This chapter will:

- Profile and cite replicable studies from a number of key research areas: contextualized business discourse research, research on business writing and business talk, and studies of business document design;
- Present some of the theoretical frameworks and methodologies business discourse researchers have used;
- Provide examples of project ideas that could form the basis for individual, collaborative or group research.

7.1 Investigating the business environment: studies of business discourse in context

In business, communication is not an end in itself; there is always an underlying business purpose or objective to be achieved as a result of the communication. To study and understand organizational communication researchers need to take into account the specifics of the context, including business strategy, the business environment and professional practices, and how that context influences communication practices in a given discourse community (e.g. Varner, 2000; Bhatia, 2004). Business discourse researchers that have investigated the link between business discourse practices and the business context have taken different approaches, depending on the aims of their research, and have used various methodologies to collect and analyse their data. Using a selection of representative studies in the field, we will outline and discuss some important approaches and methods in business discourse research, and present some of the theoretical frameworks that researchers have used as the starting point for their enquiries or as a basis for analysing their data.
Business discourse practices and communication needs in organizations: quantitative approaches

Elsewhere in this book, we discuss examples of large-scale quantitative studies of business practitioners’ communication skills and language needs that have investigated the interface between language use and business discourse practices, and the organizational context in which they occur (see Part 2). We note, for instance, that quantitative surveys conducted in Europe since the 1990s have indicated a clear relationship between the geographical scope of exporting companies’ corporate activities and foreign language use and skills needs in these firms (e.g. van Hest & Oud-de Glas, 1991; Hagen, 1993; 1999; Christie et al., 2001; ELAN, 2006). The ELAN (2006) surveys, for instance, commissioned by the European Union at the turn of the millennium to investigate the relationship between language needs, corporate language strategy and economic performance in internationally operating companies across 29 European countries, showed that English is the most widely required and used lingua franca for international business in over 20 markets, in Europe and beyond. It is used relatively more extensively by larger European companies than SMEs, a reflection of the wider scope of these companies’ business dealings, and partly the result of their frequently adopting a single corporate language, which has led to English being the official corporate language in many post-merger and multinational companies in Europe over the past decades (cf. Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006). At the same time, however, a number of studies have shown that French, German, Spanish and Russian also continue to be used relatively frequently for international business dealings, despite the advent of English as the international language of business (e.g. ELAN, 2006; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; cf. Vandermeeren, 1999).

What large-scale quantitative studies such as ELAN and its pre-cursors (ELUCIDATE, 1999; ELISE, 2001; REFLECT, 2002) clearly show is that the language factor, and in the European context, multilingualism, is essential not only in achieving international success and a competitive edge at the level of individual companies, but also in economic development and increased affluence in the region more generally (see also Hagen, n.d.; Dhir & Savage, 2002). A significant proportion of European companies lose or fail to land contracts and underperform internationally due to a lack of foreign language expertise (see also Christie et al., 2001). Over half the companies surveyed for ELAN (2006), i.e. in 13 of the 29 countries, and even higher percentages of companies in the new(er) member states such as Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, expected to see the demand for foreign language skills grow in the near future as globalization continues to increase. Also, the effects of globalization have not been restricted to the larger, Europe-based multinational companies, but have impacted smaller to medium-sized enterprises located throughout the region.