Genre Theory and Language Change in a Community of Practice

by

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I certify that the thesis entitled

Genre Theory and Language Change in a Community of Practice

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is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

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Date......................................................................................……………….
Acknowledgments

Completing a thesis is a long, involved and often lonely process. It takes a lot of time and effort, and I could not have finished it without support. I would particularly like to express my gratitude here to my supervisor, Dr Ron Goodrich. His enthusiasm for the project, his encouragement and knowledgeable insight were invaluable and greatly appreciated. Thanks also to my associate supervisor, Prof David Birch, for insightful comments and useful references.

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Abstract

At the service centre of a large loyalty program in the travel industry, writers in the correspondence department reply to incoming requests and complaints. As a community of practice (Wenger 1998), the writers have formed a practice around their primary focus of identification: the business letter-of-reply genre. The genre is institutionalised and highly stable, yet it also requires constant negotiation and reification. Writing is situated and operationalised, repetitive and dynamic.

When the writers first heard of an intentional change to the style in which they wrote their letters, they argued that the genre had changed and was no longer a business letter. This research critically examines textual (e.g. Swales 1990, Lewin et al. 2001) and social aspects (e.g. Miller 1984, Dias et al. 1999, Beaufort 1997) of genre theory to analyse the social context, reactions and learning strategies of the community, and to provide a comparative and contrastive analysis of the textual changes.

Findings suggest that the notion of communicative purpose tends to foreground the provision of information over relational purposes, and that the moves and acts of genre analysis appear unable to account for changes in register or style where purpose remains the same. Genre theories that see writing as a situational activity provide no specific methodology for textual analysis.

This dissertation argues that, in this instance at least, the learning involved in mastering a genre cannot be separated from the socialisation and learning involved in becoming a full member of a particular community of practice, and the perception of the nature of a genre is also linked to this socialisation. Thus, the meaning of the term ‘business letter’ may need to be negotiated, and depends on issues such as its prestige and the extent to which a given community identify with it. The change in writing register or style was successfully learned primarily due to a replacement intertextual history.
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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine both the problematic nature of language change and the social perspectives on language change provided by current genre theory and Wenger’s (1998) notion of Communities of Practice. The language change considered involved the intentional alteration of a particular business community’s correspondence writing style by an external marketing agency. This thesis provides an account of the nature of the linguistic changes made, using Swales’ concept of genre theory and modifications presented by Askehave and Swales (2001) and Lewin et al. (2001). Following Dias et al. (1999), it also provides a comprehensive picture of the business community concerned and the ways in which that community coped with the changes demanded of them by the correspondence project. This study uses ethnographic methodology, the findings of which are considered within the framework of Communities of Practice (COP), which herein takes the place of the discourse community as presented by Swales (1990).

The thesis is split into two parts. Part 1 sets the scene in three chapters, providing a description of then-current social practice and a genre analysis of the original correspondence, prior to the change. Part 2 details the changes from both social and textual perspectives, and Chapter 6 concludes with a consideration of the issues and arguments raised throughout. A brief overview of chapter contents is provided below.

Part 1: Stabilised for now: The genres and practices of a business community

Chapter 1 provides an initial, critical review of genre theory. The issues raised lead to a brief introduction to Communities of Practice, which is contrasted with the notion of discourse community.

Chapter 2 introduces the correspondence department of a loyalty program: the business community on which this research is focussed. The chapter considers the ‘more or less’ (Schryer, 1994) stable working environment of the company,
drawing on the framework of COP. The practices and business letter genre of the community are also discussed in detail, providing a perspective on the social purposes employees perceive in their writing and raising issues concerning the nature of writing.

Following the social account of context and purpose within the correspondence community, Chapter 3 returns to the primarily linguistic, textual concept of genre. The chapter opens with a review of genre as text analysis, and then critiques the genre analysis method presented by Lewin, Fine and Young (2001). A comprehensive analysis of the correspondence department’s original business letter genre is then presented.

**Part 2: Language change and community response: Genre theory and the practice of change.**

Chapter 4 provides an account of the style change from a social, ethnomethodological perspective, and using Wenger’s (1998) notion of Communities of Practice as the primary theoretical framework. Following on from the working environment described in Chapter 2, the writers’ reactions to the changes and their changing perspectives are discussed. The author’s direct participation as an employee, both as a writer and as the agent responsible for introducing the change is also considered.

Chapter 5 presents a comparative and contrastive analysis of the changes, based on the analysis of the original letters provided in Chapter 3.

The issues raised and arguments presented throughout the study are brought together in Chapter 6, which presents discussion and conclusions, and suggests some avenues of further research.
Part 1

Stabilised-for-now:

The practices and genres of a business community
CHAPTER ONE

1 Literature review: Genre theory

1.1 Introduction

Chapter one takes the notion of genre as its starting point and discusses a number of theoretical developments that have taken place in recent years. The chapter functions as both a review of the literature and as a means of positioning this research within an initial theoretical framework. While genre theory serves as the focus of the chapter, problematic issues raised also lead to a consideration of related theories, notably Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998).

1.2 Genre overview

1.2.1 Textual features versus social action?

The notion of genre has been considerably developed over the last two decades or so and, while studies have been carried out in a variety of disciplines, two related areas of theoretical debate common to all stand out: genre as a means of social action and communicative purpose and genre as textual description and analysis. Although closely related, the nature of the relationship between these two areas appears to be somewhat disputed, and they often seem to be placed at opposite ends of a cline, at least in terms of their relative significance in theories of genre.

The social and textual elements of a genre are also often considered alongside another scale, at one end of which genres are seen to be fixed and unchanging and at the other, fluid, dynamic and evolving, as shown in Figure 1.1. The
relationships between these four characteristics are complex and contested, the emphasis placed on any one element arising from, and contributing to, the description of the nature of genre in any adopted theoretical position.

![Figure 1.1 Genre characteristics](image)

**Figure 1.1 Genre characteristics**

Two recent studies exemplify the different emphases given to the social and textual elements of genre: a 7-year writing research program in Canada led by Patrick Dias, Aviva Freedman, Peter Medway and Anthony Paré (see e.g. Dias et al., 1999, Dias and Paré, 2000, Paré and Smart, 1994, Freedman et al., 1994), and a detailed linguistic model for the ‘analysis and identification of components of different genres’ presented by Beverly Lewin, Jonathan Fine and Lynne Young (Lewin et al., 2001).

Dias et al. place their research within the framework of North American genre studies, referring to it as ‘the most developed and comprehensive rhetorical theory to address writing in recent times’ (1999: 18). Briefly, their position on the two areas they here refer to as ‘social action and textual regularity’ is as follows:

[Genre studies] is not just an account of genres but is also, more generally, a situated account of writing per se. […] it ties the textual to the social, sees texts as action and texts as in dialogue with each other; none of these strengths relate specifically to explaining genres. […] 
Genre in this view has two aspects: social action and textual regularity. 

In accounting for the first of these we have potentially dealt with most texts… (Dias et al., 1999: 18, italics added).

As such, their work is primarily ethnographic in method, and their reporting, at least in the context of their 1999 publication ‘Worlds Apart,’ contains very little textual analysis, and none in the generic framework presented by for example Swales (1990) or Martin (1984). In contrast, Lewin et al. (2001) rely on textual analysis, with no analytical consideration of context beyond their corpus. They base their study primarily on work by systemic linguists such as Halliday (1978, Halliday and Hasan, 1985), Hasan, (1995) Martin (e.g., 1984, 1997) and Ventola (e.g., 1987, 2000), as well as on work by Swales (1990) and Bazerman (e.g., 1988, 1994), and provide a quite different perspective on genre analysis:

The purpose of our work is first to contribute to a comprehensive model of genre in expository texts, showing the interweaving of genre, registerial and discoursal options. […] Our intention, then, is to illustrate a particular approach to the study of genre through the detailed examination of social science research texts in particular (Lewin et al., 2001: 1).

The dispute about whether genres are static or fluid has come to prominence primarily in debates over their teachability and the primary use of linguistic patterns without placing the text in its social context (see e.g. Threadgold, 1988, Reid, 1987). Lewin et al., in a brief and somewhat over-simplified review of the issue, gloss Freedman’s (1993) position that it is neither possible nor desirable to teach genres explicitly, as they are fluid and dynamic, ‘always changing in response to different needs’ (2001: 2) and situated in a unique social environment, thus preventing them from being accurately reproduced or taught outside that context. Lewin et al. then comment that genres are in fact recognisable ‘because of conventionalised features’ and that therefore there is ‘a counterbalancing static nature to genres for extended periods’ (2001: 3).
Contrasting Freedman with Williams and Colomb (1993), Lewin et al. appear to accept the position that ‘explicit teaching of salient features of genres is beneficial’ (2001: 3), to the extent that neglecting to teach genres ‘hide[s] from the students the ideological commitments and consequences of particular generic forms,’ from which it appears to follow that ‘explicit teaching is a necessary step in empowering students to choose how they will participate in the communities they encounter’ (2001: 3).

