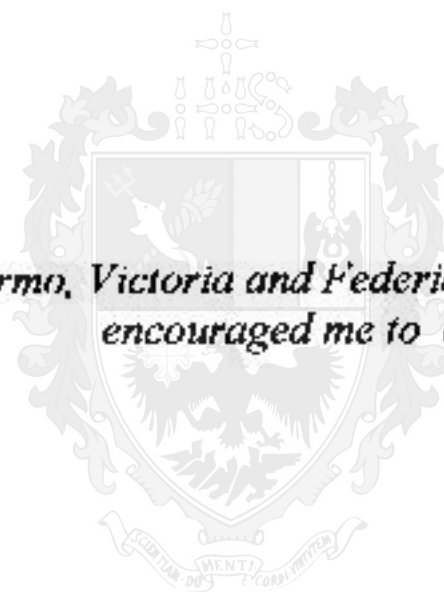
Buenos Aires, December 2006

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To Guillermo, Victoria and Federico. Their endless love and support encouraged me to complete this voyage of discovery.



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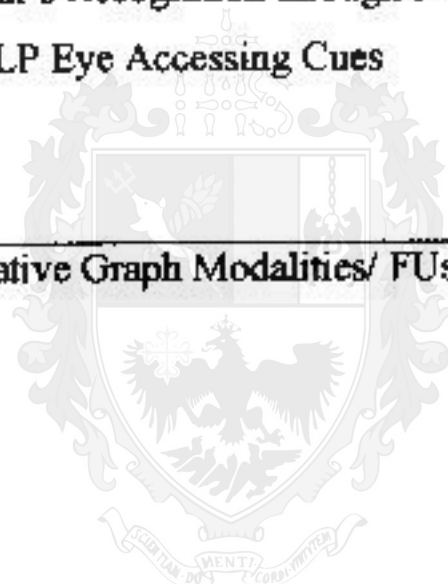
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ABSTRACT

Market globalisation has definitely placed English as the language of international business. In Argentina, as in other countries of the world, companies are aware that an English-speaking workforce is an asset that enables them to remain competitive and technologically updated. In view of this, companies are willing to invest in English training programmes. However, these programmes need to be effective and efficient.

One way to attain effectiveness and efficiency in learning is by analysing how business people use their primary language in the workplace and in the learning process. This thesis sets out to explore the preferred learning styles of corporate students in the context of an English as a Foreign Language Programme, and to examine the effectiveness of a multi-sensory teaching style at corporate level. It also proposes a style of teaching aimed at developing the full potential of the three modalities that are necessary to achieve successful interactions in a business setting.



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1 Thesis Topic and Some Further Remarks

1.1. Thesis Topic

This thesis has emerged from the need to offer Business English teachers a full understanding of the learning styles of corporate students so that they may provide a more professional and effective teaching service to companies. To meet such a need, all my years of research, of class observation and of reflection as well as of day-to-day teaching practice have been used - first, as source of the analysis to be made, and then, as background to the advice to be proposed.

1.2. The Language of Lessons

Clearly set in the field of business as conceived by the English community, Business English (BE) must be seen as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), its purpose being to provide the means by which the communication needs of businesspeople and companies in general can be catered for. As such it shares with GE or IE¹ the basic stages and components of any English language course: needs analysis, goals and objectives, course content, methodology and evaluation processes. Like most varieties of ESP, Business English implies the presence of a specific language corpus that has to be acquired, but unlike some of such varieties, it sustains that the acquisition of that specific language corpus has to be accompanied by the ability to communicate effectively (Ellis & Johnson, 1994), a *sine qua non* of success in business transactions.

This awareness, which is of recent data, started in the 70's, and for that reason there does not exist a systematic corpus of research about how students acquire Business English. *"And it is a field often neglected by linguistic researchers, who prefer to work on other- more easily-defined areas of special English"* (Ellis & Johnson, *ibid*). Because of the growing demand and the presence of specific needs, this still unexploited field deserves the attention of linguists and teachers, and, in my modest opinion, calls for systematic research into the characteristics of the service and of the setting (the company and its people) where such service is to be displayed.

¹ G.E. (General English), I.E. (International English)

1.3. Why the Need for Research

The need for research arises from two concrete realities in the field. On the one hand, market globalisation and the emergence of the 'global village' have easily shown that the mere knowledge of specialised vocabulary is insufficient to develop and maintain successful communication at work. Argentine businesspeople are aware of this and as learners, these people ask for 1) courses targeted to meet their business communication needs and 2) teachers ready to answer such needs. In class they are 'highly demanding students who know precisely what they want' (Ellis & Johnson, p.17) in other words, who demand from teachers effective solutions to their communication needs right on the spot and without further delay.

