

Role of Simulations in the Thai Graduate Business English Program: Can They Engage and Elicit Learners' Realistic Use of Specific Language?

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Abstract—This research paper aims at exploring the views of Thai adult learners enrolling in the one-year Graduate Diploma Program in English for Business and Management (EBM), Thammasat University, on the use of business simulations in terms of their realistic nature, level of engagement, and usefulness. In addition to the learners' views, outcomes of four different simulated meeting tasks conducted by a group of four learners were analyzed to explore how realistic patterns of interaction used in those simulations were. The hypothesis of this study is that if the learners find the simulated tasks engaging and representative of the real-world contexts, they are likely to focus on using specific and work-related language to fulfill the task purposes. In-depth interviews with a total of eight EBM students and audio-recordings of simulated meetings were the main data collection methods of this qualitative study. Discussion of the findings led to the conclusion that simulations strived to elicit the use of language which was similar to the authentic generic patterns found in the real world' business meetings. It further pointed out that the participants believed simulations were likely to assist them in improving their use of specific language to achieve their real-world business operations.

Index Terms—simulations, business discourse, genre analysis, language learning, second language acquisition, learners' interactions

I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper attempts to explore the way simulated business-meeting tasks shape the use of language of eight adult learners who were undertaking the Graduate Diploma Program in English for Business and Management (EBM) at the Department of English, Thammasat University, Thailand, while they were working on the assigned simulations. The one-year EBM program at Thammasat was designed for professional people and recent graduates who needed to strengthen their English communicative skills in order to communicate fluently and effectively in a global business environment.

The majority of EBM students are full-time employees who urgently need advanced English skills to advance to a higher position. Their expectations for proficiency are high, and some have expressed concern that their communicative skills had not improved as much as expected despite completing EBM speech communication courses with native-English speaking teachers. They particularly pointed to a lack in opportunities to practice using the target language specifically related to real-life situations. According to the students, the most relevant scenarios that actually took place in the classroom, and came closest to simulation, were those in which the teacher asked the class to work on role plays where they were provided information they could use to achieve the tasks. As simulated tasks are believed to encourage learners to interact with others in lifelike situations and to elicit their use of the target language in a natural way, this study, thus, aims at exploring the role of simulation in making the target language use more relevant and motivating for participants.

Studies central to second language acquisition have considered communicative tasks as learning opportunities for learners to receive comprehensible input as well as modified output, meaning that they are encouraged to negotiate meaning while working upon tasks, leading to achievement of an outcome (Ellis, 2003; Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Richards, 2001; Skehan, 1998). Tasks with a focus on meaning, particularly real-world tasks, are designed to respond to the findings of a needs analysis, which of course tends to be important, relevant and useful to learners in the real world. The learners' second language acquisition process is believed to stimulate while working upon good unfocused tasks carefully designed to combine the three major conditions—(1) the negotiation of meaning, (2) task demands and (3) the discourse mode called dialogic task (Richards, 2001). This means a good task needs to be interactive requiring learners to negotiate and exchange meaning with clear instructions.

Given all these significant elements of unfocused tasks, we can see that simulations contain components necessary to accomplish real-work related situations wherein learners are required to use imagination, critical thinking, appropriate target language skills, and group dynamics skills to solve lifelike problems, interacting in groups of three to four members. What makes simulation different from role play or any other tasks is that learners can retain their

individuality and exercise their creativity in achieving task outcomes. Unlike role plays, learners are normally assigned to perform according to what is instructed on a worksheet. In most cases, they are required to engage in an exchange of information activity which does not encourage them to tap into language skills in the same way that they would in a real life situation. Numerous applied linguists have emphasized the importance and influence of simulations in language development. For example, Tomlinson & Masuhara (2003) state that learners are encouraged to work collaboratively to solve lifelike problems while working on simulations and they will tend to put all their energy and efforts in working out a problem and achieve a task outcome.

To prove whether or not simulations can engage learners in negotiating meaning and concentrating efforts into producing realistic use of language to achieve the task outcome as a way to assist EBM learners to improve their business communication, I applied the analysis of genres of business meetings to determine the authenticity of the participants' patterns of interaction. Thus, the goals of this study are: (a) to investigate how realistic the participants' patterns of interaction used in the simulated tasks are, and (b) to identify what the participants' perception towards the simulated tasks were and whether the simulations could engage them in solving lifelike problems and expressing themselves in the way they expect to perform in real-life situations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Simulations in ESP*

Since learners of ESP courses possess an urgent need to improve their professional English, opportunities to practice English in lifelike situations in the classroom context are compulsory. Simulations appear to be most reliable in providing practice opportunities for enhancing 'flexibility' in their use of professional English, particularly when interacting with others in an unpredictable spoken discourse (Burns and Moore, 2008, p. 324). Due to the fact that learners are not provided with any script, simulations contain the nature of unpredictability, which is similar to real-life interactions. In addition to the nature of unpredictability, Burns and Moore (2008) also highlight the authenticity of simulated interactions by saying learners must "deal with potentially face-threatening consequences when breakdowns occur in real-time simulated interaction, through strategies such as clarification, recasting and so on to make authentic demands on spoken communication" (p. 324). Learners, thus, need to rely on not only their professional background, their creativity but also their potential to respond to any kind of unpredictability during their interactions with others, adding up the level of authenticity to simulations.