Dias et al. consider this same position as put forward by the systemic linguistics tradition (citing Cope and Kalantzis, 1993), and liken it to the traditional literary concept of genre ‘with its concern for unchanging regularities of form and content’ (1999: 22). They argue that teaching such structures requires that genres are primarily fixed and unchanging, to the extent that a new employee could potentially already understand and immediately take part in workplace writing. Beaufort summarises an earlier paper by members of the Canadian team (Freedman et al., 1994), which:

found that social roles were largely ones of having to invent or imitate a level of expertise that was inauthentic and that writing served no social function other than the school purpose of evaluating the learner’s knowledge (2000: 186).

Dias et al. contend that a text ‘has purposes, for action and, therefore, communication, that are recognized and allowed for …and for which the genre has emerged adaptively as the appropriate vehicle’ (1999: 22). They also suggest that genres are ‘always in flux …provisional and open to contestation and change, adaptation to or displacement by new technology, or decay from disuse and irrelevance’ (1999: 23).

As can be seen from this brief initial outline, there appears to be a correlation: a. between theories that concentrate on textual attributes and the notion of regular and conventionalised features, and b. between theories that concentrate on social action and the notion of fluid and dynamic discourse. Previous studies have generally concentrated on one or two specific genres and the apparent conclusion regarding these characteristics appears to be that they do not sit comfortably together, that genres either feature conventional, regular
textual elements or that they are at the most ‘stabilised-for-now’ (Schryer, 1994: 107), potentially or actually changing in line with social exigence (Miller, 1994a).

Perhaps (and at first sight, perhaps paradoxically) genres, by their nature, must embody both elements simultaneously. As Berkenkotter and Huckin argue,

…genres must be flexible and dynamic, capable of modification according to the rhetorical exigencies of the situation. At the same time, though, they must be stable enough to capture those aspects of situations that tend to recur. This tension between stability and change lies at the heart of genre use and genre knowledge… (1995: 24).

Much of the debate about the nature of genre seems to centre on just how best to capture the levels of fluidity and stability at both social and textual levels, and the ways in which these elements affect each other. If at opposite ends of a cline (as in the vertical scale in Figure 1.1 above), then it may be possible that different genres, depending upon their developmental stage, and that of the social environment of which they are a part, occupy different points along the scale, moving up and down it during their lifetime. It may, however, be more appropriate to place these elements in such a way that they both complement and contrast with each other, thus showing, by their interaction, how both the textual features and social action inherent in a genre affect each other, constituting and constituted by their structures and the tensions of opposing tendencies.
The above diagram serves both to begin to place the current research within the genre debate, and also to anticipate an aspect of the argument to be put forward. Following Giddens (1979) and, later, Wenger’s use of dualities as a single unit of analysis (see e.g., 1998: 63) this research argues that the nature of genre involves a unity between rigidity and fluidity, that these two elements complement rather than oppose each other, and that they must necessarily be taken together in order to best understand the complex interactions between the social and textual. As such, a detailed consideration of the issues here raised and an explication of Figure 1.2 will be held over to Chapter 2 (see sections 2.9-2.11).

The view of genre presented herein may effectively be summarised by a quotation from a recent and excellent introduction to genre by John Frow, which echoes somewhat Derrida’s (1980) Law of Genre:

…far from being merely ‘stylistic’ devices, genres create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood […]. These effects are not, however, fixed and stable, since texts – even the simplest and most formulaic – do not ‘belong’ to genres but are, rather, uses of them […] (2005: 2).
1.2.2 The development of genre: Textual conventions

There is a tendency in human nature to catalogue: to make sense of many varied items or experiences, each of them in some way unique, by categorising them according to some useful criteria and so enabling future, similar encounters to be conveniently assessed and addressed. We label everything, from nouns and verbs to mammals and reptiles, from brass instruments to weeds. Label, classify and categorise are terms often used interchangeably, and these groupings of like with like are so prevalent that they are accepted with little thought, as normal, naturalised phenomena framing our experience of reality.

Recognising and naming textual or language genres in this way necessarily implies a method of classification and this has traditionally been placed in the province of textual regularity. As Frow puts it, ‘Genre is, amongst other things, a matter of discrimination and taxonomy: of organising things into recognisable classes’ (2005: 51). If genres are merely the classification of different discourse types into appropriate groupings, then it follows that no description of them is possible without definable criteria. From the time of Aristotle, traditional literary theory and folk studies onwards, genres such as sonnets, odes, tragedies, myths and legends have been classified primarily by a consideration of what appear to be ‘generally unchanging regularities in conventions of form and content’ (Dias et al., 1999: 19).

For example, Freadman and Macdonald (1992) suggest that there are four metaphoric ‘folk theories’ of genre description that classify in this fashion: labels, recipes, games and templates. To consider one of these, the recipe metaphor for genre ‘suggests that a text is the output of a set of rules’ (Freadman, 1994: 46). Thus a genre may be defined by a list of ingredients, and a method or a description of how these ingredients are mixed together. So, in a ‘business letter’ genre ingredients might include a date, an address, a salutation line, and a closing sequence including ‘yours sincerely’ or something similar, the sender’s name and business title. Other formatting additions such as a company logo and a reference number may be required. Following the recipe metaphor, the instructions would include a structure: which ingredient is
placed where, which are mandatory and which may be used at the discretion of the author.

Frow picks up several other sets of metaphors that suggest a system of rules or standards of classification. They include analogies to biological species and resemblances between family members (Fishelov, 1993), patterns of textual features (Beebee, 1994), blueprints and contracts (Altman, 1999, and see Frow, 2005: 52).

The attempt to describe genres by their rules has been the focus of many studies over the years and, particularly in popular ‘how to’ books, the practice remains an important genre-defining element. A cursory look at books or articles on how to write business letters (e.g. Barrass, 2002, Kent, 2002, Fletcher and Gowing, 1987, Goodworth, 1986) will quickly reveal these textual recipes or formulae, often advertised to guarantee success if followed.

Perhaps the most obvious difficulty in this perception of genre may be seen through a consideration of culinary recipes themselves. When a recipe for sponge cake is followed, a sponge cake is generally the end result. The problem is that it is possible to know what a sponge cake is without knowing what is in it, or how it was prepared. In many cases too, it is not possible to work backwards from a completed recipe and arrive at the ingredients and method used to create it. In this way, the recipe theory of genre favours the writer/creator over the reader. Readers may well know that they are reading a ‘business letter’ but it does not necessarily follow that they know the recipe for creating it. An intelligent and resourceful L1 reader familiar with such notions of categorisation should be able to identify many of the elements of a business letter using an ingredients framework, particularly paratextual elements (Genette, 1997, and see 1.5.2.). Reading a text does not automatically grant the reader an ability to write similar texts, however, and it would seem to follow that readers do not use a recipe framework to identify genre and, as such, the notion of a category of this type appears unable to account for some aspects of genre knowledge.
In an early and influential work, the Russian formalist Propp investigated Russian folktales. In aiming to describe a ‘grammar’ of the folktale, Paltridge notes that Propp identified thirty one ‘action-developing events’ (which he called ‘functions’) in the tales… [He] then proceeded to describe genres as having their own ‘boundaries’ beyond which they do not, and cannot, go without becoming a different genre (1997:6).

As a structural analysis, Propp’s work considers features within the texts, assuming that each tale stands on its own without reference to an external context. This method starts with the text as source, and constitutes criteria based on textual comparison. As Nair puts it, ‘whole genres …have been analysed using an apparatus that consists of limited epistemic categories and rules of combination which allow numerous permutations and disallow others’ (1992: 228). Berkenkotter and Huckin argue that ‘Traditional generic classifications are pitched at such a broad level of generality that they can describe only superficial parameters of form or content’ (1995: 14). That said, the notion of categories, or types, or kinds of discourse requires the existence of boundaries, and Propp’s assertion that genres have boundaries is a valid one. Further, Kress and Threadgold (1988) note that the Russian formalists did not simply attempt to taxonomise literary text-types – a traditional feature of literary research as late as the 1980s. Their ‘socio-historically based work’ was ‘related to the evolution of literary history’ and thus they saw genre as ‘a dynamic and changing phenomenon, and not a set of static taxonomies’ (Kress and Threadgold, 1988: 218).

It would seem obvious that for the notion of genres to exist at all there must be rules of differentiation. Swales paraphrases Todorov’s argument that:

the fact that works ‘disobey’ their genres does not mean that those genres necessarily disappear. For one thing, transgression, in order to exist, requires regulations to be transgressed. For another, the norms only retain visibility and vitality by being transgressed (1976: 159, in Swales, 1990: 36).
Hepburn (1983: 496, in Swales, 1990: 37) also makes the important point that a work that rebels against its genre relies for its success on the reader’s knowledge of that genre in order to challenge the genre’s ‘conventions.’

If, then, genres are characterised by recognisable regularities in content and form, and are bounded by accepted conventions, it is not a difficult step to assume them to be fixed and unchanging – if not absolutely so, then at least as a general principle (Dias et al., 1999: 19). At the very least, some genres are apparently fixed enough to warrant detailed descriptions of them. As Lewin et al. point out,

the fact that [rhetorical actions] are typified and recognised as genres because of conventionalised features suggests … [a] static nature to genres for extended periods. Furthermore, […] their conventional character is such that different social institutions and communities can easily identify typical generic features (2001: 3).

