

Constructing Professional Authority in Business Education: A Pragmatic Analysis of Business English and Financial Textbooks

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Abstract

This study examines how professional authority is pragmatically constructed in business education by comparing two widely used textbook genres: Business English pedagogical materials and academic financial textbooks. The research aims to identify the linguistic strategies through which authority is discursively produced and to explore how gender is represented or backgrounded within these educational genres. The study adopts a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach grounded in Critical Genre Analysis and complemented by stance and metadiscourse frameworks. The empirical material consists of selected extracts from two widely used university textbooks: Market Leader: Intermediate Business English Course Book (Cotton, Falvey, & Kent, 2010) and Multinational Business Finance. (Eiteman, Stonehill, & Moffett, 2016) The analysis focuses on four pragmatic dimensions relevant to authority construction: stance, engagement, impersonality, and gender representation. These dimensions enable a systematic comparison between interaction-oriented pedagogical discourse and knowledge-oriented academic discourse. The findings reveal significant genre-based differences in the construction of professional authority. Business English discourse constructs authority as an interactional achievement through negotiation, persuasive language, and engagement with interlocutors. In contrast, financial textbook discourse constructs authority as epistemic and institutional through conceptual definitions, technical terminology, and impersonal explanatory structures. The analysis also shows that gender references tend to appear in pedagogical interactional scenarios but are largely neutralized in financial academic discourse. This study contributes to research on professional discourse by providing a comparative pragmatic perspective on textbook genres that shape different models of professional authority in business education. The findings highlight the importance of integrating communicative and disciplinary discourse models in business curricula and encourage greater awareness of how educational materials influence students' understanding of professional expertise and authority.

Keywords

Pragmatics, professional authority, business discourse, textbook analysis, genre analysis.

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Introduction

Business education plays a central role in shaping not only disciplinary knowledge and managerial competencies but also the communicative practices through which future professionals construct authority and expertise. In contemporary organizations, communication functions as a strategic resource influencing leadership, professional credibility, and organizational effectiveness (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2013; Breeze, 2013; Nickerson, 2005). As business environments become increasingly globalized and

multilingual, the ability to negotiate meaning, persuade stakeholders, and present expert knowledge has become a core professional competence (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2013; Nickerson, 2005).

Discourse analysts have shown that professional authority is achieved through the strategic use of stance, evaluation, and audience alignment within particular genres of communication (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2004; Hyland, 2008). These pragmatic resources allow writers and speakers to present knowledge claims, manage interpersonal relations, and position themselves as credible participants within professional and disciplinary communities (Hyland, 2004). Further research in critical discourse analysis emphasizes that professional authority is shaped by institutional and ideological contexts that influence how expertise and legitimacy are communicated (Paltridge, 2021).

Gender has also been conceptualized as a socially and discursively constructed category rather than a fixed personal attribute. Studies of workplace communication demonstrate that authority and leadership are interactionally negotiated and may reflect gendered expectations embedded in professional cultures (Holmes, 2006; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Schnurr, 2024).

Little attention has been paid to textbooks as discursive artefacts that model professional communication practices. Educational materials function not only as pedagogical tools but also as ideological instruments that normalize particular representations of authority, expertise, and professional identity (Apple & Christian-Smith 1994; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2018; Gray, 2010). This issue is particularly relevant in business education, where students encounter multiple discourse genres within the same curriculum.

This paper is organized around a comparative discourse-pragmatic analysis of Business English and financial textbook discourse. The first section reviews relevant research on professional discourse, stance, metadiscourse, and gender in workplace communication, while also addressing the ideological role of educational materials in shaping professional identities. The second section presents the theoretical framework, corpus selection criteria, and coding procedure used to examine stance, engagement, impersonality, and gender representation. The third section analyzes how professional authority and gender are discursively constructed across the two textbook genres through specific pragmatic strategies and genre conventions. The final sections discuss the findings in relation to existing research and highlight their implications.

This study contributes to research on professional discourse by providing a comparative pragmatic analysis of textbook genres used in business education. The study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1. How is authority pragmatically constructed in Business English and financial textbook discourse?
- RQ2. What pragmatic strategies represent or suppress gender in the construction of professional authority?
- RQ3. How do genre conventions influence the pragmatic realization of gendered authority in business education materials?

