

Pedagogical implications of teaching codes of ethics at tertiary level: An Italian case study

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ABSTRACT

EN The study investigates the use of codes of ethics in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to students enrolled in a first-level master's course in Marketing Management in an Italian public university. According to Bhatia (2002), genre-specific documents such as codes of ethics have the potential to "sensitize and prepare students to meet the communicative demands of disciplinary communication" (p. 13). Within the theoretical framework of genre analysis and its possible implications for language teaching, this paper focuses on learners' perceptions and achievements in EFL learning using corporate codes of ethics, presented to students both theoretically and on a practical level. A pre-questionnaire, pre- and post-test, and abridged post-treatment questionnaire were used to collect data. The goal of the five-week study was to demonstrate that genre pedagogy caters to learners' needs, raises rhetorical and genre awareness, and fosters language awareness at a micro-textual, lexico-syntactical level.

Key words: CODES OF ETHICS, LANGUAGE TEACHING, ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES, GENRE-BASED INSTRUCTION

ES Este estudio es investiga el uso de los códigos de ética en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (LE) a los alumnos de un Máster en mercadotecnia en una universidad pública italiana. Se espera que los códigos revelen su potencial de "sensibilizar y preparar a los alumnos a fin de poder estar a las alturas de las exigencias comunicativas en comunicación disciplinaria" (Bhatia, 2002, p.13 [traducción nuestra]). Dentro del marco teórico del análisis de género y sus posibles implicaciones para la enseñanza de idiomas, este trabajo se enfoca en las percepciones y resultados de los estudiantes de inglés LE, a quienes se les han presentado códigos de ética empresarial desde un punto de vista tanto teórico como práctico. Para obtener los datos, se han utilizado una encuesta antes del tratamiento, una prueba tanto antes como después y una versión reducida de la encuesta post tratamiento. El objetivo de este estudio de cinco semanas es demostrar que la pedagogía de los géneros se vincula con las necesidades de los principiantes, porque, por un lado, solicita su conocimiento retórico y de género, y, por otro, favorece, a nivel microtextual, su conocimiento del léxico y de la sintaxis de la lengua extranjera.

Palabras claves: CÓDIGOS DE ÉTICA, DIDÁCTICA DE IDIOMAS, INGLÉS ESPECIALÍSTICO, ENSEÑANZA BASADA EN EL GÉNERO

IT Questo studio indaga l'uso dei codici etici nell'insegnamento dell'inglese come lingua straniera (LS) a studenti di un master in marketing management di un'università pubblica italiana. Ci si aspetta che i codici rivelino la loro potenzialità nel "sensibilizzare e preparare gli studenti a soddisfare i bisogni comunicativi della comunicazione di una data disciplina" (Bhatia, 2002, p. 13 [traduzione nostra]). Avendo come quadro teorico di riferimento l'analisi del genere e le sue possibili implicazioni nella didattica delle lingue, il presente studio si focalizza sulle percezioni e i risultati di studenti di inglese LS, ai quali vengono presentati i codici etici aziendali da un punto di vista sia teorico sia pratico. Per raccogliere i dati sono stati impiegati un questionario preliminare, un pre-test, un post-test e un questionario ridotto finale. Questo studio, durato cinque settimane, si è proposto di dimostrare che la pedagogia dei generi testuali va incontro ai bisogni dei discenti, perché, da una parte, sollecita la loro consapevolezza retorica e dei generi testuali, dall'altra favorisce, a livello microtestuale, la loro consapevolezza del lessico e della sintassi della lingua straniera.

Parole chiave: CODICI ETICI, DIDATTICA DELLE LINGUE, INGLESE PER SCOPI SPECIFICI, INSEGNAMENTO BASATO SUI GENERI TESTUALI

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1. Introduction

The pivotal importance of English in the field of international business is evident, thus the relevance of developing business communication skills in English to prepare speakers of other languages for a future professional environment seems unquestionable. Enhancing learners' communicative competence implies concentrating not only on grammar but also the sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of language (Hymes, 1971), while focusing on sociocultural and discourse rules (Canale & Swain, 1980). Hence, a pedagogical approach based on an authentic learning environment (Oliver, Herrington, & Reeves, 2006; Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2014) and authentic materials (Gilmore, 2007; Peacock, 1997; Ruiz-Garrido & Palmer-Silveira, 2017) is particularly advisable in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class. Within this framework, with reference to companies' social engagement and public image (Andrade, Hamza, & Xara-Brasil, 2017), the study of codes of ethics (CoEs) seems to meet the need to focus on corporate discourse at a tertiary level to build students' competitive profiles.

CoEs are corporate documents that have become "one of the most common tools of implementation of ethical principles into business practice" (Krč, 2015, p. 2). They could, therefore, be considered useful tools in fostering language awareness and proper vocabulary use, which will ultimately contribute to the enhancement of learners' communication skills. Based on the classic definition of genre proposed by Swales (1990), whereby "the principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes" (p. 46), emphasizing the establishment of discourse communities and prototypicality (pp. 49–58), it would be safe to claim that CoEs represent a specific corporate genre. At this point, some preliminary remarks about CoEs should be made. CoEs are:

- specialized texts addressed to insiders but, like other corporate documents (i.e. annual reports), expected to also be read by external stakeholders
- available and easily downloadable from companies' websites (and can potentially reach a huge audience)
- examples of specialized discourse
- written to guide behavior (content-wise)
- a relatively new genre in linguistic research
- a new genre in pedagogical research; at the time of the present study, no research on their potential use in ESP courses is to be found in Italy.

In the present case study, the focus is on the field of ESP, in particular on genre-based instruction (GBI), where the codes and their authenticity become an asset in language teaching. They present a twofold advantage, providing exposure to real language use, and, in terms of content, offering the opportunity to explore both the corporate values and principles that regulate institutions in which members engage in social and business relations.