In addition to the unpredictable nature of simulations, they of course convey 'reality of function' (Jones, 1984), in which the teacher and the learner are aware that simulations are part of the language course and that all must behave as though simulations were real to them. To do so, they must make decisions, express their own views and tackle problems in the way they would do in the authentic world, despite the fact that their decisions will not be susceptible to the outside world. Through the simulations' reality of function, learners perceive the reality on the inside and thus are entitled with power and responsibility to achieve the outcomes and solve a problem. Levine, Eppelsheimer, Kuzay, Moti and Wilby (2004) point out that a simulation-based language program can offer the learners with opportunities to integrate their language skills with critically analyzing concepts and other knowledge areas including intercultural communicative competence, communicative strategies, learning strategies and skills in technology.

B. *Genres of Business Meetings*

In order to justify the extent to which simulated business meetings, produced by eight adult learners in the EBM program, contain the nature of authentic patterns of interactions as appearing in real-life business meetings, it is necessary to investigate the genres of business meetings as well as move analysis and apply those interactional patterns to re-analyse the participants' own simulated business meeting transcriptions. Starting with its definition, a genre is a classification of communicative events where the members of such communicative event share sets of communicative purposes. These purposes influence the structures of discourse and choice of content and style (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013; Handford, 2010, 2007). In this regard, Bargiela-Chiappini (2013) further explained that "within the field of business discourse, researchers have used genre analysis to identify and meaningfully classify systems of *recurrent practices* as they are manifested in texts between and within companies, and to characterize and describe potentially new genres, such as fax and email" (p. 218).

Basically, we can say that genres are shaped according to their purposes. As seen in the case of business meetings, we can recognize them intuitively because they have specific purposes and are different from other types of institutional discourse. A genre is also staged as it contains some stages for the members to follow in order to achieve the goal. Finally, a genre is social as of course we participate in genres to interact with other people.

In this study, I adapted Handford (2007) and McCarthy (2000)'s generic structure of business meetings to analyse the participants' simulated transcriptions. Handford analysed CANBEC, a corpus of audio recordings of authentic business meetings. Those recordings were made in a variety of companies in UK, Germany and Japan. The meetings included internal and external meetings involving a wide range of topics and purposes. Eventually Handford came up with six stages of generic model of business meetings including "*Meeting Preparation*", "*Pre-Meeting*", "*Meeting Coheres*", "*Discussion of the agenda*", "*Closing of meetings*" and "*Post Meeting*" with transition moves, in addition to his analysis of lexicogrammatical items and most frequent clusters produced in those meetings. This generic model also

includes meeting preparation and post meeting stages which are not necessary although they do feed into and flow from the meeting itself.

As for McCarthy (2000), he distinguishes four types of talk in business meetings. The distinction is relevant to business communication in general and business meetings in particular. They are (1) phatic exchanges (greetings and partings) (2) Transactional talk (requests, enquiries, instructions) (3) Transactional-plus-relational talk (non-obligatory task evaluation and comments) and (4) Relational talk (small talk, anecdotes, wider topics of mutual interest). Below is the framework adapted from Handford and McCarthy I employed to analyze the interactional patterns the participants produced while striving to achieve the simulations.

The four-staged Framework of Business Meeting Genre Analysis

Stage 1 Pre-meeting

This is the phase when the participants discuss the topic or some aspects related to the meeting just before the meeting actually starts, or interact with each other through small talk, also referred to by McCarthy (2000) as 'phatic exchanges'. Pre-meeting is one type of social activity; therefore, to establish relationship among the members is common and necessary.

Stage 2 Meeting coheres

At this stage, the Chair normally hands out the agenda and opens the meeting by addressing the issues to be discussed and solved in the meeting. At varying points a switch to interacting with each other through small talk or relational talk, anecdotes or wider topics of mutual interest is permitted. This stage is very important as it is the phase when the participants will understand specific goals of the meeting. Sometimes, items are addressed very explicitly to make things clear for the participants, while at other times items can be implicit, especially if the participants share the same institutional context working for the same department or are about to talk about issues they already know.