1. Review of scientific literature

Research on professional discourse emphasizes the central role of genre in shaping communicative practices and institutional norms. Genre-based approaches argue that professional texts are structured by recurring communicative purposes, rhetorical conventions, and socially recognized patterns of interaction that influence how expertise and authority are discursively constructed (Bhatia, 2016; Paltridge, 2021). Within this perspective, authority emerges through socially recognized communicative practices rather than through individual attributes.

Within applied linguistics, stance and metadiscourse have been identified as central mechanisms through which authoritative voice is constructed in academic and professional writing. Stance markers such as modal verbs, evaluative expressions, and stance adverbs enable writers to position themselves in relation to knowledge claims and audiences (Hyland, 2004; Hyland, 2008). Corpus-based research further demonstrates that stance patterns vary across genres and disciplinary communities, reflecting differences in communicative purpose and epistemological traditions (Biber, 2006).

Pragmatic competence involves the capacity to select appropriate linguistic forms in relation to contextual variables such as social status, interpersonal relationships, and communicative goals. Learners must develop awareness of these contextual factors in order to avoid pragmatic failure and achieve effective interaction (Pramono & Kurniawan, 2020).

Several studies have shown that the pragmatic content of EFL textbooks is frequently limited or insufficiently contextualized, which may restrict learners' opportunities to develop pragmatic awareness

and authentic communicative skills (Ton Nu & Murray, 2020; Vellenga, 2004). As globalization increases the complexity of professional interaction, communicative competence in areas such as negotiation, persuasion, and decision-making has become essential for professional credibility and leadership (Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2013; Breeze, 2013; Nickerson, 2005).

In parallel, sociolinguistic studies have examined the relationship between gender and professional communication. Workplace discourse research demonstrates that authority and leadership are interactionally constructed and may reflect gendered expectations embedded in organizational cultures (Holmes, 2006; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Schnurr, 2024). Rather than treating gender as a fixed variable, these studies conceptualize it as a discursive category emerging through interactional positioning, role attribution, and identity construction. Research on educational materials further suggests that textbooks may reproduce implicit gender ideologies by representing men and women in stereotypical roles or by reducing female visibility in professional contexts.

Educational materials present particular models of expertise, authority, and professional behavior that may appear neutral but reflect specific pedagogical and institutional assumptions (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1994; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2018; Gray, 2010).

In business education, different textbook genres expose students to distinct communicative models of professional authority. Business English textbooks typically emphasize interactional competence through simulated workplace communication and collaborative tasks, while finance textbooks prioritize analytical reasoning and impersonal disciplinary knowledge. Despite the coexistence of these genres within business curricula, comparative research examining how they construct authority and gender remains limited.

The present study addresses this gap by comparing Business English and financial textbook discourse from a discourse-pragmatic perspective.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Theoretical and analytical framework

The study adopts a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach grounded in a triangulated analytical framework that integrates Critical Genre Analysis, stance and metadiscourse theory, and discourse-based approaches to authority and gender in professional communication. This combination allows for a multi-level examination of how authority is linguistically constructed and how gender is positioned or backgrounded within business education textbooks.

At the macro-analytical level, Critical Genre Analysis (Bhatia, 2016) provides the framework for comparing Business English and financial textbook discourse. This approach views genres as socially situated, goal-oriented communicative events shaped by institutional practices and professional expectations. Within this perspective, authority is conceptualized as a genre-specific discursive outcome that emerges from conventionalized rhetorical practices, textual organization, and communicative purposes.

At the micro-analytical level, the study draws on stance and metadiscourse frameworks (Hyland, 2004; Hyland, 2008; Biber, 2006) to operationalize authority through concrete linguistic resources. Stance markers such as modal verbs, evaluative expressions, and stance adverbs are examined to identify degrees of epistemic certainty, mitigation, and evaluation. Metadiscursive features, including engagement markers and reader-oriented devices, are analyzed to capture how authors position themselves in relation to their audience and negotiate authority interpersonally.

Gender is approached from a discursive and pragmatic perspective, informed by discourse-based studies of authority and gender in professional contexts (Schnurr, 2024). Rather than treating gender as a fixed social variable, the analysis conceptualizes it as an emergent category that becomes visible through explicit role attribution, interactional positioning, and identity labels, or is rendered implicit through abstraction, impersonality, and agent suppression. This framework allows the study to examine not only how gender is represented, but also how its absence contributes to the construction of apparently neutral professional authority.