This study is grounded on two beliefs: The first is that students can substantially contribute to the development of teaching tools and practices alike by actively participating and working on the sources used during the ESP lesson; the second is that a genre approach could be considered a useful method in teaching students to understand and reflect on why genre conventions are specified and needed in corporate environments. This study thus follows Hyland's belief that "genre pedagogies enable teachers to ground their courses in the texts that students will have to work with in their target contexts, thereby supporting learners to participate effectively in the world outside the ESL classroom" (Hyland, 2017, p. 148). The study will present insights resulting from the use of CoEs in teaching Business English to a group of non-native speakers of English enrolled in a one-year master program in Marketing Management at a public university in Milan (Italy) in the academic year 2019-2020. Although Italy is one of the few countries that requires its students to have reached at least a B2 level at the end of upper secondary education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017), most graduates don't comply with this requirement and newly recruited workers typically encounter difficulties to accomplish English-related activities. The study therefore aimed to evaluate the didactic impact of using CoEs, a genre that is new to the Italian domain of ESP, by discussing two main hypotheses related to one research question:

RQ: What is the impact of using CoEs written in English in a Business English course for L1 Italian speaking learners of English as a foreign language?

Hp. 1: Generating awareness of CoEs' main features is functional in the enhancement of students' linguistic competence.

Hp. 2: CoEs assist in developing business-related communicative competence.

2. Theoretical framework

In the context of language teaching and learning, a growing interest in genre theory and its possible pedagogical application has attracted growing attention in the last two decades. Although definitions of *genre* vary, a rather intuitive notion of genre derives from the idea that discourse involves conventional use of stable utterance groups, which follow recognizable patterns that suit the accomplishment of certain social goals (Cap & Okulska, 2013). This notion prompted both scholars and educators toward the introduction of genre-based instruction (GBI) as an ESL solution to speed up the mastery of English language-related activities. Genre pedagogies can meet students' needs in a way that general English instruction, which can focus on "abstract prescriptions of disembodied grammars" (Hyland, 2007, p. 148), may not.

On the one hand, defining a genre may be a theoretical minefield: What components or stages are essential? What is their order and how does it change across different discourse domains? What are the conventional characteristics that typify a given genre? Whose recognition counts the most in identifying a genre (the communicator's or the analyst's)? On the other hand, GBI is attractive in terms of benefits for students when/if general English instruction fails. In genre classes, language awareness means moving away from vague descriptors such as adequate knowledge of grammar/syntax/vocabulary and towards understanding how language works in human interaction, with special attention to the texts students will need to use in a particular target context.

Within the present framework, we define genre as "abstract, socially recognized ways of using language" (Hyland, 2007, p. 149), or, more comprehensively, "a type of discourse that occurs in a particular setting, that has distinctive and recognizable patterns and norms of organization and structure, and that has particular and distinctive communicative functions" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 245). Furthermore, it could be seen as the "functional relationship between a type of text and a type of situation" (Coe, 2002, p. 197) or as "rhetorical actions that writers draw on to respond to perceived repeated situations" (Hyland, 2003b, p. 22). Concisely, these last two definitions emphasize a fundamental aspect: The correlation of the written production to situational instances.

The popularity of genre-based instruction (GBI) may be traced back to the 1980s following criticism of product-based and process-based approaches to language teaching. In the 1990s, not only did genre-based analysis (GBA) respond to the limitations presented by the process approach (Ahn, 2012; Feez, 2002; Paltridge, 2007), but it was also later combined in a resultant process-genre approach (Assaggaf, 2016; Babalola, 2012; Badger & White, 2000; Ghufon, 2016). Increasing attention was devoted to the concept of GBA in language teaching and learning (Ahn, 2012; Chandler, 1997; Hyland, 2007; Swales, 1990) as it emphasizes both the linguistic knowledge and the social context of a text.

Among major approaches to GBI—ESP (English for specific purposes) and EAP (English for academic purposes), SFL (systemic functional linguistics) (Hyland, 2003b), and RGS (rhetorical genre studies) (Ahn, 2012; Artemeva, 2004; Johns, 2008)—ESP concentrates on identifying the key features of genres that are employed in both academic and professional settings (Ahn, 2012, p. 3). According to Bhatia (2002), genre-based analysis in ESP means:

investigating instances of conventionalized or institutionalized textual artefacts in the context of specific institutional and disciplinary practices, procedures and cultures in order to understand how members of specific discourse communities construct, interpret and use these genres to achieve their community goals and why they write them the way they do. (p. 6)

As the development of professional, institutional and critical literacies highly relies on cultivating reflective knowledge approaches (Alessi, 2016, p. 61), it is believed that once the recurring features of a genre are presented, learners will be able to display greater awareness towards the language and produce their own examples.

In GBI, students are provided with explicit explanations in social context (Hyland, 2003b, p. 18) so that they can find the recurring structure by themselves (Ahn, 2012). They are then to analyze texts in their contexts, "exploring the 'natural history' of written communication in their ecosystem" (Breeze, 2012, p. 69).

Combining the linguistic (bottom-up) and the social context (top-down) approaches (Breeze, 2012) could support students' knowledge of the linguistic traits that are used in specific contexts such as corporate writing. Few studies have explored genre-based pedagogy at an undergraduate level, instead focusing either on ethnographic research (Johns, 1997, 2007) or developing writing competencies for L2 primary school students (Ahn, 2012). However, the genre-based approach is popular in business and legal English, where scholars concentrated on increasing students' awareness of organizing information in writing (Paltridge, 2001), of linguistic characteristics (Freedman, 1999), of lexico-grammatical features and generic structures of a discussion genre essay (Nagao, 2019), of the reader-writer relationship, and of learners' writing abilities (Feez, 2002; Viriya & Wasanasomsithi, 2017). In Italy, scholars have recently examined genre or discourse-informed ESP language awareness components in course content in 14 Italian universities through a questionnaire distributed to 25 academics (Alessi, 2016); others focused on Italian-English language crossing in tourism discourse by analyzing a small corpus of English tourist texts about Italy (Cappelli, 2013).