Stage 3: Discussion of the agenda/topic

This stage contains several phases which may be called 'clusters of activity'. They can actually be recognized in overall structural organization. However, the patterns of clusters of activity may vary depending on the contextual factors such as relationship of speakers, role of Chair, meeting purpose and topic. The cyclical patterning can occur as well as varying in terms of the level of clarity. Four related phases, each of which builds on the previous one are (1) non-task sounding, (2) task-related exchange of information, (3) persuasion, (4) concessions and agreement. These phases can also include requests, enquiries, instructions, interruptions, incompleteness, summaries, reaching a decision, blocking a decision, evaluating, commenting and so on.

Stage 4: Closing of meeting

This stage can be very indirect and may tend to occur quite quickly in regular meetings. It can also include 'phatic exchanges' like partings here at the closing stage as well.

This four-staged framework along with the use of the focus-group interview were administered to draw out the answers to the following research questions:

- How realistic are the participants' patterns of interaction (four stages of a generic structure of business meetings) as used in the simulated tasks?
- What are the participants' perception of simulations, and can simulations engage them in solving a lifelike problem and expressing themselves in the same way they tend to in personal real-life situations?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

This present study employed qualitative research methods integrating business meeting genre analysis as well as in-depth focus group interviews conducted with all the participants to gain insight into their perceptions of the simulated business meeting tasks. Details of the participants are as follows:

A. Participants

A total number of 8 volunteers, aged between 26 and 41, undertaking the Graduate Diploma Program in English for Business and Management Class of Academic Year 2012 served as the self-selected samples and they volunteered themselves as meeting participants working upon 2 different simulated tasks each. All the participants received their MA in Business from a university in Thailand and had just completed their 1st year in the EBM program. Seven out of eight were working full time in private companies which assigned them to use English at work on daily routine tasks. Of this group, one was a housewife who was tending to her own rental business in a downtown area, communicating with overseas customers most of the time. The participants were divided into two groups, each of which was asked to prepare and work on two different simulations, and also requested to select group members who they were familiar with on their own, as close relationship was proven to be one of the factors helping all group members create contingency necessary to achieve successful group work (Tomlinson, 2008).

B. Simulated Tasks

The four different simulations were chosen and adapted from Thompson (2007) as they mimicked authentic business situations. However, due to its lack of cultural connection to the Thai social context, I localized part of the situations to increase the level of familiarity, authenticity and motivation of the participants.

Simulation no.1

• Your company Harnn & Thann Thailand is having a board meeting to discuss the launching of a new bar of soap. You all are a board committee member having a debate about what the name and advertising for the bar of soap should be. You can freely decide the product name, price, packaging, etc. One of you is a marketing director who is chairing the board meeting. And the rest of you are marketing managers.

Simulation no.2

• You are a member of the customer care management team at the subsidiary of a British insurance company in Bangkok, Thailand. You are meeting with three other managers to discuss possible changes in the way you offer customer care. The company has a call center with 65 agents, 25 of which spend their time making calls to potential customers. The other 40 agents answer calls from potential and existing customers.

The company has been looking at web-based customer care for several years. Some people are saying that call centre agents should no longer answer calls from customers. Instead, they think there should be a customer care website where new customers can find answers to their questions. Student A's job is to chair the meeting. The rest of the students share your own ideas with other members and try to decide together what to do at the end.

Simulation no.3

• You are a member of the public relations team at a pet food manufacturer. Your leading brand of dog food is Friskee. Unfortunately, you have just heard that Friskee contains small quantities of Z44T. This is a chemical which is not dangerous for animals to eat. However, it can cause sickness in humans if taken in quantities. Food safety guidelines do not provide clear rules about Z44T and there is no legal reason why you should withdraw the product from shops. This is strictly a potential public relations problem. You are going to have a meeting with other members of the PR team to decide what to do. One of you can chair the meeting.

Simulation no.4

• Your General Product Company in Thailand is under threat from other local competitors. You have to reduce overhead by 20%. Your present costs are divided as follows: Salaries: 40% R & D: 5% Marketing: 10% Travel: 5% Administration: 10% Facilities: 5% Rent: 10% Sundries: 5% Communications: 10% Hold a meeting and decide how you can make the necessary budgetary changes. One person can chair the meeting and at the end try to come up with the solutions together.