Berkenkotter and Huckin, however, seek to move away from what they see as ‘a holistic, normative approach to genre.’ They ‘feel that genericness is not an all-or-nothing proposition,’ but rather, ‘communicators engage in (and their texts reveal) various degrees of generic activity’ (1995: 17). In the case of the business letter genre, for example, they argue that a knowledge of formal conventions (a recipe categorisation) is not enough to constitute genre knowledge, and that the necessity of knowing appropriate topics and levels of detail and relevance must be acknowledged (1995: 14).

Concentrating solely on the attempt to identify a set of necessary and sufficient textual ‘ingredients’ for a given genre forces a rather unnatural decontextualisation of discourse that does not appear to take into account the possibility that social and cultural knowledge may be required by the individual to understand or create an instance of a genre. Even where such textual ingredients incorporate social knowledge in some way, the notion suggests that a novice could follow a list and create an acceptable text regardless of their understanding of the social context surrounding it.
The completion of a text in a given genre is not usually, or only, the goal writers have in mind when they write. Writing is not undertaken just to produce a text, but within a social context where the text is part of the means to an end other than the production of the text itself. For example, a business letter is written to provide certain information to its recipient. Students write to complete assignments on which they will be graded. The activity of writing, in these cases, has as one of its results an intended effect on the intended reader. If the business writer has asked for information to be sent, the text would be considered successful if the requested information then arrives. For students, the text is a test in which they must demonstrate various levels of knowledge, and they are likely to consider an essay or report to be successful if they get a good grade. In a business environment such as the loyalty program service centre to be considered below, another goal of text production is the completion of an employment requirement. The completion of a text is merely one step in a series of other steps that constitute a working day. In this way, a single text can serve multiple functions.

Bazerman notes that ‘attempts [to understand and define genre] have been either formalist or essentialist, defining genre by a collection of recurrent features or by comprehensive typologies of literary types’ (1988:6). He goes on to state that ‘attempts to understand genre by the texts themselves are bound to fail, for they treat socially constructed categories as stable natural facts’ (1988:7, italics added). At the same time, Kress and Threadgold noted that ‘the challenges of poststructuralist (postmodernist) critique… have brought the category [of genre] under close scrutiny, and attack.’ They go on to make an attempt, within the framework of social semiotics, to ‘put genre firmly in the context of social practices, and hence of social and political concerns’ (Kress and Threadgold, 1988: 215, also, Kress and Knapp, 1992, Threadgold, 1989, Threadgold, 1988). This raises the questions of how genres relate to individuals and institutions, and to writers and readers; and how these culturally informed concepts of social identity relate to each other.
1.3 Social action and shared genre knowledge

The consideration of social context requires an alternative perspective on genre labels and rules that, rather than taking them to be a transparent given, asks where they come from, and how and why they are used. Instead of seeing genres as taxonomic categories, they are seen to be abstract, socially formulated notions of useful and similar communicative events, held in common within, or related to, cultural expectations. The broad conception of a socio-cultural context and the related notion of shared knowledge provide a platform from which to describe the complex, interrelated elements that define a genre.

1.3.1 Names, labels and purpose

As has been indicated above, an important element of shared genre knowledge is the label or name of a genre. The name is generally used as a ‘shorthand for identifying texts and the situations in which they occur’ (Johns, 1997: 23). Some generic communicative events that have been considered in the literature are: ‘the wedding invitation’ (Johns, 1997), ‘the parody,’ ‘the impersonation’ (Swales, 1990), ‘the television interview,’ and ‘the sports commentary’ (Freadman and Macdonald, 1992). Scientific or academic genres may include ‘the experimental report’ (Bazerman, 1988), ‘the research abstract’ (Bhatia, 1993), ‘the critical review’ (Johns, 1997). Dias et al. suggest that ‘The definite article that designates these genres is telling in that it seems to prescribe an unchanging, fixed, and authorized rubric, with the strong implication that adherence to form is tied in with effective writing’ (1999: 19). While this is perhaps an over-analysis of the use of the definite article in English, the existence of a recognised label does tend to assume a clear, unambiguous category containing uncontested characteristics. The unthinking acceptance of labels may then lead to prescriptions based on apparent textual features alone, rather than taking into account the social actions that originally required those features, and that are subject to change.
Associating genre labels with taxonomic categories often leads to the not-unexpected result of assuming that a genre has a single purpose, which can be described in the name. This, in turn, can lead to an overabundance of labels, as purpose after purpose is recognised. It is quite possible, with no more investigation than to consider a few years’ personal experience, to draw up a chart of texts in a ‘letter’ category. Labels that immediately come to mind are business letters, marketing letters, sales letters, letters of introduction, personal letters, complaint letters, legal letters, love letters, standardised letters, and so on. Some of these labels may well form their own category (under the ‘letter’ category); others would be sub-categories. A cursory examination of these names immediately raises the question: what is meant by purpose? A standardised letter, insofar as it has a purpose, is a convenient method of sending the same letter out to many different people. Such a purpose is not specifically content related, although only certain kinds of content are conducive to such treatment. As even ‘Standardised Letter’ may have its subcategories (the impersonal ‘Dear Customer’ of a circular or the semi-personalised ‘Dear Mr Jones’ of a club letter), attempting to categorise all the many variants of a letter in this way becomes extremely complex. Once modern technology is taken into account, and faxes and emails are added to the mix, even the label ‘letter’ begins to sound obsolete, at least in terms of its customary definition, in popular dictionaries such as the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English: ‘written or printed message, addressed to person(s), usu[ally] sent by post or messenger and fairly long’ (Sykes, 1982).

The various ‘folk theories’ of genre names and categories are of considerable importance however, as a ‘source of insight’ (Swales, 1990: 54) into the social production of texts within a specific community of practice and, indeed, into the assumed purposes represented by the descriptive name given to the genre. In the case of this study, an intentional change to the ‘rules’ of the business letter genre, as perceived by members of the community (particularly the use of a register, or style, described as ‘formal’), impacted upon their understanding and acceptance of the change. A theoretical perspective of genre justifiably requires a wider socio-cultural base from which to consider the apparent structures and purposes of a genre. However, a discussion that does not acknowledge the widely held assumption that these rules are formal and
naturalised, is likely to misunderstand or misconstrue the tensions visible in the workplace.

1.3.2 The notion of communicative purpose

As noted above, contemporary research in genre studies has recognised that a consideration of textual categories based on discourse conventions and regularity alone leaves a number of social and contextual questions unanswered and, thus, appears inadequate when accounting for change, or framing research into the ideologies and power relationships contained within texts. In appropriating the notion of genre from its primarily literary sources, a number of scholars formulated influential definitions basing their categorisation or identification of genres with an emphasis on their communicative purpose.

This early work included Carolyn Miller, who stated that ‘a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish’ (1984: 151), and Jim Martin, who stated that ‘genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them’ (1985: 250). John Swales’ (1990) influential study gave privileged status to communicative purpose and, as Askehave and Swales (2001) note, the bulk of genre research in the last decade has been achieved using communicative purpose as the primary criterion for establishing discourse categories.

Since these influential studies, genre analyses have developed in a number of directions. Swales’ methodology is still being used in largely unchanged format (e.g. Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans, 2002, Pinto dos Santos, 2002, Zhu, 2000, Martin, 2002, Upton, 2002), and has also been revised and extended in various directions (e.g. Bhatia, 1993, Lewin et al., 2001).

Recently, the widespread use of communicative purpose has begun to receive greater critical attention. Askehave and Swales describe the problem succinctly:
‘communicative purpose’ has assumed a taken-for-granted status, a convenient but under-considered starting point for the analyst. However, most of the important work following the early publications in this field has, in various ways, established that the purposes, goals, or public outcomes are more evasive, multiple, layered, and complex than originally envisaged. How then … can communicative purpose be used to decide whether a particular text qualifies for a membership in one particular genre as opposed to another? (2001: 197).

The use of communicative purpose as a primary definition of genre membership would seem to be particularly problematic in research where a corpus of texts is taken as the starting point, as in Lewin et al., whose position is that:

…characterizing expository text by genre first of all means determining the customary discourse structures ([linguistic] moves and their constituent acts); these in turn are defined by their communicative purposes (2001: 37).

In placing their research, Lewin et al. cite the well-regarded positions of both Martin and Swales and conclude that ‘genre identification rests solely on communicative purpose, a criterion that has been well established by Searle (1969) who classified disparate realizations according to the speaker’s intent’ (2001: 24).