Due to the fast-paced and, quite often, highly specialized communication in an international setting, ESP learners need to be knowledgeable in business discourse. Thus, analyzing authentic material, namely material that "is produced by companies for use by their employees, for client information, or for general publicity" (Ellis & Johnson, 1994, p. 157), has a fundamental role in teaching business English. Company-specific materials may include annual reports, product information, newsletters and magazines or other PR material, company videos, correspondence, reports and memos, minutes of meetings, contracts, manuals, and written instructions (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Sampath & Zalipour, 2010). This study focuses on codes of ethics.

2.1 Codes of Ethics: A genre in corporate communication

A CoE could be considered a guideline designed to establish a principled corporate environment, ultimately fostering ethically correct behavior and practices. The adoption of CoEs supports the creation of a "moral community" where employees "as the members of a profession are bound together by common aspirations, values, and training" (Frankel, 1989, p. 110). Previous steps of the research that were carried out by one of the authors of this paper (Gigliani, 2020), showed that Italian CoEs tend to follow a legalistic tradition, as they are bound by the terms of Legislative Decree n.231/2001 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2001), which introduced the concept of the liability of institutions. This concept is quite opaque in the Anglo-Saxon world, where commitment-oriented codes are prevalently used instead. As underlined by Gigliani (2019), the two previously defined types of codes—i.e. legalistic and commitment-oriented (Catenaccio & Garzone, 2017; Frankel, 1989)—entailed some recurring traits at both macro and micro-textual levels. As to macro-textual level, the legalistic, small-sized codes generally display lists, definitions, and a contract-style layout, and they do not resort to visuals, whereas in large-sized, commitment-oriented codes, it is possible to find, together with the CEO's message, comprehension aids, ad hoc titles, and visuals. With reference to the micro-textual level, on the one hand, legalistic codes present formal words, phraseological units, attempts at extreme precision, the overuse of *shall*, and nominalization; on the other hand, commitment-oriented codes include the use of short sentences, a more personal style (e.g. first-person plural pronoun), simple and clear lexicon, and figurative language. The rationale upon which this paper is based is that students can be taught to identify the typical traits of the two code types, thus reaching a twofold objective: enhancing foreign language awareness and learning specific contents.

In the study of CoEs, previous research mainly focused on socio-psychology (Fairfax, 2007); cross-cultural studies (Langlois & Schlegelmilch, 1990; Singh et al., 2005; Wood, 2000); the relationship between codes and perceptions of ethical behavior (Adams, Tashjian, & Stone 2001; Pierce & Henry, 1996; Somers, 2001); perceptions of code users (Kaptein, 2011); linguistic data (Chua, 2015; Farrell & Farrell, 1998; Holder-Webber & Cohen, 2012; Long & Driscoll, 2008; Pollach, 2003); content description, overlapping, and effectiveness (Farrell & Cobbin, 2000; Holder-Webb & Cohen, 2012; Krippendorff, 2013; Stevens, 2008; Singh, 2011; Wood & Rimmer, 2003); and comparative content analysis of corporate CoEs (Andrade, Hamza, & Xara-Brasil, 2017) to mention some. However, a lack of studies on the pedagogical implications of using CoEs in ESP courses is to be noted. If compared to other corporate documents, such as annual reports, memos, minutes of meetings, etc., CoEs provide narratives that could contribute to learners' understanding of corporate dynamics from an ethical point of view, thus, shaping their future behaviors in and approaches to their companies. The exposure to authentic language and genre can be valuable for the students as it can empower them to manipulate and work with professionally useful information. At the same time, it can foster

foreign language acquisition through “an explicit understanding on how target texts are structured and why they are written the way they are” (Hyland, 2007, p. 151).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The setting of the present study is a public, Italian-medium university in Milan, Italy, where students have the opportunity to attend a first-level master program (60 CFU) comprehensive of an 80-hour Business English course. The course is designed to familiarize students with various aspects of business-related topics. The syllabus, which was developed by one of the researchers and taught by the other researcher, follows the classic subdivision in foreign language teaching based on the four macro skills, in accordance with the European Common Framework B1-B2 levels. Based on their prior language level, which was assessed with one-to-one interviews at the beginning of the course, students were divided into two groups: 14 in Group A (B1 ECF) and 10 in Group B (B2 ECF) (see 3.1.1).

In order to ensure its validity, multiple methods were used in this study, where a quasi-experimental framework was followed. The study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The study, which extended over a period of time of five weeks, started by asking the participants if they wanted to take part in it anonymously, then asked them to fill in a pre-questionnaire (see 4.1) and complete a pre-test. Anonymity was ensured by eliminating all direct identifiers (name, surname, ID number) and instead referring to students as S1, S2, etc. One student was responsible for collecting all electronically submitted questionnaires and collectively sending them to one of the researchers.

After a four-hour session consisting of teaching functions and the textual organization of corporate codes of ethics and following a set of exercises (see Table 1) assigned in self-study, a post-test and an abridged questionnaire in the students’ native language were employed. Building on Ellis and Johnson’s (1994) suggestions on how to use company material in teaching Business English, several activities were designed for the present course and, in particular, the four hour session. Adapting the charts created by Ellis and Johnson (1994, pp. 157–167) for other types of corporate documents (e.g. annual reports, contracts, correspondence, reports and memos, minutes of meetings), Table 1 presents the skills, language, and activities that were taken into account to devise the material for the lessons and the activities that were distributed among the students both in class and during the self-study sessions.