C. Procedures

The participants were thoroughly informed of the instructions of how to carry on the selected simulated business meeting tasks and were given one week for the preparation. This is because in the real world, it is necessary for members to research appropriate information in preparation to provide information necessary to support discussion. On the day of their simulation video recording, participants could spend as much time as they found appropriate to achieve their meeting purposes, exactly similar to the real world meeting in their lives. They were also told, before hand, that they would be video recorded so some participants felt like they needed to dress up like they were used to doing in their real world company meetings. At the end of the simulations, they were interviewed as a group to investigate their perceptions at depth towards the simulations. The interview questions particularly focused on the authenticity of the selected simulated tasks, their perceptions towards the reality of the tasks' functions and problems they experienced while conducting the simulations, and their comments and suggestions to develop new business meeting simulations in the future.

D. Data Analysis

The simulations were both video and audio recorded, after which they were transcribed using a transcription system by Jefferson (1985, 1996), which has been universally employed in the field of Conversational analysis (CA). This same system has also been very influential on approaches to transcription more broadly (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993; Ochs, 1979). Furthermore, it is regarded as having become "a near-globalized set of instructions for transcription" (Slembrouck, 2007, p. 823). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), a CA transcript "embodies in its format and in the phenomena it marks out the analytic concerns" that drive the work of conversation analysts (p. 76). Transcript notation encompasses two types of concerns; the dynamics of turn-taking and the characteristics of speech delivery (p. 76). Jefferson notation encompasses symbols to represent aspects of each. For example, brackets represent the beginning and ending points of overlapping speech. However, as this research does not aim at focusing on intonation, and participants' feelings, some original symbols were removed to make the transcription convention more appropriate (Krzyzanowski, 2008).

TABLE 1:
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTION IN SIMULATED BUSINESS MEETING TASKS

Symbol	Name	Use
[text]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
=	Equal Sign	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
(# of seconds)	Timed Pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech.
(.)	Micropause	A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
underline	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
:::	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance.
(text)	Parentheses	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
((laughs))	Double Parentheses and a word <i>laughs</i>	Non-verbal behavior

The data received from the transcription was analyzed through the use of the 4-staged framework of business genre analysis as reviewed in the literature review section to find out whether or not the language through the simulations contained elements of authentic business meetings. The focus-group interviews were transcribed without the use of transcription convention because the content of the interviews was the focal point of this data collection.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Level of Authenticity of Language Used in Simulations

The findings received from the video-recording transcriptions were analyzed to investigate whether the participants employed the similar generic patterns of interaction as the four-staged Framework of Business Meeting Genre Analysis adapted from Handford (2007) and McCarthy (2000) in the simulated tasks. All four stages of the analysis are discussed below:

Stage 1: Pre-meeting

Only one simulation was found to contain the generic pattern of Stage 1: Pre-meeting and that simulation is Simulation no. 3. Here is the excerpt of Simulation no 3.

Excerpt no.4.1

C1: Good afternoon everybody (.) Welcome to PR team meeting.

P1, P2, P3: [Good afternoon].

C1: How are you, guys?

P1: Not too bad. Welcome back from the long holiday.

P2, P3: [Oh, OK].

C1: Umm (.) Today what we are going to talk about in a meeting is quite important as you know now we are facing a problem of losing our major customers. But we don't know exactly what it is, like the cause of the problem. So we are going to discuss about it.

P1: Right.

This is obviously "small talk". Speakers greeted each other and one participant made a reference to their long holiday. Meeting agenda has not yet been raised by the chair and participants are allowed to conduct brief informal conversation exchanges that contribute to creating a good relationship prior to meeting formalities. As characterized in the 4-stage framework for business meetings, this kind of generic pattern does not contain any specific business lexis as its purpose and goal is to strengthen the relationship. The other three simulations also convey this element, but in a more abrupt manner. The participants tend to use a more straightforward way of identifying the goals of the meeting, much more than employing this kind of 'phatic communication', as we can see in the following excerpt of Simulation no. 1.

Excerpt no.4.2

C1: Good afternoon everyone. That we invite you to join the meeting today because umm (.) after we have the competition of our product name on the soap of our company. From the marketing that we discussed on last meeting we meet to ur have the final result about product name, right? And the advertising campaign. Then we would like to brainstorming about this today. I would like to know your idea about this due to after we have the competition, we have three names to debate today also. The first name is Jas Bath. The second name is Jas Bar. The third name is Natural Bar.

P1: Could you repeat again?

Stage 2: Meeting coheres

Excerpt no.4.3 (Simulation no.3) include the generic pattern of Stage 2: Meeting coheres. In this excerpt, the chair opens the meeting in a very explicit way (From the phrase "*what we are going to talk about in a meeting is...*", "*So we are going to discuss it*"). The participants are made to understand their roles and responsibilities in helping to solve the problem from the very start of the meeting. The Chair goes on to elaborate on the problems of the products which contain Z44T, a chemical substance. She, however, is not quite sure whether it is dangerous to people or animals, while in fact, in the simulation worksheet the Z44T is indeed not harmful to animals but could cause sickness if people consumed in large amounts. So when the chair opens the meeting, she did not provide all the information to the participants at the onset and proceeds to ask for participants' opinions on the problem and how to solve it. The chair's generic patterns of language convey the key concepts of the topic she needed to bring up in the meeting. The specific

lexical choices that are frequently used are “problems”, “important”, “the problem”, “a problem” because she perceives the chemical substance as the urgent issue every participant needed to tackle.