This reference to Searle appears somewhat problematic, given that Lewin et al. state that they identified communicative purpose ‘after examining SSR [social science research] texts’ (2001: 27). To classify an utterance by intent requires the analyst to know the context in which the utterance was made. For instance, to gather from ‘it’s cold in here’ that the speaker actually intends the hearer to close a window and that the utterance is in fact an imperative, requires an evaluation not available from the text alone. In the same way, forming an opinion about the intended meaning of elements of a corpus of similar texts using only the texts themselves, without reference to the social exigences they reflect, seems likely to lead to differences of opinion and contestation.
That said, it is worth clarifying here that various disciplines have recognised that written texts are often ‘alienated from the original circumstances of their production,’ or ‘‘orphaned, and separated at birth from the assistance of the father’, to use Derrida’s paternal metaphor (1982: 316)’ (in MacLachlan and Reid, 1994: 9). As such, the ‘traditional text-first or ‘linguistic’ approach’ (Askehave and Swales, 2001: 207) taken by some genre research can potentially provide insights into the ways in which written texts contain measures intended to regulate the meanings a reader might assign to them, regardless of the context in which the reader is situated. In this theoretical position, the significance of the regularity of genres, and their recognition by various groupings of people, would seem to lie primarily in the advantage of predictability they should perhaps bring to the interpretation of textual intent and therefore meaning.

Much of the literature concerned with this aspect of texts puts forward theories using the variously defined notion of ‘framing’ (Bateson, 1972, Goffman, 1974, Tannen, 1993, Altman, 1999, see MacLachlan and Reid, 1994 for a cross-disciplinary introduction to framing theory). The question of how best to relate texts to their contexts is widely discussed in a number of linguistic disciplines (e.g. Toolan, 1992, Johns, 1997, Paltridge, 1997), and will be considered further below (see 1.3.3 and Chapter 2). The specific issue here, in relating text and its context to the concept of communicative purpose, lies in the problematic definition of communicative purpose itself.

That is, the term ‘communicative purpose’ implies action and intent, and so would seem to give preference to the writer(s), as the source of a text, and thus the individual and social motives that require a text’s creation: ‘the action it is used to accomplish,’ as Miller (1984: 151) put it. The social implications of communicating for a purpose can also be seen in Swales’ (1990) concept of discourse community. This notion of genre requires a group of texts whose common function is a commonly recognised set of purposes, synchronically and diachronically, and this idea implies that a group or community of people have, for some length of time, commonly-held goals. This theoretical perspective appears to be quite different from the notion of framing in texts as it seems, at the very least, to imply that a reading of a corpus of texts cannot in itself source communicative purpose and, put more strongly, that a discussion
of genre cannot take place without a consideration of the social context, thus requiring something more than a textual analysis.

To return to the example analysis of social science research (SSR) texts by Lewin et al., the question at issue in their use of communicative purpose to identify genres and their elements is: who identifies the purposes and how? In this case, at the macro level, in identifying the genre an SSR text is seen to be recognisable ‘because it encapsulates most of the structures we have come to expect from that genre’ (2001: 37). This seems to privilege relatively static conventionalised features over communicative purpose as the primary means of identification. The notion of communicative purpose is primarily applied in order to identify moves and acts within a genre, or sections of a genre. For example, within the genre group of SSR texts, research papers written in academic journals were used as source material. Within these papers, sections such as ‘Introduction’ and ‘Discussion’ are identified; within the introduction section, moves such as ‘claim relevance’ and ‘preview the authors’ contribution’ were identified; and within the ‘claim relevance’ move, acts such as ‘claim relevance for research’ and ‘claim relevance for human behaviour’ were identified (Lewin et al., 2001: 29).

Lewin et al. therefore claim that they identify and define ‘the elements within research texts on the basis of their communicative purpose’ (2001: 25). While they go on usefully to define and explain the extent of their units of analysis, their genre elements appear to be based on an unquestioned ability to recognise communicative purpose solely on a study of their corpus.

This research follows Askehave and Swales (2001) in considering communicative purpose from the perspective of the community which produces the genre (see Chapter 2, particularly 2.8). Issues surrounding communicative purpose are presented further in 3.4 and 3.5, which discuss the relational aspect of business communication, and in 3.9, which considers the complexities caused by implicit or covert purposes. A further critique of Lewin et al. (2001) is provided in section 3.3.2.
1.3.3 Aspects of role: Social role, writing role

The term *role* tends to refer to a specific function or task set within a wider context. In the literature, two uses of role stand out – Johns’ (1997) notion of *social role*, and Beaufort’s (2000) of *writing role*. As each of these uses is significant for the discussion to follow, both are considered and placed within the context in which they will appear in this research.

Genre knowledge also requires literate individuals to consider the social roles of readers and writers as they are realized within texts and contexts (Johns, 1997: 25).

Johns’ notion is of social role, which considers the function of writers and readers situated within complex relationships; with each other and the social environment. In a business community the role of a writer can be perceived in a number of ways. Johns remarks that:

In some types of business letters, for example, the writer initiates the text and takes the more forceful role of complainer or requester, and the reader is the one who must deal politely with the complaint or decide how to respond to the request (1997: 25).

The vast majority of correspondence received at the *LoyaltyOne* Service Centre (site of the case study for this dissertation, see 2.3) is of the complaint or request type, and the roles suggested here are certainly valid, however this view is more likely to be the perception of the initiating writer. The employees receiving such mail may prefer to see themselves as experts in their field, and their role then becomes one of providing clarification and information, which allows them (in their perception) to take the more powerful position of condescending to share their knowledge, with the expectation that the recipient’s role is then to accept their authority and expertise. Thus, social roles can be associated with relations of power, and business texts can in part contain a negotiation of the positions of power perceived and represented by both sides in the dialogue. This example is simplified of course, for the
business writers considered here are also aware that they are required to provide a service.

Johns’ use of role is related to the classroom. The social roles of writers and readers are linked to the purpose behind the production of a text, in order to raise learners’ awareness of these issues. Johns notes that sometimes the writer is in the more powerful role, as when a judge issues a court order, and at other times readers have greater power, such as editors and publishers (1997: 26). The notion of role recognises the importance of the particular contexts of writers and readers, however the complexities involved in analysing roles in a research context requires the notion to be unpacked within a specific analytical frame.

For example, in much the same way that a student must ‘invent the university’ (Bartholomae, 1985, in, Johns, 1997: 20) for the purpose of writing a successful academic text, writers in a business environment ‘invent’ the recipients of their texts from the sources at their disposal. This must be done within the context of their work environment, where individuals must negotiate meaning and perception with other members of their community and constellation of practice (see e.g. 2.5 and 2.8.3).

As such, this research focuses upon the writer and the production of genres, and so presents issues of social role primarily from the perspective of the community of writers studied. The perceptions those writers have of readers, both internal to their organisation and the members of the public for whom their correspondence is intended, is further discussed in Chapter 2.

While Johns’ notion highlights the wider context and purposes behind text creation, Beaufort (2000) uses role in a much narrower sense. In her study of a Job Resources Center, Beaufort found 15 different writing-related roles, such as editor and proof-reader, co-author, author and coach (2000: 199). In this sense, then, writing role is concerned specifically with tasks carried out by writers in the process of producing a text. Beaufort relates these tasks to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) categories of apprenticeship, suggesting that different tasks are taken on at different stages of a new writer’s participation in a community of practice (2000: 203).
The notion of writing roles appears to become somewhat problematic when a community of practice has as their focus the production of texts. Beaufort names roles such as inventor, coach and negotiator, all of which relate to the writing process. An inventor is an ‘originator of ideas for conceptual documents’, a coach ‘trains others’ and a negotiator ‘negotiates a positive climate for [the] reception of texts’ (2000: 199). Arguably, however, all of the tasks in the community of practice considered in this research were therefore writing-related. As such, the term writing role is somewhat superfluous in this research, and is included within the framework and larger concept of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998).

That said, viewing the different writing roles that form part of the LoyaltyOne writers’ practice, and the stages at which those roles may be taken on by employees, can offer a useful comparison to Beaufort’s findings, as well as providing a foundation from which to discuss how these roles were affected when the writing style was changed. These discussions form parts of Chapter 2 (2.6) and Chapter 4 (4.4.3) respectively.

### 1.3.4 Content and intertextuality

The underlying epistemology, history, and theory of a field cannot be separated from its rhetoric. The rhetorical action is mounted within a conceived world and in pursuit of ultimate as well as immediate goals. (Bazerman, 1988: 323)

Content is constrained by purpose, of course. Because purposes become common, that is, both shared and institutionalised, content is also constrained by diachronic and synchronic social and cultural values. Each time another example of a particular genre is produced it contains elements of the individual writer’s knowledge of that genre: his or her previous experience of similar material, which contains within it the developed and evolving roles and contexts that the purpose of the genre represents. As Bazerman notes in the quotation above, much of the past history of a genre is implicit in a particular text, however each and every such text serves to confirm the notion of the genre, as understood by the writer producing it and the reader who receives it.
The concept of intertextuality is of considerable importance in this process, as can be seen from the business letter genre considered in this study. Day by day, week by week, an individual writer produces these texts in a communal environment. Some aspects of the texts are so commonly used, letter after letter, that the most obvious, common sense form of intertextuality is made quite explicit: the text informally becomes a 'standard paragraph' (boilerplate), to be used again and again. These paragraphs make their way gradually around a group of writers, to be used as they are, or as a guide to an appropriate response. Often, they are formalised: recognised by management they become an official response.