2.2. Corpus and data selection

The corpus comprised 24 purposively selected qualitative extracts, including 12 extracts from Market Leader: Intermediate Business English Course Book (Cotton et al., 2010) and 12 extracts from Multinational Business Finance (Eiteman et al., 2016). The extracts represented recurrent discourse types such as collaborative tasks, negotiation scenarios, meeting management, telephoning activities, conceptual definitions, analytical explanations, and discussions of financial risk. The corpus was designed to capture

pragmatic markers related to stance, engagement, impersonality, and gender representation across the two genres. The textbooks were selected because they reflect contrasting communicative purposes: Market Leader emphasizes professional interaction, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving, whereas Multinational Business Finance prioritizes conceptual explanation and disciplinary expertise.

From Market Leader, extracts include collaborative tasks, meeting simulations, negotiation activities, and discussion prompts. Examples include directives such as “Work with a partner. List some of your favourite brands” and evaluative prompts including “What image and qualities does each one have?”, which require learners to express opinions and justify evaluations (Cotton, Falvey, & Kent, 2010, p. 6). Additionally, meeting-management activities include expressions such as “Could you let him finish, please?”, “How do you feel about...?”, and “What do you think?”, which model negotiation, mitigation, and audience engagement (Cotton et al., 2010).

From Multinational Business Finance, extracts include explanatory sections, conceptual overviews, and discussions of financial risk. Representative examples include statements describing multinational enterprises as organizations operating across different institutional forms and explanations of foreign exchange and political risks affecting multinational firms (Eiteman, Stonehill, & Moffett, 2016, pg. 5-6).

Extracts were selected according to four criteria:

- (1) the presence of identifiable pragmatic markers related to stance, engagement, impersonality, or evaluation;
- (2) representation of professional communication involving negotiation, leadership, explanation, or expert positioning;
- (3) inclusion of explicit gender references or examples of gender neutralization through abstraction and impersonal discourse;
- (4) illustration of recurrent genre-specific patterns rather than isolated linguistic forms.

The aim was analytical depth rather than statistical representativeness, consistent with qualitative discourse-pragmatic methodology.

2.3. Coding scheme and analytical procedure

All selected extracts were analyzed using a structured coding scheme aligned with the study's research questions. The analysis focused on four interrelated dimensions: stance, engagement, impersonality, and gender representation. These dimensions capture both interpersonal and ideational aspects of authority construction.

The coding process was conducted in three stages. First, each genre was analyzed independently in order to identify recurrent pragmatic patterns specific to Business English discourse and financial discourse. Second, a comparative analysis was undertaken to highlight systematic similarities and differences across genres. Finally, the findings were interpreted in relation to communicative purpose, genre conventions, and institutional context. Table no. 1 summarizes the analytical framework, coding categories, and linguistic indicators used in the analysis.

Table no. 1. Analytical framework and coding categories

Dimension	Coding categories	Linguistic indicators	RQ
Stance	epistemic certainty; mitigation; evaluation	modal verbs; declaratives; stance adverbs	RQ1
Engagement	audience positioning; inclusiveness	inclusive we; directives; conditionals	RQ1, RQ3
Impersonality	abstraction; agent suppression	passives; nominalizations; generic agents	RQ1, RQ2
Gender	explicit representation; suppression	gendered roles; identity labels; absence	RQ2

This analytical procedure ensures methodological transparency and allows authority and gender to be examined as discursively constructed phenomena shaped by genre-specific pragmatic choices.

3. Results

3.1. Pragmatic strategies across textbook genres

The analysis reveals clear differences in how professional authority is constructed in the two textbook genres. Table no. 2 presents representative examples illustrating the pragmatic strategies identified in the corpus.