Table 1
Language activities using codes of ethics in a business English class

Skills	Language	Activities
Reading CoEs (scanning and detail reading)	Vocabulary	Jigsaw reading
Listening	Comparing / Contrasting	Info transfer
Information exchange	Formality: Passive form, nominalization, phraseological units, modal ‘shall’	Comparing written / oral language use
Understanding CoEs	Company’s philosophy, values, principles	Explain: summarize, paraphrase
Making presentations		Presenting information

Considering that genres could affect students’ learning, whether they are taught explicitly or not (Devitt, 2009), and that any genre pedagogy must use some particular genre, at least as examples (Devitt, 2009), in-class activities concentrated on raising and gauging students’ awareness. Pre-reading exercises, which involved skimming and scanning two CoEs, each representative of one type of CoEs, focused on CoEs’ potential target audience, authors, and context of release. Small sections of the texts were then analyzed concentrating on grammatical, lexical, and semantical features. Jigsaw reading of selected sections of the two codes allowed students to work on their speaking, paraphrasing, and summarizing skills. Students were particularly keen on extensively discussing ethical principles and evaluating the norms, comparing and contrasting them with their previous personal experiences. The researchers then selected two new (to

students) CoEs. A new set of exercises, which were assigned in the two-hour session of self-study, were modelled on the activities carried out in class.

3.1.1. Participants

Participants of this study included 24 students aged 22-28¹ (11 males and 13 females) enrolled in a first level, one-year master program in Marketing Management in a public university in Milan (Italy) in the academic year 2019-2020. Most of the students were Italian native speakers (91.6%, n=22) and two were bilingual (Italian being one of the languages together with US English or Dutch). All participants reported having previous knowledge of English at varying levels, generally ranging between an A2 and a B2 level (ECF) according to their self-evaluations². Almost half (41.6%, n=10) of the students had spent some time (from a minimum of 2 weeks to a maximum of 1 year) in an English-speaking country, either on a study holiday abroad or for a temporary job. The majority had also studied one or more foreign languages: Spanish, German, French, Russian, and Chinese³. Students held a previous degree in the fields of communication (29.1%, n=7), management (25%, n=6), marketing (20.8%, n=5), foreign languages and economics (12.5%, n=3), tourism (4.16%, n=1), and psychology (4.16%, n=1).

3.1.2. Data collection, instruments, and data analysis

The data for this study was collected through: 1) a pre-questionnaire designed to evaluate students' general knowledge of CoEs that was electronically administered (via email) in class (response rate 100%); 2) a pre-test to assess students' critical thinking skills and linguistic competence, 3) and a post-test to evaluate post-treatment knowledge in analyzing a CoE; 4) an abridged post-questionnaire. The questionnaire, developed according to Kothari's (2004) guidelines, consisted of 10 open-ended questions in the students' native language (Italian).

As no studies of this kind were found in the relevant literature, the pre-test was developed following previous research by one of the authors of this paper which focused on the distinctive features of CoEs at both macro and micro-textual level (Giglioni, 2019). The framework for the study is experimental and has its foundations in the idea of testing findings in class (the second author was the students' instructor). The post-test involved a re-analysis of data after the treatment.

In agreement with the reflections provided by Nyumba, Derrik, and Mukherjee (2018) on the weakness of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, an abridged questionnaire in the students' native language was then opted for and submitted at the end of the five-week period. The questions mainly focused on participants' perceptions on the use of CoEs in the ESP course.

A quantitative analysis was conducted on the data collected from the pre- and post-tests. Due to the small sample of the experimental group, the compare mean and proportion measurements were implemented. As to questionnaires, quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. Response categories were identified by using a text analyzer and by further scanning the alphabetically sorted responses. Positive individual responses were then subjected to quantitative analysis.

4. Findings

4.1. Questionnaires

Ten open-ended questions (see Appendix A) were addressed to the 24 participants. To guarantee a degree of certain conformity, it was decided to ask the questions and allow students to answer in Italian, their native language, so they could be more effective in communicating their ideas. The questionnaire was sent electronically to the students and sent back to one of the researchers upon its completion (the maximum allocated time was 15 minutes).

The first question (Q1) to which the participants were asked to respond explored their knowledge of CoEs. While 12.5% (n=3) of the students claimed to ignore the definition of CoE, the vast majority provided its meaning by using the words *insieme* ("set" in English: 23%) and *regole* ("rules": 28%) or its synonyms

¹ 22 - 12.5% (n=3); 23 - 41.6% (n=10); 24 - 25% (n=6); 25 - 8.3% (n=2); 26 - 4.1% (n=1); 27 - 4.1% (n=1); 28 - 4.1% (n=1).

² After one-on-one interviews, the instructor separated the students into two groups: 14 were considered at a B1 level and 10 at a B2 level.

³ Spanish 79.1% (n=19); German 29.1% (n=7); French 29.1% (n=7); Russian 4.1% (n=1); Chinese 4.1% (n=1); no other foreign language 8.3% (n=2).

(*regolamenti, norme*), and *comportamento* (“behavior”: 19%). When asked about the hypothetical content (topics) of CoEs (Q2), the most recurring words were *rispetto* (“respect”: occurrences 5, frequency 2.1%), which was provided by 16% (n=9) of the respondents, *condotta e comportamento* (“conduct,” “behavior”) by 26% and *ambiente sociale* (“social environment”) by 26%. Only 7% (n=4) mentioned *etico* or *morale* (“ethical,” “moral”). As to style (Q3), 42% believed that a CoE would present a communicative style, 4% a legalistic style, and 35% both. Participants justified the “communicative” and “both” answers by emphasizing the link between the ethical aspect (a more contract-like type of document) and its target audience (a generic public). Some examples of the students’ answers are as follow: S1 claimed, “I expect the code of ethics to present both a direct and legalistic communication style because I believe legal support is fundamental;” S2 wrote, “Although it is an official document, I expect a direct communication style as it is addressed to each individual.”

Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 concentrated on the writers, the moment of writing, the retrieval of codes, and the reasons for writing codes of ethics in the first place. The authors (Q4) were thought to be lawyers (25%), the company itself (14%), administrators (32%), or “other subjects” (11%), including an expert in law, sociology or economics, or a person who is not necessarily linked to the administration. Concerning the moment of code writing (Q5), almost half of the students (48%) believed that the code was written at the moment the company is founded, whereas 36% responded that a CoE can be written when needed. Two such students claimed that, “An ethical code is written when it is necessary to codify the behavior of people within a social context or an organization,” and “When a clarification about the guiding behaviors to be followed in a company is needed.” As to the reasons for writing a code (Q6), the majority of the participants, 62% (n=16), claimed that a CoE is required for “establishing the rules,” 15% (n=4) for “keeping a balance,” 8% (n=2) for “making the code available,” and 12% (n=3) stated that rules change so codes are needed. The retrieval of a code was the subject of question 7. Only 6% of the participants did not know where to retrieve such document, whereas 35% assumed it would be on a company’s website, 29% in paper format at the company, and 26% suggested other alternatives such as on the company’s intranet, in a book dictating corporate principles, within the company’s statute, “exposed somewhere visible,” or “among official documents.”

Question 8 aimed at understanding how familiar participants were with corporate documents. When asked about their knowledge of other textual genres in corporate communication, 25% declined any knowledge, while 53% provided other examples, such as financial statements (10%), reports, journals, and business plans.

As to the usefulness of knowing CoEs (Q9), relevant answers focused on understanding values and rules (41%) and behaving in a correct manner or avoiding mistakes (31%). Most importantly, when asked about the utility for English learning of studying CoEs (Q10), all but two students thought that working on CoEs could contribute to the improvement of their language learning process: for vocabulary enhancement (n=14), content-wise (n=14), or at syntactical level (n=2). Four participants provided a positive answer, but did not justify it, whereas eight found it could be stimulating or could improve their knowledge of corporate dynamics (Table 2).

Table 2

Questionnaire, Q10 (see Appendix A) n = number of occurrences (multiple answers were evaluated separately)

	Yes, to improve vocabulary	Yes, for linguistic structures	Yes, content wise	Yes (no motivation)	Yes, other (stimulating / corporate dynamics)	Not at my level
Number of occurrences*	14	2	4	4	8	2

*when students gave multiple answers, each was evaluated and counted separately

4.2. Pre- and post-tests

Pre and post-tests consisted of the analysis and re-analysis of two CoEs—selected by the researchers and submitted to students—which included features that well represented the difference between

committed-oriented (Code V⁴) and legalistic (Code B) styles at both macro and micro-textual levels (see Appendix B).

The two codes and a word file with instructions for students and charts to be completed were sent via email to the participants and then sent back (100% overall response rate) to one student who was responsible for collecting all the questionnaires and forwarding them to the researcher after the allocated 45 minutes. Besides detecting the presence of the features, or lack of thereof, participants were asked to provide at least one example for each feature. This proved particularly useful to double-check results, especially for features at a lexico-syntactical level.

4.2.1. Macro-textual level

Table 3 shows the distribution of the participants' analysis of the traits of legalistic and commitment-oriented codes at a macro-textual level (Appendix B) during the pre and post-test phases.

Table 3

Percentage of correctly-identified⁵ features in participants' analysis of CoEs at a macro-textual level, pre- and post, by group and by code

	Group A				Group B			
	Code V		Code B		Code V		Code B	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Legalistic								
Lists	85.7	78.6	100	100	90	88.9	100	100
Definitions	92.9	78.6	78.6	71.4	100	66.7	90	100
Contract-Style Layout	0	0	100	92.9	20	22.2	80	88.9
No Visuals	0	0	100	100	0	0	100	100
Short Code	21.4	7.1	71.4	92.9	20	0	80	88.9
Commitment-oriented								
CEO's Message	100	100	0	0	100	100	0	0
Comprehension Aids	28.6	57.1	35.7	0	80	77.8	30	0
Ad Hoc Titles	92.9	92.9	7.1	7.1	90	88.9	50	11.1
Visuals	100	100	0	0	100	100	0	0
Long Code	64.3	92.9	50	7.1	70	88.9	20	11.1

The lists, definitions, visuals, and CEO's message were easily detected in both codes in both tests. In the pre-test, 50% of the participants identified the presence of comprehension aids in Code V and their absence in Code B. However, only 16% (n=4) pinpointed a clear example from Code V. Of those, 8.3% (n=2) presented the Q&A section as an example. Only one participant demonstrated awareness of this feature by claiming that comprehension aids are "pages with few words to sum up a concept." Based on the post-tests, the majority of the examples that were provided were correct, and few students (n=4) still had doubts regarding this trait.

The contract-style layout was identified by 91.7% of the 24 participants in Code B, and the lack thereof in Code V was identified by the same percentage. As far as the code's shortness or lengthiness is concerned, a tendency towards consistency was demonstrated by most of the participants; however, in the pre-tests, 16.6% presented inconsistencies in their own answers, and 4.2% expressed clear doubts. In the pre-test, 62.5% of the consistent answers considered Code V to be long and 12.5% considered it short, whereas 54.1% considered Code B short and 20.8% long. In the post-test, the majority in both groups considered Code V to be long and Code B to be short.