Excerpt no.4.3

C1: Umm. Today what we are going to talk about in a meeting is quite important (#2) as you know now we are facing a problem of losing our major customers. But we don't know exactly what it is, (.) like the cause of the problem. So we are going to discuss about it.

P1: Right.

C1: And also let me introduce ah (#2) let me talk about the problem a little bit. As far as I know, ah (#2) now we are having a problem about our product called Friskee, which (#2) is (#2) now it's revealed from the research that it contains a small quantity of Z44T which I'm not sure what kind of chemical substance it is but it's quite umm (.) important that we have to find out what it is. So if it's harmful to people or animals, so that we can find out the way to handle the problem.

P1: Right.

C1: So ah (#2) today we are going to talk about the problem and find solutions to the problem. So I'd like to hear from you guys first. What do you think? What's your opinion about the problem?

P1: So maybe you can start first, yeah?

P3: Z44T is a chemical which is not dangerous for animals that (#2) ah (#2) but it cause sickness with humans if they eat a lot of it so (.) I think we should communicate to the customers about Z44T no dangerous for animals because we use in a small quantity.

P1: Right.

P3: And then we have a brochure and attach it to our product when we deliver to the store. And educate the customers to know about Z44T is not dangerous.

In Excerpt no 4.4 (Simulation no.4), the chair formally opens the meeting and includes an element of “relational talk” (“Welcome back from last week meeting. It's been a long time no see”) with the participants; however, the issues are not addressed in an explicit manner. All the participants know is that there is a threat from competitors and she does not provide much detail about the weak points of the company. However, she does make it clear that they needed to cut off the overhead costs to survive and asks for opinions from the competitors. The chair's meeting cohere generic patterns include “I have to say is quite important because...”, “it's quite a big issue that I'd like to bring up in the meeting”.

Excerpt no.4.4

C1: OK (.) Welcome back from last week meeting. It's been a long time no see. Today I believe that the things I'm going to (#2) that I have to say is quite important because now our company has been threatening from the rising competitors.

P1: OK

C1: So it's quite a big issue that I'd like to bring up in the meeting first. Umm, (#2) it's about the cost and our profit of this year. It's because as right now we need to be able to be more competitive to compete with the competitors (.) so maybe some overhead costs have to be reduced. So I'd like to hear you guys first.

P1, P2: [OK]

Excerpt no.4.5 (Simulation no.2) shows another example of the stage 2 pattern but this one contains unique characteristics because it is not produced in a dialogue but in a monologue in the sense that the chair did not allow the participants to interfere her talk by discussing the issues non-stop. She attempted to raise the issue of reducing the number of customer care service agents, even if the company wanted to increase sales revenue and continued by giving her own solutions, persuading the participants to follow her ideas at the same time at this stage.

Excerpt 4.5

C1: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for your time today. The reason I asked you guys ah (.) to meet up today because I want to talk about the possibility for changing the way we offer our customer care service to our customers (#2). I call this meeting because I see one problem and that I'm quite concerned about. Ur (.) we actually at the moment we have 65 customer care agents but only 25 of them are (#2) you know umm assigned to making call to find new customers to potential customers and 40 of them are dedicated to answering calls from our existing customers. So basically we can say that only 25 of them are responsible for finding new customers while you know 40 of them are actually trying to do the after- sale support.....

In brief, all the simulated meeting tasks convey the 2nd stage of the four-staged framework of business meetings in which the chair discusses the historical background of the issues and identifies the goals and expected outcomes of the meeting. What seems to be problematic is that the chair in each meeting does not offer the background issues completely and in Simulation no. 2, the chair does not give the participants any room to interrupt.

Stage 3: Discussion of the agenda/topic

In Excerpt 4.6 (Simulation no.1), the chair proposes names for the spa soap, their new product and asks for the participants' opinions. P1 is the first participant who expresses her opinions. She disagrees with the first two names but prefers the name “natural bar” and then provides reasons to support her ideas. Then P3 agrees with the P1 and at the same, P1 who agrees with the name “natural bar” expresses a negative opinion for the name “jas baht” and attempts to ask for other participants' ideas as the way to persuade others to reach a decision. P1 also interrupts others in an attempt

to persuade others that “natural bar” is the best name. All participants do not merely say “Yes, I agree with you”, but instead attempt to provide reasons to support their ideas. Suddenly, P1 thinks of something. Just before they are about to make a decision, she interrupts and expresses her concern that they may not be allowed to use the name “natural bar” due to the Thai business law. Hence, the discussion changes from jumping to a conclusion to discussing the possibility of using the product name. C1 then proposes that they may either use the name “nature bar” and consult the legal team. Every participant agrees with this proposal and shifts their discussion on to the advertising campaign.