Table no. 2. Pragmatic strategies in Business English and financial textbook discourse

Genre	Pragmatic strategy	Example	Source
Business English discourse	Collaborative task framing	"Work with a partner. List some of your favourite brands."	Cotton et al., (2010)
Business English discourse	Evaluative reasoning	"What image and qualities does each one have?"	Cotton et al., (2010)
Business English discourse	Negotiation framing	"We'd like to reach a deal with you today."	Cotton et al., (2010)
Business English discourse	Diplomatic negotiation	"Could you possibly give me a discount?"	Cotton et al., (2010)
Financial textbook discourse	Conceptual definition	"Multinational enterprises are firms that operate in more than one country."	Eiteman et al., (2016)
Financial textbook discourse	Analytical description	"The foreign exchange market provides the institutional structure through which currencies are exchanged."	Eiteman et al., (2016)
Financial textbook discourse	Financial risk explanation	"MNEs face foreign exchange risks due to foreign operations."	Eiteman et al., (2016)
Financial textbook discourse	Strategic explanation	"Strategic motives drive the decision to invest abroad."	Eiteman et al., (2016)

The analysis reveals systematic differences in how professional authority is pragmatically constructed across the two textbook genres.

In Market Leader, authority is primarily interactional and collaborative. The discourse relies heavily on directives, evaluative questions, and audience engagement. For example, the instruction "Work with a partner. List some of your favourite brands" positions learners as active participants in discussion and collaborative meaning construction (Cotton et al., 2010). Likewise, prompts such as "What image and qualities does each one have?" require evaluative reasoning and stance-taking.

Meeting activities reinforce this interactional orientation through mitigation and consensus-building strategies. Expressions including "Could you let him finish, please?", "The purpose of this meeting is...", "How do you feel about...?", and "What do you think?" illustrate diplomatic negotiation and interpersonal management (Cotton et al., 2010). These linguistic forms correspond to engagement markers and stance strategies identified in the coding framework.

The textbook also foregrounds professional communication through tasks involving negotiation with investors and decision-making scenarios. For example, participants are instructed to negotiate investment conditions and anticipate stakeholder questions, reinforcing authority as communicative competence (Cotton et al., 2010).

In contrast, Multinational Business Finance constructs authority through conceptual explanation, technical terminology, and declarative certainty. The preface presents multinational enterprises as organizations operating in multiple institutional forms and discusses foreign exchange and political risks through analytical exposition rather than interpersonal interaction (Eiteman et al., 2016).

Financial discourse additionally emphasizes abstraction and impersonal explanation. For example, explanations of forward hedging and money market hedging focus on systemic mechanisms and institutional processes rather than individual actors. Statements such as "The firm seeking to construct a

money market hedge borrows in one currency and exchanges the proceeds for another currency” foreground procedure and financial logic rather than interpersonal negotiation (Eiteman et al., 2016).

3.2. Gender representation and the pragmatic construction of authority

The analysis suggests that gender visibility differs across the two genres. In Market Leader, gender occasionally appears through workplace scenarios, interviews, and professional roles, such as managers, directors, and recruitment specialists, although authority is generally linked to communicative competence rather than explicitly gendered attributes. The textbook includes a unit titled Women at work (Unit 8, Human Resources), indicating that gender becomes visible in selected pedagogical contexts.

More explicit gender visibility appears through the thematic organization of Market Leader, where professional authority is occasionally discussed in relation to workplace identity and gendered experience. For example, the inclusion of the unit Women at work (Unit 8, Human Resources) foregrounds gender as a relevant dimension of professional participation rather than treating professional authority as entirely gender-neutral (Cotton et al., 2010). At the same time, many communicative tasks involving meetings, negotiation, and leadership rely on managerial or executive roles that are not explicitly gender-marked, suggesting a tendency toward partial neutralization of professional identity through role-based representation. This pattern indicates that authority in Business English discourse is constructed primarily through communicative competence and interactional performance, while gender remains intermittently visible through topic selection and workplace scenarios.

The relative absence of explicit gender markers in financial discourse appears closely linked to genre conventions emphasizing objectivity, abstraction, and disciplinary expertise. References to institutional actors such as multinational enterprises, markets, and financial systems replace individual social identities, while passive constructions and nominalizations further suppress personal attribution. Gender is therefore backgrounded not through explicit exclusion, but through discourse patterns privileging institutional processes over individual agency.

4. Discussion

The findings support previous research on professional discourse by showing that professional authority in business education is constructed differently across textbook genres. The two textbook genres examined in this study therefore model distinct forms of professional expertise and authority.