⁴ The commitment-oriented code that was submitted to students was *Vodafone Code of Ethics* (Vodafone, 2018), while the legalistic code was *Burberry Ethical Trading Code of Conduct* (Burberry, n.d.). Both codes were included in the corpus which had been investigated by one of the authors of this paper in previous steps of the research (Gigliani, 2019).

⁵ "Correctly-identified" = positive responses, which indicate students' awareness of the presence of features. Responses that were close to the correct answer were also included in this category. For instance, in the case of comprehension aids, both "Q&A section" and an explanation such as "pages with few words to sum up a concept" were evaluated as correct.

91.7% reported the use of ad hoc titles in Code V; nevertheless, when it came to giving an example, 25% did not provide any, 33.3% gave an unrelated and thus incorrect example, and 41.6% provided a correct example. As to Code B, the majority (70.8%) stated that there were no such titles in the document. Those reporting their presence either confused ad hoc titles with the formal titles of the sections or defined them as “explanation titles.” The post-tests confirmed the same understanding.

4.2.2. Micro-textual level

Table 4 shows the distribution of the participants’ analysis of the traits of legalistic and commitment-oriented codes at a micro-textual level.

Table 4

Percentage of correctly-identified features in participants’ analysis of CoEs at a micro-textual level, pre- and post, by group and by code

	Group A				Group B			
	Code V		Code B		Code V		Code B	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Legalistic								
Formal Words	28.6	42.9	78.6	92.9	20	22.2	100	88.9
Phraseological Units	0	21.4	21.4	50	40	33.3	30	11.1
Extreme Precision	42.9	42.9	71.4	85.7	50	44.4	100	100
Overuse of Shall	7.1	0	85.7	92.9	0	0	100	100
Nominalization	21.4	50	0	57.1	20	55.6	50	33.3
Long Sentences	21.4	14.3	50	92.9	20	22.2	90	88.9
Commitment-oriented								
Prevalence of Short Sentences	57.1	64.3	35.7	7.1	80	66.7	10	11.1
No Impersonal Style	28.6	78.6	35.7	14.3	50	66.7	40	22.2
Simple, Clear Lexicon	85.7	100	42.9	21.4	90	100	10	11.1
Figurative Language	21.4	14.3	7.1	14.3	60	77.8	0	0

In the pre-tests, formal words were found in Code B by the majority of the participants (87.5%) but, besides a generic “use of professional language,” only a few specific examples were provided: “we comply,” “to uphold in relation to its own employees,” and “B. is committed to working collaboratively.” In the post-tests, Code B was still considered (91.3%) to be the code with more formal words, and participant provided sound examples to support the idea (“for instance,” “in accordance with,” “sustainable employment,” “requirement,” “disproportionally,” and “hence”).

The traits, Phraseological Units and Nominalization, received the highest rates of Not Answered in the pre-test, while they were supported by suitable examples in the post test. Group A displayed a higher percentage of Not Answered than Group B in the post-tests. While examples were not given in the pre-tests even when an answer was provided, in the post-tests 50% of the students in Group B and 28.5% in Group A provided a correct example.

The trait, Overuse of *Shall*, which is common in legal documents to imply obligation, was considered to be present in Code B and absent in Code V by the majority of the participants, 87.5% and 83.3%, respectively. In the post-test, this percentage greatly varied in Group A, where all participants did not notice the overuse of the central modal verb in Code V, thus aligning with Group B’s answers.

Even though the participants’ perceptions may have differed in the pre-test, an overall consistency was shown when it came to the use of short and long sentences. In both the pre-test and the post-test, it was considered that Code V displayed a prevalence of short sentences and Code B that of long sentences.

As to impersonal style, the data that was retrieved in the pre-tests point to a lack of impersonal style in both codes, and the few examples that were provided were not clear enough to draw more precise conclusions. 12.5% (n=3) indicated the use of personal pronouns in the example box. In the post-tests, consistency between the two groups was noted; they both stressed the lack of an impersonal style in Code V and its presence in Code B.

In contrast, resorting to a simple lexicon seemed to be a more easily comprehensible trait. In fact, 87.5% of the students in the pre-tests and 100% in the post-tests believed that a simple and clear lexicon was preferred in Code V but not in Code B, where 58.3% in the pre-tests and 73.9% in the post-tests emphasized its absence.

Figurative language was another rather problematic trait in its interpretation based on the data of the pre-tests. One participant wrote, “images and metaphors,” and another wrote, “customer obsessed,” as examples. The post-tests showed a divergence between the groups, as Group A was still uncertain, and no examples were to be found. Group B retrieved examples from Code V (i.e., “innovation hungry,” “customer obsessed,” “we voice our opinions”) and ascertained the absence of figurative language in Code B.

4.3. Abridged final questionnaire

This section presents the views of 23 of the 24 study participants (one student was absent) on the implementation of CoEs in the ESP course. The 23 participants were asked to answer two open-ended questions: Q1. *Perché potrebbe essere utile conoscere un CoEs? Elabora.* (trans. Why could it be useful to know the content of CoEs? Explain). Q2. *Ritieni che lo studio dei codici etici in inglese possa aiutarti a migliorare la conoscenza della lingua inglese? Elabora.* (trans. Do you believe studying codes of ethics in English can help you in your language learning process? Explain). As with the pre-treatment questionnaire, to guarantee conformity, it was decided to formulate the final questionnaire questions in Italian and to allow students to answer in Italian. The questionnaire was sent electronically to the students right before administration and sent back to the researchers upon its completion (the maximum allocated time was 15 minutes) using the same procedure of the pre-questionnaire.