On the other hand, companies are aware of the reality that surrounds them: they need to have a workforce capable of communicating in English. To this end, companies are ready to invest in Business English Programs for their workforce. These programs are considered an investment in time, money and effort. Because of companies' expectations, the pressure is high: results are to be seen and concretised in a pre-established term. We are dealing with business minded people who believe in facts and in the evidence they have before their eyes - when using English, their staff can or cannot perform successfully on the job. Midways do not exist for them and their assessment is not only objective but also irrefutable.

1.4. Teachers' Response to Students' Needs

How can English teachers meet corporate students' needs? If teachers observe the way their students receive and process information, they can substantially improve the effectiveness of their classes and reach all the students in one, single, effort. After having examined the way corporate students learn as well as the way they communicate, one day I decided to investigate further into this subject. To my surprise, I was on the right track, for I then learnt that an EFL² programme for executives that takes into account individual use of skills and learning styles has more chances of success: classes become more motivating and above all productive, and learning takes place in a warm and friendly atmosphere (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

² EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

Once the research was over, I began to develop the idea of walking towards a more individualised teaching style, a style that would help me reach objectives and goals successfully; goals and objectives are, as we, teachers, know our direct answer to students' needs and expectations. I certainly had in mind a multi-faceted style of teaching Business English. To tell you about steps.



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2 The Business Organisation: Before and Now

"Nothing endures but change"
Heraclitus

2.1. Historical Survey

The present survey is based on Alvin Toffler's three waves of civilization and focuses attention on three historical periods. The beginning and end dates of such periods cannot be exactly fixed; the occurrence of a breakthrough in some field of knowledge is usually the signal that announces the beginning of a new era.

Since one of the reasons why people need to learn a foreign language is the development of trade between different nations, this survey places emphasis on the gradual development of commercial and industrial relationships among countries and enterprises over these three periods and the resulting interactions in L1 and L2 among the people.

2.1.1. The Agricultural Age (from the beginning of our era to the first half of the 18th century):

During this span of time, Western societies based their economies on land produce with the large family as the unit of production. There were three well-defined social classes: the nobility, the clergy and the common people (by the end of the period the bourgeoisie was emerging as a new class). The type of work performed by each class was also clearly determined by birth with very few possibilities of upgrade. The nobility ruled, the clergy was concerned with spiritual and intellectual matters and the common people represented the working class. In this last sector, the peasants worked the land most often for a lord, the craftsmen (such as carpenters and iron men) made crafts to sell or exchange for other goods, and the merchants sold commodities in the town market. These workers, except for the peasants, were organized in guilds or associations which had been created to protect the quality and price of goods sold, standardize technical processes, set wages and see to working conditions, in general.

During this age, work was synonym of physical effort. In effect, physical strength was a necessary requisite to carry out tasks in the grown fields, in craftsmen's shops or in building sites. Technological progress was made tangible by the presence of some inventions such as the catapult, the lever and the crane. And curiously enough, these inventions helped amplify the human or animal muscle. It was human strength what moved these machines, i.e. made them work. Due to the prevailing social class division, work was not a source of social prestige. People were bound to their work or trade for life, often through a relation of service to the lord, and generally with no means to own property or move about as desired.

In addition, the socio-political relationship of the time was rigidly authoritarian. The master gave orders to his servants and expected the latter to respond under any conditions. Work was not a source of economic prestige either, for not all workers were paid wages. Peasants, for example, received a portion of the production which they could partially sell or exchange in the town market; craftsmen and merchants who hired workmen often made an arrangement: during the period of apprenticeship, they would provide apprentices with lodging and food, and these workers would not be paid until they became skilled craftsmen.

The workplace and the dwelling house often coincided. Peasants and their families lived in the grown fields, and craftsmen and their apprentices in the same house of which the workshop was part. Thus, there was no need for workers to come and go. Job training did not exist as an organized methodology. Work was learned through some combination of observing a master and having hands-on experience. At that time, people were illiterate. Only with the invention of the printing press did the illiteracy rate begin to decline gradually, and according to records, it was by the 17th century that the first technical manuals began to appear.

The end of the 16th century experienced a wave of economic, intellectual and military expansion. The modern mechanisms of international commerce needed the support of financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies. And the growing international trade needed strong maritime trading fleets. The first signs of the capitalist system began to emerge and the entrepreneurial bourgeois class could be seen at the head of the first business organisations.

In Argentina, there was a considerable volume of trade with England and North America during these years. By 1817, Graham-Yooll reports that there were many British trading companies in Buenos Aires and that the local and the English communities were interested in forging new business relationships. The use of the English languages between the local people and the British grew from this increasing trend. The first bilingual interactions seemed to have taken place at the Buenos Aires port, upon the departure and arrival of vessels, where sellers and buyers met, agreed on the transaction and