The findings also support corpus-based research showing that stance patterns vary according to genre and communicative purpose (Biber, 2006). In the Business English extracts, modal verbs, interrogatives, and inclusive pronouns encourage participation and collaborative reasoning. Authority is therefore associated with communicative competence, flexibility, and interpersonal management rather than purely hierarchical expertise.

In contrast, financial textbook discourse constructs authority through abstraction, conceptual explanation, and epistemic certainty. Declarative structures, nominalizations, and impersonal formulations present financial knowledge as objective and institutionally validated. This supports previous research arguing that academic disciplinary discourse frequently constructs expertise through depersonalization and the suppression of subjective presence (Hyland, 2004; Paltridge, 2021).

The comparison between the two genres suggests that professional identity in business education emerges through both interpersonal and institutional forms of competence. Business English discourse promotes communicative authority grounded in interaction and negotiation, whereas financial discourse promotes epistemic authority grounded in analytical reasoning and disciplinary expertise.

The gender-related findings further contribute to discourse-pragmatic research on professional communication and workplace identity. Our study shows that gender is shaped not only through explicit representation but also through interactional visibility and genre conventions.

In Business English discourse, gender remains more visible because communicative scenarios rely on identifiable social actors engaged in meetings, negotiations, and workplace interaction. Authority is constructed through conversational participation and professional role allocation. This finding supports sociolinguistic research demonstrating that workplace authority is interactionally negotiated through discourse practices associated with leadership and collaboration (Holmes, 2006; Schnurr, 2024).

At the same time, the analysis suggests that the selected Business English materials reproduce relatively balanced interactional participation. Still, male-associated managerial roles appear somewhat more frequently in several extracts, suggesting that broader organizational hierarchies may still influence textbook representation.

In contrast, the financial textbook discourse largely neutralizes gender through abstraction and impersonality. Human actors are replaced by institutions, systems, and economic processes, while passive structures and nominalizations reduce individual visibility.

Interaction-oriented genres tend to make gender more visible through interpersonal communication, whereas knowledge-oriented academic genres suppress identity markers through institutional and abstract discourse. Gender in professional discourse should therefore be examined not only through explicit representation but also through mechanisms of abstraction and discursive backgrounding.

Conclusions

This study examined how professional authority is pragmatically constructed in two textbook genres widely used in business education: Business English pedagogical materials and academic financial textbooks. Through a comparative analysis of Market Leader: Intermediate Business English and Multinational Business Finance, the study explored how stance, engagement, impersonality, and gender representation contribute to the construction of authoritative discourse.

The findings demonstrate that the two genres promote distinct models of professional authority. Market Leader constructs authority as an interactional and relational process in which influence emerges through negotiation, collaborative discussion, mitigation strategies, and audience engagement. Frequent use of directives, evaluative questions, and meeting-management expressions such as “What do you think?” and “Could you let him finish, please?” reflects professional authority grounded in communicative competence and interpersonal effectiveness.

In contrast, Multinational Business Finance constructs authority primarily through epistemic certainty, conceptual explanation, and impersonal analytical discourse. Explanations of multinational enterprises, foreign exchange risk, and hedging strategies rely on declarative formulations and technical terminology that position knowledge as objective and institutionally validated.

The analysis also indicates differences in the representation of gender across the two genres. These findings suggest that genre conventions shape not only how professional expertise is communicated but also whose identities remain visible within professional discourse. In Market Leader, gender occasionally becomes visible through workplace roles, managerial identities, and pedagogical scenarios, including themes explicitly addressing women in professional contexts. In contrast, Multinational Business Finance largely neutralizes gender through abstraction, institutional terminology, and impersonal explanatory structures. The relative absence of explicit gender markers suggests that authority in financial discourse is associated with disciplinary expertise rather than individualized professional identities. These findings indicate that genre conventions influence not only how authority is constructed but also whether gender remains visible or becomes backgrounded in educational discourse.

The findings therefore suggest that students in business education encounter complementary models of expertise: relational authority, grounded in communication and negotiation, and epistemic authority, grounded in analytical and disciplinary knowledge. Developing awareness of these genre-specific constructions may support more critical engagement with professional discourse and educational materials.

Future research could expand the corpus to additional textbook genres, incorporate quantitative corpus analysis, or investigate how students interpret and reproduce these models of authority in classroom interaction.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement:

No GenAI tool was used in the development of this paper.

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