Intertextuality is not limited to the reproduction of, or referral to, other texts in the same genre and locality, and it can therefore provide a rich and complex set of relations between different genres and between similar or different genres that are produced externally to a specific community of practice. This is an area of particular relevance here, as this study considers a style change that affected the local intertextual history of a business letter genre. For the writers involved, intertextual awareness raised questions concerning the nature of the business letter. The issue is further considered in chapters 2 (see e.g. 2.5) and 4. Intertextuality is also a concept that is itself used as a form of analysis, for example, in media studies (Meinhof and Smith, 2000), and literary and cultural studies (Allen, 2000).

1.3.5 Contextualising genre theory

…the essential quality and aptitudes of a given language in a living moment is both more important to seize and far more difficult to make explicit than its linear history. So with regard to fairy-stories, I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them (Tolkien, 1964: 19-20).

Just as the concept of genre must take into consideration the social contexts and purposes of discourse, so must a theory about genre acknowledge its own
purposes, and the political, cultural and social contexts in which the theory is placed, and for which it provides a framework for discussion and illumination. Tolkien, in his essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’ argues that folklorists and anthropologists use stories ‘not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence, or information, about matters in which they are interested’ (1964: 18). While he concedes that this is ‘a perfectly legitimate procedure in itself,’ he notes that such motives lead to certain judgments, and that there are other ways of reading and understanding such texts (a point with important consequences for any theory of text and its context, including genre). Swales (1990) makes a similar point about aspects of genre theory in folklore studies:

A strong motive for the concept of an underlying permanent [generic] form apparently derives from the long-standing interest among folklorists in using the classic exemplars of myth and legend to trace beliefs back into pre-history. For that motive, the assumption of an enduring substrate is clearly useful, perhaps even necessary, but closely tied to a field-specific research agenda (Swales, 1990: 34, author's italics).

The ‘field-specific’ perspective of recent linguistic genre theorising has been predominantly pedagogical in nature. The Systemic Functional Linguists based primarily in Sydney, Australia have been involved in a wide ranging, in-depth study into literacy in schools (see e.g. Christie and Martin, 1997, Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, Reid, 1987, Martin, 1984). Kress and Threadgold suggest that the work of the ‘Sydney School’ derives in part from areas of ethnography (Hymes, 1974, Gumperz and Hymes, 1972) and sociolinguistics (Labov, 1972), and ‘seems to be the result of an attempt to transfer notions of genericity from a long history in classical rhetoric, and thus in pedagogic and literary contexts, to the analysis of non-literary, non-pedagogic forms of text production’ (1988: 218) such as mother-child interaction, service encounters and ritual insults.

The North American Genre Studies has also been particularly concerned with education in the classroom (Dias and Paré, 2000, Dias, 1994, Freedman and Medway, 1994, Freedman et al., 1994). Their approach is grounded in
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rhetorical theory (see e.g. Miller, 1984, Campbell and Jamieson, 1978, Bitzer, 1968), and moves away from text-based analysis.

Swales’ (1990) approach to genre analysis comes with practical applications for English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL or ESL). Johns (1997) is particularly concerned with academic literacy, Paltridge (1997) with academic research writing, and Dias et al. (1999, Dias and Paré, 2000) and Parks (2001) with the academic/workplace divide. A growing number of researchers are also considering the role of genre within workplace practices (Barabas, 1990, Gunnarsson et al., 1997, Killingsworth and Gilbertson, 1992, Spilka, 1993, Berkenkotter, 2001, Smart, 2000).

Perhaps not surprisingly then, a good deal of debate has centred on the issue of teaching genres. There are notable differences in underlying assumptions and perspectives about language and about learning, however it would seem that much of the motivation for research has been pedagogical in nature, concerned primarily with classroom environments.

This study is based within a business and is concerned with both the nature of the changes made to a specific example of the business letter genre and with the processes of learning and adaptation displayed within a community that does not have learning as its primary goal. The foundation of this research is much the same as that of Dias et al. (1999) who consider writing to be a highly situated practice. In this research, the textual analysis component of genre theory, which follows Swales (1990) and Lewin et al. (2001), is primarily concerned with the analysis of intentional change within a genre, and the extent to which this form of analysis can provide insight into the nature of the changes. Further influences are discussed in Chapter 3 (3.2.4) and Chapter 4 (4.2).
Once the definition of genre includes the notions of purpose and social process, the rather complex question of location arises. That is, who or what defines a genre? Whose goals are being met by the creation, maintenance and evolution of a generic form? What level of social ‘structure’ may best illuminate the apparent contexts of a genre? Where – in what social theoretical framework and using what units of analyses – is genre best located?

The problem of location is complex precisely because the possibilities appear to be numerous, and attempts to establish criteria inevitably lead back to the same questions of motive and usefulness, such as: what might researchers be looking to find, or show; or from what theoretical position are they approaching genre? And how useful is a particular unit of analysis? That is, what insights and statements about genre may appear from this point of view, and do they have theoretical or practical application?

In 1984, Carolyn Miller’s seminal paper presented the argument that ‘a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish’ (1994a: 24). Linguists in the Systemic Functionalist tradition also consider genre to be a form of social action, stating that ‘Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them’ (Martin, 1985: 250, in Swales, 1990: 40).

The introduction of a social element to genre presents a related problem: not only must a social framework be described, but also the question must be considered of what, exactly, constitutes genre. Freadman remarks that ‘[a]ll generic descriptions rely on a more or less explicit ‘filing system’’ (1994: 57) and points out that ‘place’ must be acknowledged in any description of a genre, both in the sense of physical location, such as the literal positioning of certain genres within a newspaper, and in the sense of social location, in that ‘some kinds of texts occur necessarily, or always, in kinds of places, between participants defined by their social roles’ (1994: 57).
Herein, genre is considered following Swales (1990), and the rhetorical view of genre studies as presented by Dias et al. (1999) following Miller (1984). The notion of the discourse community as represented by Swales (1990) is replaced by the social theory of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Social location and context is therefore discussed in more detail below, beginning with Swales’ discourse community and briefly introducing communities of practice (which is further explicated in Chapter 2) and Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory. Further discussion of social contexts and issues, particularly that of author participation within the researched community, is presented in Chapter 4.

1.4.1 The discourse community

A discourse community:

1. has a broadly agreed set of common public goals;
2. has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members;
3. utilises and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims;
4. uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback;
5. has acquired some specific lexis (in addition to owning genres);
6. has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise
(from Swales, 1990).

In his 1990 monograph, John Swales clearly establishes the need for an environment, or context, in which to place genres. He refined the concept of discourse community as a macro-level unit of analysis, arguing that it is within such communities that genres are recognised, used and maintained. Swales summarises this in the following way:

Discourse communities are sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals. One of the characteristics that established members of these discourse communities possess is
familiarity with the particular genres that are used in the communicative furtherance of those sets of goals. In consequence, genres are the properties of discourse communities; that is to say, genres belong to discourse communities, not to individuals, other kinds of grouping or to wider speech communities (Swales, 1990: 9).

The notion of a discourse community ‘owning’ a genre perhaps requires some consideration. After all, the very generic nature of genre allows many texts to be recognised and produced by a far wider populace than that within a single discourse community. More than one discourse community may share a set of similar goals. A larger, or more powerful institution or organisation than is allowed by the criteria for a discourse community may have an impact on the goals of a given community, and therefore on the genres they use. Swales is explicit, however, in establishing purpose as the major criterion for both the existence of the discourse community and its ownership of genre. By so doing, Swales follows Miller (1994a) in suggesting that the analysis of genre should be based upon purpose, ‘common goals’ or ‘social action’ (see 1.3.2 above for a discussion of communicative purpose). To gloss Freadman’s (1987) ‘game’ metaphor, a game of tennis, while recognisably the same game, becomes markedly different when different players are on the court: differences in technique, in ranking, in the consequences of winning or losing for each player, make that particular game unique. In much the same way, different communities may use what is recognisably the same genre, such as the business letter, for their own ends. Beaufort argues that ‘the size of the community is of less importance than the fact that there are distinguishing features.’ As such, a discourse community ‘could be a single institution or an aggregate of institutions, as long as each was organized around a distinctive set of writing principles’ (1997: 522).