The answers to the first question, which mirrored Q9 of the pre-treatment questionnaire, conveyed a positive approach to CoEs, which were perceived as useful tools to: “conoscere la cultura aziendale” (“get to know the corporate culture”), “comunicare al mondo esterno i valori” (“share company values with outsiders”), but also “per entrare nella realtà aziendale” (“to enter the corporate environment”), and “per sapere come comportarsi” (“to know how to behave”). Hence, CoEs were mainly perceived as valuable instruments to: get to know a company’s values (46%), with the word, *conoscere* (to know) recurring 21 times; to better understand suitable corporate behaviors (20%), with *valori*, (values) recurring 11 times; to define a company’s public image (15%), and to identify a company’s organization (11%). Additionally, three participants reported the usefulness of knowing CoEs in preparing for a job interview. One student stressed the link between language use and code writing in defining a company’s email language: “Infatti sullo stile si riflette anche l’intento del codice [...] spesso le aziende lo adottano per migliorare la propria immagine.” (“The purpose of the CoE is reflected in its style [...] companies often implement codes to improve their image.”)

The second question, which paralleled Q10 on the pre-treatment questionnaire, aimed at assessing students’ perceptions of the impact of learning about CoEs on their language competence and enhancement. Table 5, like Table 2, shows the answers that were provided by the participants, who believed that studying CoEs improves their vocabulary (n = 22), their knowledge of specific linguistic structures (n = 8) and content (n = 3), and their preparation for a future professional environment (n = 10). One answer was off-topic.

Table 5
Responses to abridged questionnaire Q2

	Yes, to improve vocabulary	Yes, for linguistic structures	Yes, content-wise	Yes, other (prepare for work / job interview)	Not at my level	Off-topic
Number of occurrences*	22	8	3	4	0	1

*when students gave multiple answers, each was evaluated and counted separately

5. Discussion

The present study applied a genre-based approach to providing students with the necessary tools to analyze a specific type of corporate document (i.e., CoEs) that feature distinctive patterns and norms of organizations. This gave the students the opportunity to work with authentic material, thus exploring both the natural written communication and the institutional environment of material (Breeze, 2012). One of the responsibilities of ESP teachers is to make students aware of and sensitive students to sociolinguistic

variables, which ultimately play a central role in numerous situational frames echoed in common, professional settings and situations. Through the designed activities, which focused on several skills (see Table 1) following Ellis and Johnson's model (1994), students were able to explore the codes both from a textual and a communicative perspective, with the aim to stimulate reflection and discussion on topics that are intrinsically related to the master course in marketing and management they attend. The active interaction and discussions that the activities spurred served as useful sources to enable students to understand contexts and the language used in those contexts. The results underline that the exploration of authentic material may help second language learners in communicating and feeling prepared to meet a new English-speaking working environment.

As far as the macro-textual level is concerned, while the presence or absence of visuals and the CEO's message were quite intuitively and easily detected, thus providing an almost homogenous response, some features (e.g., comprehension aids) led to doubt and uncertainty during the pre-test but were mostly pinpointed in the post-test. Although ad hoc titles were still confused with simple titles, a clear progress in trait recognition was recorded after the treatment, and the trends that were displayed by the two groups at the macro-textual level of analysis were similar (see Table 3).

In contrast, the micro-textual analysis posed some challenges, especially for the less proficient group. Indeed, Group A seems not to perform as well as Group B. The examples of specific traits that were presented were few and often incorrect in the pre-tests for both groups, whereas they were more relevant in the post-tests, especially for Group B. It may be safe to claim, then, that the absence of correct examples is connected to a higher level of difficulty in detecting the traits (compared to their greater ease in identifying traits at a macro-textual level). Multi-word lexical units with partially or fully transferred meanings and nominalization were processes that students were especially unfamiliar with during the pre-test. Nevertheless, as illustrated by the percentage and examples in the post-test, students' cognizance of these structures improved with the treatment. Hence, the post-treatment post-test results illustrated participants' greater awareness of the lexical and syntactical aspects of language in relation to formality. Overall, the post-treatment re-analysis of the two codes strengthened the validity of Hp. 1 (i.e., Generating awareness of CoEs' main features is functional in the enhancement of students' linguistic competence). Moreover, with regard to the pre-test and its analysis at a micro-textual level, several answers were not provided (NA=not answered), whereas in the post-tests not only were there more answers, but they were also supplemented with more relevant examples. Essentially, especially for proficient learners, CoEs can be claimed to represent a useful source to enhance overall language skills.

As to Hp. 2 (i.e., CoEs assist in developing business-related communicative competence.), on the basis of the post-treatment answers to the abridged questionnaire, it may be worth noting that the participants established a connection between the codes and their future work experience, as they seem to see codes as a useful source of information on a company's values and public image. Albeit in a small percentage, the participants thought that retrieving information on a company before a job interview could be an asset for a potential candidate. This reiterates the CoEs' belonging to the category of institutionalized textual artefacts that display a specific discourse that is typical of a specific community (Bhatia, 2002) and emphasizes their correlation to the social context (Breeze, 2012; Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, as shown in Table 2 and Table 5, participants' beliefs changed slightly: After the treatment they all started seeing CoEs as an effective source of business-related vocabulary. On the one hand, no correlation between long sentences and extreme precision in legalistic codes was noticed. This, most probably, indicates that the level of precision is not associated to the number of words used to express ideas. On the other hand, all answers highlighted simple lexicon in short sentences with a personal style that was mainly traced in the use of personal pronouns and a lack of passive voice, which is typical of a commitment-oriented code. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the students clearly connected the traits, but simply suggests that such features are correlated.