The discourse reflects a series of activities related to negotiation—proposing ideas, interrupting, rejecting others’ views, supporting others’ ideas, and changing one’s own opinions, while attempting to propose each individual ideas. The fact that they eagerly and actively engaged in interrupting, shifting topics, proposing new ideas ensured that this simulation contained an important element of business meetings, authenticity.

Excerpt no. 4.6

C1: Uh ah (.) The first one is Jas Bath. (#2) B-a-t-h. The second is Jas Bar and the third is Natural Bar. Jas is come from our ingredient on the soap that’s ur jasmine rice.

P2: To me I actually I don’t really think that the word ‘Jas’ will make the customers know that ‘jas’ actually stands for jasmine. So I personally prefer the name natural bar because at the whole (#2) how we market how we market the big picture of our product we tell you know we send the message that our product is actually made of natural ingredients. So I think that the natural bar will emphasize the whole theme or the whole product range of our company and again (.) I said Jas (.) J-a-s doesn’t really tell at you know? the first instance that Jas actually comes from jasmine. So I personally prefer Natural Bar.

P3: OK. I agree. Because I think the natural bar is the name to deliver to the customers directly and the customer will know about the our product.

C1: Ok the same as me due to I think in my opinion (.) Jas is look like a negative meaning and difficult to develop the advertising campaign due to our brand needs to easy to link with the advertising campaign and easy understanding for our customers also yes and how about Khun Ying?

P1: I agree with Dear and Aor because ur (#2) I don’t like Jas (.) Jas bath is just like we just finish a bath and what happens is that I think it not make sense but for the word natural. Natural is mean ur (.) you can see the tree or something that it feel good for you.

P2: I think it will help differentiate our self from other brands that um (#2) is um are sold in the supermarket. It will say that we’re different from Palm Olive. We’re different from Dove. Because we are not the same. So I think we should go for the natural—

P1: Uh uh sorry (.) I would like to concern something that we should check for the word natural. We can use it or not because it may be a reserved word we cannot.

C1: We cannot use the “natural” word?

P3: Yes. Directly. But I know that the government do not to allow to use the word “natural” for the other product.

P1: Yeah Who will response for checking this?

In Excerpt no. 4.7 (Simulation no.2), meeting participants were talking about how to replace customer service man power by using social networks. They planned to create FAQ in the form of an interactive chat. However, the chair, C1, did not agree and argued politely against it. She was concerned that the chat might make customer response time slow and provided the reasons to support her claims. Then P2 agreed and proposed to use email so that the staff would not have to answer questions simultaneously. Other participants simultaneously agreed with this proposal since they believed they could actually use one staff to be responsible for correspondence. Therefore, this is an agreement on an outcome. They did not achieve their group’s solution by adopting a linear and simple pattern of negotiation; on the contrary, they put on all of their effort in resorting to a cluster of activities to reach the group’s outcome.

Excerpt no. 4.7

P3: May I er (.) conclude the features on the website? So we will have the features of download documents and we have FAQ and the last one that (#2) Khun Aor recommend us is the online support.

P1: I think it looks like a chat.

P2: Interactive chat.

P3: Ah OK

C1: Excuse me but I do not mean to go against you guys (.) but I have a feeling that the interactive chat will take more time. You know? Because when you chat, some people type slowly. Some people type fast. If we have to ask allocate some of our agent to answer this chat. Then I’m not so sure whether that this will increase productivity or that will increase work proficiency. I’m afraid that it will reduce the overall proficiency of the customer care team. I mean (.) but that is my only concern. I’m happy if you want to try.

P2: But I think if this is your concern, I think can change to the (.) not interactive online but can change to send the email require to directly to the agent. And then the agent receive the require and reply to the customers and that will be so quickly more than telephone call?

C1: Yeah. I think I prefer that idea because ur (.) email will give us time. But if we open the interactive channel. If they say hello, they would expect instant reply from the agent and that will affect the time that the agent will have stay on the chat. I don’t really like that idea.

P1: I think that maybe we create (.) that it looks like leave a message on the web and that message will be linked to customer care and after that we can have one staff dedicate for the correspondence something like that and will call back to the customer later. I think this can be implement without budget, (.) I think that.