While the structure of a text may therefore be readily recognisable to many people, is seems appropriate to acknowledge that each discourse community owns the genres it uses, and that newcomers to a community must learn its goals and, as Miller puts it, ‘…learn, more importantly, what ends we may have [and] learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potential for failure and success in acting together’ (1994a: 38).
The notion that a discourse community owns its genres also has the effect of limiting what may logically be called a genre, or at the very least recognising that the discussion of apparently common genres is effectively limited to the variety of ‘common’ genre being used in a given community. For example, the term ‘business letter’ is often used generically to refer to a certain class of letter that appears across many companies, or communities. Swales’ view of ownership, however, implies that the business letter genre in any given community is a separately owned genre, and therefore not the same as the business letter genre in another community. This view does not preclude wider external influences. These aspects of genre ownership imply that writing within a given community is situated, and that a discussion of genre must therefore include some consideration of the social motives prevailing in a given setting (Dias et al., 1999: 22, Askehave and Swales, 2001). This area has also been considered in 1.3, and will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

Another issue with the concept of discourse community relates, in certain cases at least, to the notions of author and audience. In the example of the LoyaltyOne Service Centre on which this study is based, there are, arguably, two different audiences for whom the writers write: they fulfil at once the expectations of their employment – their team leaders and managers and the quantity and quality requirements that define their job – and the requests of the members of the LoyaltyOne program: the thousands of people external to the writers’ discourse community and for whom, in large part, it exists. Freadman makes a particularly interesting point in relation to this issue by contending that a genre consists ‘minimally, of two texts, in some sort of dialogical relation. For example, theoretical debate; brief and report; play and audience response; essay question, essay, feedback’ (1994: 48). The business letters considered herein would seem to fall quite neatly into this category, as each letter written by a LoyaltyOne employee is in direct response to a query initiated by a LoyaltyOne member. The difficulty then raised returns to the issue of ownership, for the millions of LoyaltyOne program members do not satisfy the criteria for the existence of a discourse community, and yet their communications appear to have much in common; they write in as individuals yet their writing becomes part of the social activity, goals and purposes of LoyaltyOne employees’ discourse communities. Thus, a reified notion of discourse community itself does not appear to allow for a consideration of the
impact of internal and external authors and audiences on the goals and purposes mediated through genre.

Swales himself concedes that ‘the account I have provided of discourse community […] remains in at least one sense somewhat removed from reality’ (1990: 32). He then quotes Harris’ point that discourse community is ‘oddly free of many of the tensions, discontinuities and conflicts in the sorts of talk and writing that go on everyday…’ (Harris, 1988/9: 14, in Swales 1990: 32). Miller says of the term ‘community’ that:

It is a troublesome concept, one that seems to devalue individual rights and capabilities, to privilege the domination of a majority or an orthodoxy; it is a concept that makes it difficult to account for change, a notion that can be – and has been – vague, comforting and sentimental (Miller, 1994b: 72).

The theoretical separation of the notions of genre and discourse community raises the problem of a circular relationship: which comes first? (Freedman and Medway, 1994: 7). Put another way, the circular question relates to the use of ‘metaphors that suggest an underlying neo-Platonic or Cartesian dualism of something contained and its container, text and context, … individual and community’ (Russell, 1997: 505). The notion of a circular relationship acknowledges that a dualist approach cannot easily consider the apparent paradox of the contained constituting its container: of genres that play a part in structuring the communities who own them. As such, Nystrand et al. (1993) place the notion of discourse community in the category of Social Constructionism, arguing that the underlying philosophical method is still Structuralism. For a further discussion on underlying philosophical premises, see Chapter 3, section 3.2.1.

The concept of discourse community provides an initial and useful set of criteria defining a social space within which goals and purposes, and so genre as social action, may be situated. Without well-defined units of analysis, the need to address the social aspect of social action would appear to be difficult to act upon. However, the question of usefulness and the notion of social location
presuppose that more than one valid framework or theoretical position may be considered.

1.4.2 Communities of practice

The notion [of discourse community] has […] been questioned because it implies static, unchanging modes of discourse as dominant and uncontested […]. Communities of Practice [is] both more general, in that it covers activity beyond language, and more precise, since it centers on what groups of people do.’ (Dias et al., 1999: 29, original italics).

The notion of discourse community as a unit of analysis requires a group of people to be linked in some way by their discourse. That is, apart from the overarching requirement for a common set of goals, the criteria for discourse communities refer to methods or depth of discourse internal to the community. This is problematic as it would seem that the criteria for discourse mechanisms, lexis and genres are part of what is needed to fulfil the first criterion, of common public goals, and therefore they are constitutive elements of the first criterion.

Another issue appears in a consideration of many genres, for, rather than providing communication within a discourse community, they appear on the boundary between communities (Russell, 1997). This seems to be the case with the letters sent out from the LoyaltyOne Correspondence department to its members, or customers, and it is also the case with internal forms used between departments: memos, lists of instructions, LoyaltyOne program terms and conditions, glossy brochures and newsletters created by other communities primarily for the use of program members, and so on.

Etienne Wenger’s (1998) monograph outlining a framework for a social theory of learning develops the concept of Communities of Practice (COP), a term originally coined by Jean Lave and Wenger (1991). Wenger’s more recent work, with McDermott and Snyder (2002), has primarily been concerned with developing COPs within business settings and in order to develop strategies of
knowledge management, a fairly new and burgeoning field within business theory (Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003). With this in mind, Wenger and his colleagues have recently defined communities of practice as:

Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their understanding and knowledge of this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (2002: 4).

Much of the current popularity of COP is based on its use in this area (see e.g. Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003, Lesser et al., 2000, Wenger and Snyder, 2000), and of explicitly creating and maintaining COPs for the purpose of managing knowledge. Several recent works have, however, expanded its influence in fields such as organisational learning (Barrett, 2005), rhetoric and applied writing (Dias et al., 1999) and academic and school-based contexts of community (Stehlik and Carden, 2005).

COP takes as its primary units of analysis the concepts of practice, community, identity and meaning, and sees them relating in turn to the notion of learning. From this basic structure, concepts such as participation and reification, and the recognition of boundaries and boundary objects provide a broad framework from which to consider social contexts as they relate to the concept of genres. As such, COP provides a perspective from which to consider genre, linguistic change and social reaction to such change, and a number of areas of discussion arise from this context, which will be explored in the following chapters.

Wenger describes the constituent terms of COP, practice and community, as specifying each other (1998: 72). In associating these two notions, Wenger defines ‘…three dimensions of the relation by which practice is the source of coherence of a community […]: 1) mutual engagement, 2) a joint enterprise, and 3) a shared repertoire’ (Wenger, 1998: 72-3). As Dias et al. (1999) note in the quotation at the beginning of this section, the concept of COP is not specifically based on discourse, and its strength lies in part in its ability to place the socio-rhetorical concept of genre in a broader context than the linguistically biased notion of discourse community. For instance, in discussing the notion of a shared repertoire, Wenger comments that:
The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice (1998: 83).

One implication of this position, when related to the notion of genre, lies in Wenger’s discussion of his use of the term repertoire ‘to emphasize both its rehearsed character and its availability for further engagement in practice.’ Wenger argues that a COPs shared repertoire ‘reflects a history of mutual engagement’ while it also ‘remains inherently ambiguous’ (1998: 83). Any given genre, to be recognised as such, must therefore have a history within a given community. Whether an existing genre was adopted by a nascent community, or a new one created to fulfil a rhetorical aim of a shared enterprise, it is now owned, recognised as a resource, and understood by members of the COP through its shared relationship with the history of the COP. Importantly, however, ‘Histories of interpretation create shared points of reference, but they do not impose meaning’. As such, a genre can also ‘be re-engaged in new situations’ (1998: 83). Wenger’s terminology here suggests an alternative approach to a perhaps needless dichotomy in genre studies between the apparent dynamic fluidity of genres and their equally apparent conventional stability.

The presence of a genre in a COP is as a ‘resource for the negotiation of meaning’ (Wenger, 1998: 83 and see also 4.4.4). In this way, COP provides a conceptual framework to enable descriptions of genres as ‘communicative action situated in a stream of social practices which shape and are shaped by it’ (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992: 318, following Giddens, 1984).

A distinct difference in the perspective of Wenger’s (1998) treatment of COP lies in the emphasis placed on learning. The pedagogical fields of ESP, EAP, ESL, WAC, and SFL, all areas where genre has been widely discussed, naturally place considerable importance on explicit teaching. Learning tends therefore to be considered as an outcome of teaching, and many studies have been based on students in an environment where learning is their primary focus.
and goal. This can be contrasted with the developing psychological field of situated learning, and specifically Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ and Wenger’s (1998) inclusion of this notion in his extended treatment of COP. In this model, as Dias et al. point out,

Apprentices and masters, or rather newcomers and oldtimers, are both involved in activities that have a purpose above and beyond the initiation of newcomers. […] the activity as a whole has an end other than the learning of its participants… however, the newcomers do learn. (1999: 187)

A consideration of the potential of COP as a framework for discussing the impact of intentional linguistic change within a social context may best be briefly outlined by reference to a criticism levelled at an aspect of it by Yrjö Engeström (Engeström et al., 1999: 12, Engeström and Cole, 1997: 306, Engeström and Middleton, 1996), who has written extensively on Activity Theory, and his colleagues:

The theory of legitimate peripheral participation depicts learning and development primarily as a one-way movement from the periphery, occupied by novices, to the centre, inhabited by experienced masters of the given practice. What seems to be missing is movement outward and in unexpected directions: questioning of authority, criticism, innovation, initiation of change. Instability and inner contradictions of practice are all but missing… (Engeström et al., 1999: 12).

The subject of this study – the introduction of a change in letter-writing style at the LoyaltyOne service centre (see Chapter 2) – involves many, if not all of the factors here claimed to be missing from the COP framework. Lave and Wenger, in their 1991 monograph on legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), clearly state that ‘there is no place in a community of practice designated “the periphery,”’ and, most emphatically, it has no single core or center’ (1991: 36). Rather:
Peripherality suggests that there are multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and –inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community. Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world (1991: 35-6).