Overall, then, CoEs could be aptly integrated in ESP syllabi to encourage a focus on several textual and communicative features at once. As mentioned before, CoEs cover a wide range of useful aspects for ESP instructors. First, they help students in identifying intuitive language patterns, communication techniques, and ethical norms used in corporate environments, which convey a generic behavioral conduct that individuals should adopt on a day-to-day basis. Second, the study of CoEs can help students develop a greater awareness of a specialized discourse. Third, CoEs can be taught by combining a top-down (genre move structure) with a bottom-up (textual features) approach based on students' needs.

As a first step, instead of just examining the linguistic text, ESP teachers can guide students to think about how these specialized texts relate to corporate life. In the present case, students were attending the

master program to obtain a more competitive profile. Hence, students' active participation, in-class involvement, and future expectations were key factors in linking classroom experience to real life. The decision to study CoEs stemmed from the observation that, in the field of international business, properly communicating in English is based on a set of conventions; thus, students should be provided the necessary codes to establish concrete and meaningful connections with the professional world. This is indeed the case for CoEs, as they are corporate documents written to guide behavior. Furthermore, working on the CoEs stimulated relevant discussions on language use, communication techniques (see, for example, ad hoc title or figurative language use), and ethical principles that can be distinctive in corporate behavior.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, though relying on a small sample, the present study suggests that using CoEs can positively impact an ESP class. In response to the ever-changing corporate dynamics, it is important for instructors to adapt their approach in teaching by integrating sources of specialized discourse. In an ESP classroom, material selection is of great importance for task-based and effective learning. In this study, the researchers found that the analysis of CoEs that was carried out collectively in class and in self-study fostered students' reflections on corporate communication and enhanced their linguistic competence. Learners' perceptions indicated that CoEs could be potentially useful pedagogical tools both in vocabulary acquisition in a second language as well as in engaging students in expanding their knowledge of corporate behaviors.

As contextually situated texts, CoEs are corporate documents that are deemed essential in the study of business discourse. They play a clear role in fulfilling the need of providing non-native speakers with the necessary skills to communicate in an overtly globalized corporate environment, where English is the dominant business language. To the authors' knowledge, studies on the implementation of CoEs as teaching tools are still underrepresented in literature, especially in Italy. The present study is hoped to offer a contribution to the field through a genre-based approach. It started by exploring the students' knowledge of CoEs, it then analyzed the acquisition of linguistic and formal traits of corporate writing, and, subsequently, focused on the students' perceptions of the implementation of the approach. Within the five-week period set for the investigation, results showed that traits at a macro-textual level were easily identifiable by both groups, whereas the micro-textual analysis proved to be slightly more challenging. Nonetheless, both groups involved in the study came to the conclusion that working on CoEs could help, particularly, in terms of acquiring new vocabulary, raising language awareness, and understanding corporate dynamics.

7. Limitations of the study

This research was a first step into the study of the implementation of CoEs into the syllabus of a Business English course. Despite the relatively small number of participants, it is hoped to encourage instructors to explore the use of CoEs as effective pedagogical tools in the ESP class.

The present study design could be further developed by analyzing students' abilities to transfer the acquired knowledge into their writing output. Likewise, a comparative approach could be of some interest, as shifting attention from a national to an international scenario may underline differences in terms of students' achievements both in foreign language acquisition and genre awareness.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Rispondi alle seguenti domande (trans. Please answer to the following questions)

1. Sai cos'è un codice etico? (trans. Do you know what a code of ethics is?)
2. Quali argomenti ti aspetti vengano trattati in un codice etico? (trans. What topics do you think are treated in a code of ethics?)
3. Ti aspetti uno stile comunicativo diretto o legalistico? (trans. Do you expect a direct communicative style or a legalistic style?)
4. Chi scrive un codice etico? (trans. Who authors a code of ethics?)
5. Quando si scrive un codice etico? (trans. When are codes of ethics issued?)
6. Perché un codice etico viene redatto? (trans. Why are codes of ethics written?)
7. Premesso (se non lo sai) che un codice etico è un documento diffuso dalle aziende quotate, secondo te dove si può trovare o dove lo cercheresti? (trans. Considering – if you don't know – that a code of ethics is a corporate document issued by listed companies, where do you think you can retrieve it?)
8. Quali altri generi testuali nella comunicazione istituzionale d'azienda conosci? (trans. What other corporate documents are you familiar with?)
9. Perché potrebbe essere utile conoscere un codice etico? (trans. Do you think it could be useful to become familiar with codes of ethics?)
10. Qual è, secondo te, l'impatto dello studio dei codici etici in inglese sul tuo apprendimento della lingua? Elabora. (trans. How do you think the study of codes of ethics can affect foreign language acquisition? Explain.)

Appendix B

PRE- AND POST- TESTS

A) Analyze the two codes of ethics by completing the chart below:

- Put a + if the feature is present and a – if it is not present
- Provide an example (include the page number and the code's name; V for Vodafone and B for Burberry) for each feature.

	Feature	Vodafone	Example	Burberry	Example
1	Lists				
2	Definitions				
3	Contract-style layout				
4	No visuals				
5	Short code				
6	CEO's message				
7	Comprehension aids				
8	Ad hoc title				
9	Visuals				
10	Long code				

Use the space below for the examples – just make sure to write the number of the feature and the code's name (V for Vodafone and B for Burberry).

B) Analyze the two code of ethics given by completing the chart below:

- Put a + if the feature is present and a – if it is not present
- Provide an example (include the page number) for each feature.

	Features	Vodafone	Example	Burberry	Example
1	Formal words				
2	Phraseological units				
3	Extreme precision				
4	Overuse of "shall"				
5	Nominalization				
6	Prevalence of short sentences				
7	No impersonal style				
8	Simple, clear lexicon				
9	Figurative language				
10	Prevalence of Long sentences				

Use the space below for the examples – just make sure to write the number of the feature and the code's name (V for Vodafone and B for Burberry).

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