C1: Ok because one thing I'd like to make it clear to you guys. The objective is to hope (.) hopefully will increase the sales volume to the company (.) but at the same time won't reduce the level of service quality or won't reduce the team performance or the teamwork efficiency. So whichever solution that you suggest or have in mind maybe try to come up with the pros and cons. I'm not so sure if you think you can do the feasibility report and present your own ideas both positive and negative side of the changes.

In summary, Stage 3: Discussion of the agenda/topic appeared in all the simulated meeting tasks. All participants employed critical thinking skills to solve issues the chair brought up in the meeting, just like they would have done in the real world through a cluster of functions. Table 2 displays the list of functions and generic structures the participants employed to accomplish the meeting goals.

TABLE 2:
LIST OF FUNCTIONS AND GENERIC STRUCTURES THE PARTICIPANTS USED IN THE SIMULATIONS

Functions	Generic structures
Agreeing	"Right", "This is excellent. Perfect!", "OK. Good", "That's a good thing", "Like Khun Ti said, maybe we can reduce rent a little bit"
Disagreeing	"I quite agree with you but I think...", "No. I don't think so", "But I don't agree with...", "To me, I don't really think that ...", "Excuse me but I do not mean to go against you guys, but..."
Checking information	"I've heard the rumor that Facebook will charge you money if you're using Facebook for commercial purpose. Is that true?"
Interrupting	"Could you repeat again?", "Excuse me", "OH, Sorry, I would like to concern something that..."
Proposing ideas	"I would like to suggest that....", "I think that...."
Summarizing/paraphrasing	"So let me put it this way", "so let me clarify our points here"
Controlling the meeting	"Is there anything that you want to add?", "OK you guys have any further concern?", "Alright! I think we'd better leave this to Khun Dutch's hands", "May I just add more, please?",
Adding more information	"So maybe you can start first, yeah?", "So what do you say, Khun Dutch?"
Calling on a speaker	"...but that is my only concern. I'm happy if you want to try"
Compromising	"It's gonna cost a lot. Do you think that our existing products can still make profits? Can still be profitable?", "You know?", "We'd better consider the other way, maybe probably better", "And I think they will understand. But reducing salary is not a good thing", "Natural is a long word. If we connect to bath, that will be four words, right?"
Persuading	

Stage 4: Closing of Meeting

It is clear that the final phase of authentic business meetings appeared in all four simulations through the use of a variety of strategies including the chair showing his or her appreciation to the participants, summarizing the solutions, briefing everyone on their responsibilities for the next meeting, and arranging the next appointment. These signaled to the participants that the meeting was coming to a close. Although they did not finish the simulated meetings out of context, they still believed that they were in the midst of a real meeting which required the completion of a final task, summing up the meeting discussion. Excerpts no. 4.8 (Simulation no.1) can be considered as a good example.

Excerpt no. 4.8

P2: When should we ur (.) aim to have the information required? Can (.) shall we do it?

P1: Shall we have a meeting on next Friday? Because before that I'm busy all week. I'll send you information to you by next Wednesday.

P3: I think I'll finish to discuss with Finance manager I think tomorrow I can send the details to you. And I let me check with the agency in the next week.

P2: And see if they can send you the plan by next Thursday (.) so we can consider and discuss and then talk about their plan and review their plan in the next meeting.

C1: I think after Khun Aor ur contact with production or any agency can send the invitation to us to join the meeting when they come to present their job. OK Thank you very much today.

P1,2,3: [Thank you].

B. Summary of Focus-group Interviews

The transcription of the 30-minute focus-group interviews revealed that participants found that simulation was engaging and real since it closely reflected real-work experiences and they could be themselves while working on those tasks. It also showed that simulated tasks were perceived as challenging since they could only rely on meeting content and they did not know what other participants would say. As a result, they had to pay close attention to what other participants were saying and responded accordingly. Another critical point received from the focus-group interview is that problem-solving based simulated tasks could stimulate critical thinking skills and encourage the use of target language knowledge to achieve the goals of the meetings.

The participants also discovered that simulated tasks must proceed the learning of specific content knowledge to enable them to immediately apply and practice what they had learnt. In relation to the difficulties perceived, participants were not sure if the words they used were correct or not and needed feedback from the teacher. To gain sufficient feedback, they suggested that the activity be presented formally in class by each individual group because if groups merely practiced simultaneously on their own, the teacher would not be able to comment on each individual group.

Participants also expressed difficulty thinking up transitional words or phrases that would help link their ideas with other previous comments and assist them in making interruptions. They also admitted to a lack of confidence on when they could interrupt. Below are the excerpts from the focus-group interview:

R: Overall how did you feel about this simulated task we did today?