Lave and Wenger maintain that change and relations of power are significant factors in learning and social participation. Instead of contrasting peripheral participation with central or complete participation, they use full participation (1991: 37). They go on to clarify that full participation is not necessarily an end point, and that peripheral participation does not have to have negative connotations.

There would seem to be an implication that participation is dynamic, that even experienced masters must constantly re-engage with their material to maintain their position. Socially, the move from full- to part-time employment, or return from maternity leave or other lengthy absences, may change the level of participation in the business COP. In terms of practice, examples would include any community where change in influential practices occurs because of forces external to that community.

For instance, an accounting firm may have a group of fully participating, experienced community members who become for a time unable to participate fully in their own practice due to major changes in their country’s taxation laws. In the current study, the introduction of a change in writing style meant that fully participating members of a correspondence department had to deal with a change that affected a primary activity of their community (see Chapter 4). In the context of COP, one of the questions this study considers is, what happens when an entire community faces the possibility that, quite suddenly, not one of its members will be experienced in an important aspect of one of its primary, defining activities?

While it may be argued that, thus far, there has been little consideration of change and instability in literature concerned with COP (Engeström and Cole, 1997), its theoretical perspective appears to present a powerful analytical tool
in the study of a community coping with change (King, 2005). The current study, primarily in chapters 2 and 4, aims to consider critically the strengths of COP, and particularly to explore the framework’s inherent implications with respect to the negotiation of change as it impacts on a community’s knowledge and practice.

1.4.3 Structuration theory

Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration provides a number of insights into social relations, and our experience of them in time and space. Giddens’ method for ‘Resolving the dichotomy between structure and action’ (Wenger, 1998: 281) sheds some light on the underlying nature of genre and the relation between genre at a macro-level and ‘the observable particular (and peculiar) actions of individual agents…’ (Miller, 1994b: 70).

The traditional sociological position (Parsons, Althusser) required ‘structure’ to be ‘external to human action, [and therefore] …a source of constraint on the free initiative of the independently constituted subject’ (Giddens, 1984, in Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 17). As Berkenkotter and Huckin go on to note in their overview of Giddens' work:

In place of dualisms such as the individual and society, or subject and object, Giddens (1979) proposed a single conceptual move, the duality of structure. Through this concept Giddens argued that social life was essentially recursive: “Structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and ‘exists’ in the generating moments of this constitution” (p. 5) (1995: 18, italics in original).

Put another way, Giddens points out that ‘evolution’ as a concept needs to be defined when it is applied to social change (1984: xxviii). By ‘evolution’ we commonly assume ‘some conceptual linkage with biological theories of evolution… an irreversible series of stages, a specification of directionality
through those stages, increasing complexity or expansion of the forces of production’ (1984: xxix). This does not take into account, however, that:

> Human beings make their history in cognizance of that history, that is, as reflexive beings cognitively appropriating time rather than merely ‘living’ it… the reflexive nature of human social life subverts the explication of social change in terms of any simple and sovereign set of causal mechanisms. Getting to know what goes on ‘in’ history becomes not only an inherent part of what ‘history’ is but also a means of transforming ‘history’ (1984: 237).

Giddens is here making the point that ‘An evolutionary ‘shape’ – a trunk with branches or a climbing vine, in which the elapsing of chronological time and the progression of the species are integrated – is an inappropriate metaphor by which to analyse human society’ (1984: 236). Given that language is inextricably bound up with the human ability to be reflexive, this same point would seem to apply to the notion of genre as a category, or type. The very act of recognising a pattern in language use – by regarding certain criteria and ignoring others – affects how that pattern is then understood and used. The knowledge (or lack thereof) a human agent has, of the apparent criteria a description of a genre has used to construe that genre, places that agent in a position where he or she can, intentionally or otherwise, transgress those rules. As such, Giddens’ quotation above could perhaps be paraphrased: We make instances of genres in cognisance of the genres that surround us. We have the ability to appropriate a genre for our own uses, even as our understanding of social responsibilities may be shaped by the genres we use. Coming to know the social actions contained in a genre is not only an inherent aspect of genre itself, but also allows us to transform that genre.

Askehave and Swales quote a management professor who glossed Giddens’ theory of structuration as ‘the wheels of life go round, and as they go round, they form ruts which channel the wheels of life’ (2001: 196). According to Yates and Orlikowski:
In structurational terms, genres are social institutions that are produced, reproduced or modified when human agents draw on genre rules to engage in organizational communication. As social institutions, genres both shape and are shaped by communicative action (1992: 305).

The social context described herein is interesting precisely because of a genre transformation, as a means of intentionally shaping communicative action. Intentional change to a social institution would seem to imply some level of conflict, if such a change represents an appropriation of a current genre and a movement away from the accepted, and therefore normative, shape of social responsibility. Attitudes within the \textit{LoyaltyOne} (see Chapter 2) community of practice concerning the re-shaping of communicative action are considered in Chapter 4. A further discussion of appropriation and transformation in light of this research, and as applied to the notion of genre, is presented in Chapter 6.

1.5 \textbf{Genre, media, paratext and body text}

…the paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison d’être. This something is the text (Genette, 1997: 12).

The social contexts in which genres are produced and the media by which they are distributed suggest that there may be more to linguistic context than the framing devices found within the primary text itself. In both literary and linguistic studies, the notion of (written) text tends to encompass the primary text which holds the purpose or intent of the discourse, here termed the body text. Surrounding text, such as titles, dedications, publishers’ details, illustrations, and many others, is often not taken into consideration. And yet, as Genette comments:
…although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it… (1997: 1).

Genette labels this surrounding text paratext, and goes on to describe it as representing a threshold or boundary mediating between the text and ‘the world’s discourse about the text’ (1997: 2). The notion of paratext is of interest here primarily due to its mediating function. If a genre represents specific regular social actions, and if the shape of a generic text is due to the functions it serves, it follows that paratext is as much a part of genre as the text itself. It would seem that elements of formatting, whether specifically media related or an integral part of the generic structure accompanying the main text, cannot be lightly put aside as they too are part of the knowledge needed to produce a genre. Indeed, basic generic form is often provided by paratextual elements, to the extent that a genre such as a business letter can be readily recognised even if the body text is absent. Nystrand concurs, pointing out that, for example,

…even before I open my mail I know something about it. […] My expectations are progressively set and fine-tuned by such details as logos, letterheads, typeface, and mode of production… (1986: 59, in Swales, 1990: 89).

As Swales then follows Nystrand in arguing, this process of elimination is a kind of procedural routine operating within a pre- or early textual context, giving genre ‘a watershed role in controlling the reader’s expectations’ (1990: 89).

The medium by which a text is delivered is also part of genre knowledge. A genre must always be linked to at least one vehicle of dissemination and, like paratext, the mode (in Hallidayan terms), vehicle or channel of communication is a social choice mediating between the text and its recipients.
1.5.1 Genre and media

Myth: letters are different from e-mail, faxes or memos

Reality: they’re all the same thing – correspondence

(Gentle, 2002: 87)

Yates and Orlikowski make the point that the memoranda genre is not the same as the business letter genre because its rhetorical purpose is different. The memo is used for internal business correspondence and stems from ‘an emerging ideology of management’ visible from the late nineteenth century, which was ‘the managerially defined need to document internal interactions on paper (1992: 311). The difference between letters and memos is an accepted one in many writing manuals and, in one case at least, the difference is seen to be ideological rather than merely one of layout:

Letters are for those in a different organisation […]. A memorandum is for someone in the same organisation though not necessarily the same locality. Therefore letters emphasise courtesy and memoranda emphasise efficiency (Fletcher and Gowing, 1987: 68).

The quotation from Gentle at the beginning of this section is a response to an apparently common perception of difference based on medium rather than on style and content. Gentle goes on to argue that a fax is simply ‘a letter that gets to you in less than a minute’ and that an email ‘gets to you in a split second’ (2002: 87). The point here is that medium often gets conflated with other elements, and Gentle makes the same mistake by suggesting that letters, e-mails, faxes and memos are the same thing, when a letter or memo can each be sent by a variety of media services – postal service, facsimile machine or computer – making the difference between letter and memo something other than the media used for distribution. As Yates and Orlikowski note, ‘comparing memos with electronic mail, for example, confounds the concept of communication medium with that of communication genre’ (1992: 310).

Research on the use and effects of media has also been critiqued for its somewhat narrow perspectives. Based on studies primarily undertaken in the
eighties, Yates and Orlikowski ‘identify two dominant streams of research that are characterized by their opposing views of the role played by media in organizational communication’ (1992: 308). The notion of media choice sees media as a dependent variable, influenced by various ‘technical, economic, psychological, and social factors’ (1992: 308). In contrast, research on media consequences ‘has concentrated on the consequences of media use for communication structure, process and outcomes’ (1992: 309). While there is validity in the positions of both streams, there is a dualistic division between them that Yates and Orlikowski, based on their structurational view, suggest ‘is incomplete for it fails to examine reciprocal and recursive relationships between media and communication in organizations over time’ (1992: 310).