The topics are related to our real-work situations so it's good. If the topics are not related, we wouldn't be able to do it well and it's not fun. Like I'm the it manager, and here I have to be an it manager, I think it's better

We can visualize and respond in the way that we will do in our real life. If it's too far from our life, we can't think of what to say or the teacher needs to give feedback and we need to do group by group so we can listen to what others do and teacher should give feedback to all the groups

R: Was it authentic to you?

It's near my real-work situation as I'm working for the Pharmacy and I have to deal with similar problems and use the same thinking process.

Yes I Think it's just like the real meeting in my real life it's just like this. We need a scenario that's close to real life. And it encourage us to use language.

We all need to pay attention, and we actually can't prepare a script because we have to listen to other people which is good.

R: Do you think that simulations promoted any problem-solving ability?

Problem-solving tasks help us engaged in to the lesson. We have to propose good ideas and see what other people feel towards our ideas.

To be ourselves is much better than to be someone else and do according to what the worksheet says. We love to think and share our genuine ideas.

R: Did you experience any problems while conducting this simulated task?

Can't think of transitional words to link ideas to what other people said. But it's challenging. It's two way not just what we propose our ideas but we have to respond to other people ideas at the same time.

It's fun that I have a chance to lead the meeting. It's fun but it's difficult when we have to interrupt, I can't think of word.

V. CONCLUSION

In an attempt to answer three research questions—(1) how realistic are the participants' patterns of interaction (four stages of a generic structure of business meetings) used in the simulated tasks? and (2) what are the participants' perception of simulations and can these simulations engage them in solving lifelike problems by expressing themselves in the way they would tend to do so in real-life situations?, this present study sheds light into a deeper understanding of how Thai adult learners felt about and performed simulated business meeting tasks. Firstly, due to the authentic nature of simulated business meeting tasks, participants reported feeling engaged in the simulations, and being motivated to produce patterns of language they thought they would use in the real world. They did not, by any means, take the simulations for granted and seriously put effort into creating a very subtle language patterns in negotiating with other participants to accomplish the task goals in a spontaneous manner. Every participant played their individual role either as the chair or meeting participants, targeting the specific goals of their assigned tasks.

Their pattern of language use contains similar characteristics to those of the four-staged business meeting genre in which they opened their meeting with 'phatic type of communication' by greeting each other and by attempting to create small talk to establish rapport. They then moved onto the phase where the Chair addressed the meeting agenda in an explicit manner prior to inviting other participants to share individual viewpoints. After which, they arrived at the point where every participant contributed their ideas to the whole group by engaging in a series of different activities including: proposing new ideas, rejecting others' ideas, interrupting others, changing their mind, asking questions, clarifying others' viewpoints, checking understanding, and so on. This was a very significant part of the simulated business meeting tasks because the more they got involved in group discussion, the more likely they could reach a sophisticated solution towards the end of their meeting. In addition, their involvement revealed that they had a high degree of motivation in completing simulations and that they were not just trying to 'get it done'. Instead, it was about 'doing their best'. The final phase of the four generic patterns of business meetings also exists in all the four simulations. Participants employed signaling words to hint that the meeting was approaching its end by showing their appreciation towards other members' opinions, setting their next meeting, assigning individual responsibilities, and making use of 'parting' expressions.

All these have led me to conclude that the use of simulations in the EFL or ELF classroom context can bring great benefits to learners by motivating them to employ the use of target language skills in the way they would do in their

professional life. Offering them opportunities to engage in simulations would further encourage and elicit their use of language in a natural and creative way, by challenging them to use language to solve specific types of problems.

To maximize the benefits of the use of simulations in the EFL and ELF classroom context, the teacher should involve the learners in the process of designing the situations. Since many learners, such as those in the EBM program use English at work and experience real-life problems, they can contribute by sharing situations that make simulation activities relevant. Personalized topics and situations tend to enhance their motivation and engagement. Furthermore, ensuring that students have sufficient input to produce their own output is another key factor the teacher needs to take into consideration. Thus, getting the learners to work upon simulations towards the end of each unit or when they feel confident would be more enriching for them.

In response to their specific language difficulties, the teacher should scaffold the generic structure of the business meetings emphasizing the importance of sequence, pace, face, politeness, power, role and status of the participants which can determine the appropriate use of language in the business meetings. The explicit form of feedback on learners' performance is also needed to raise their awareness on actions they are not conscious of while conducting simulations.

Future research in this area may explore more in-depth other specific groups of learners' language difficulties while they are working on simulations in order to provide the appropriate type of guidance in devising a suitable series of lessons and teaching materials that best promotes students' use of the target language.

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