Genre and media have, at times, been conflated and confused in both academic research and popular business writing texts, suggesting that the ‘reciprocal and recursive relationships’ between them are rich and complex. If, for example, the business letter genre is considered in its entirety, including paratextual items, a number of differences marking correspondence sent in a different medium can be immediately discerned. Paper letters can have logos and trade names, a hand-written signature pressed into the paper, colour, watermarks and so on. A fax will commonly be black and white, it may have a digital signature, and the date and time usually appears at the top of the paper, which may be on a roll. Emails are also generally black and white (where multimedia is offered, it is usually still an option, and ‘text only’ is often preferred) and tend to follow the structure of a memo, partly due to the design of the most commonly used software capable of receiving them (e.g. Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes, Qualcomm Eudora). Media therefore can be said to constrain the use of certain elements that, arguably, play a significant role in defining the nature of the business letter genre, at least as it is popularly understood. That is, many employees at the LoyaltyOne service centre based their view of the business letter on the traditional paper-based form, which may not be surprising given that the generic term ‘letter,’ here meaning ‘correspondence,’ is also used to name the traditional paper-based medium.

A further discussion on media and the differences between them, particularly email, is provided in Chapter 3 (section 3.10.1).
1.5.2 Genre, paratext and body text

In their approach to genre analysis, Lewin et al. (2001) define the genre of Social Science Research (SSR) texts based entirely upon a small corpus of these texts. In so doing, they consider the body text only. Paratextual elements appear to be disregarded in their work, including the possible presence of an abstract; keywords; author name, institution or other biographical information; formatting elements such as font types and sizes, and the use of headings; tables, charts, photographs or other graphic aids; page numbers, headers and footers; and social contexts such as the prestige of certain journals, as used by many universities in point schemes that monitor the current research status of their employees in part by the journals in which they are published.

It could be argued that genre knowledge of research texts would include access to the style guides of each journal and knowledge of style jargon such as 11 point font, justified, margins, header, footer, sans serif, and many others. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 14) comment on the relationship between genre knowledge and content, noting that the underlying philosophy of social science research can be seen in particular textual features. Such ideological factors may not be apparent from a consideration of communicative purpose as the primary or only criterion of generic moves. Paratextual considerations are further discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.10.

1.6 Genre, style and register

There seems to be a certain amount of confusion over the extent to which the notions of genre, style and register overlap. All three often appear to be somewhat conflated and it is therefore necessary to consider in what ways this terminology differs, and how each notion can be interrelated, or at least, how each may inform the other.

According to Wardhaugh’s Introduction to Sociolinguistics, ‘Registers are sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups’
Register would therefore include jargon and other characteristic terms, words or vocabulary that allow members of a specific field to communicate quickly and effectively, and to recognise each other. Honey (1997: 104) quotes Sanders’ definition of register as ‘sociosituational variation, or variation dependent on the setting and the relationship between interlocutors’ (1993: 27).

Style is often used in much the same way. Wardhaugh points out that ‘You can speak very formally or very informally, your choice being governed by circumstances’ (2000: 48). In speech, stylistic variations can include single phonemes (e.g. Fasold, 1990: 223). Competent speakers and writers control a range of stylistic variations they adopt in different situations, which appears to be much the same as the definition of register. Craig conflates the two when talking about language degeneration:

terminal speakers of Breton [...] control only casual styles for intimate routine interactions. Another reported instance of reduction of language due to loss of register is the loss of frequency of use of subordinate clauses in Cupeno [...] – languages for which subordinate clauses were a mark of the most highly valued style of language… (1997: 261).

To a certain extent, and rather simplistically, it can be argued that register has to do with what can be said, while style is about how it can be said. That is, register is concerned with context in terms of subject matter including specific jargon and discrete occupations, while style is more associated with relational context and the formality with which any given subject may be discussed. For example, when two airline employees are talking about their work they will use a register that includes jargon and terms for certain things that are quite specific to that field. The formality, or style of their speech will depend on how well they know each other and whether one occupies a more senior role.

Biber et al. (1998) in their book on Corpus Linguistics refer to register variation and define register as ‘a cover term for varieties defined by their situational characteristics.’ While this appears to be similar to Sanders’ definition, they then go on to cite examples:
Some registers can be very specific, such as novels written by Jane Austen, or Methods sections in biology research articles. Other registers are more general, such as conversation or student essays (Biber et al., 1998: 135).

Biber et al. then state that ‘Registers are defined according to their situations of use (considering their purpose, topic, setting, interactivity, mode, etc.).’ These considerations appear to be taken from Hymes’ (1964) categories concerning the features of context surrounding a speech event, such as topic, setting, channel, code and event, among others (in Brown and Yule, 1983: 38). While this seems to be quite appropriate, the example of Methods sections in research articles does suggest a narrowing of the registral concept (at least in corpus linguistics) causing a conflation between register and the concept of genre.

Swales argues that ‘even if there remains some shorthand convenience attached to retaining registral labels such as scientific, medical, legal or even newspaper English, in reality such terms can now be seen to be systematically misleading’ (1990: 3). For Swales, as for Wardhaugh, registers cover a broader spectrum such as the language of a given occupational group, and Swales goes on to state that

mainly due to the influence of the register concept, recognition of differences between, say, medical journal editorials and articles, or between legislative prose, legal textbooks and legal case reports, has developed rather slowly in the English for Specific Purposes field… (1990: 3).

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Halliday and Hasan describe register as ‘a particular configuration of field, mode and tenor’ (1985: 38). Field refers to the activity or subject: what the participants are doing, their ideas and focus. Tenor refers to the relationships and status of those taking part. Mode refers to the method of communication (e.g. spoken, written) and rhetoric (e.g. expository, persuasive). This notion of register is also developed from ideas regarding the situation in which the language is used; in this case the ‘context of situation’ and ‘context of culture’ which formed part of a theoretical
position presented originally by Malinowski (1923), Firth (1935, 1950), Mitchell (1957), and others.

This definition of register appears to form a model that does not require genre as a separate term. Variations in style would seem to be part of the feature of tenor, while Wardhaugh’s description of register primarily concerns the feature of field. Genre might more narrowly be defined within the feature of mode.

In developing the notion of genre in SFL, Martin felt that genre as a concept had a broader definition than that suggested by placing it under mode. His more recent work places the context of situation, or register, within his concept of genre (see e.g. Martin, 1984, Martin, 1985, 1997, 1998, Martin and Rothery, 1986).

Halliday’s concepts have been further developed in the research area of register analysis (Leckie-Tarry, 1995, Ghadessy, 1993, Ghadessy, 1988). Leckie-Tarry points out that genre ‘has assumed an important place within functional linguistics, a place which might, at one time, seem to have been firmly, and exclusively, reserved by ‘register’’ (1993: 27). Ghadessy’s (1993) consideration of the nature of written business communication contains elements that could fit as easily within the notion of genre analysis as that of register analysis. For example, the R element (reference), referring to previous communication, and the AI element (addressing the issue) bear a close resemblance to the moves and acts that might be formulated in a genre analysis (see 3.7).

There is not space here to provide further consideration of the variety of ways in which register, style and genre have been used in linguistics and related fields. This research takes genre as its primary unit of analysis and follows Swales’ (1990) by using the notion of community ownership and communal purpose to define the nature of a genre. That is, as the notion of communities of practice (which herein replaces that of the discourse community) centres on what people gather together to do, both register and style form part of the context and practice of the community and are not therefore elements that need to be defined separately in genre theory.

The notions of style and register do appear in discussions of the deliberate changes made to a recognised genre based within an individual community.
Where Halliday’s concept of register is considered, this is noted in the text. The changes described herein were often referred to as the ‘style change’ by members of the business community of practice concerned. Generally, style is used to refer to notions of formality and informality within a genre, and their appropriateness when dealing with the social relationships between a business and its customers. For a further discussion on genre and register see sections 3.5 and 6.2.

1.7 Contextualising genre theory

The aim of Chapter 1 has primarily been to provide a critical discussion of current issues in genre theory and their relevance to the research presented herein. There are two significant notions of textual genre analysis in linguistic literature; work following on from Swales (1990) and the Sydney position in SFL (see e.g. Martin et al., 1987, Christie and Martin, 1997, Martin, 1998). Recent work which particularly influenced this study includes that of Dias et al. (see e.g. Dias and Paré, 2000, Dias et al., 1999, Dias, 1994), Askehave and Swales (2001), Beaufort (2000) and Lewin et al. (2001). Dias et al. have largely considered the social contexts of writing, as a situated practice (following Miller, 1984). They take Swales’ notion of a discourse community owning a genre and re-define this somewhat through the notion of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998). Specific textual analysis following Swales is not considered. Lewin et al., on the other hand, attempt to bring aspects of Swales’ textual analysis together with elements of SFL. They concentrate primarily upon textual analysis and extend Swales’ original method in some detail, however the social context defined by the discourse community is ignored, as context is only considered to the extent that it can be perceived from the text itself, without recourse to the authors or their social situations.

This research follows Askehave and Swales, Beaufort, and Dias et al. in considering the social context and situatedness of writing, using communities of practice as the primary unit of analysis, and from that defining the
communicative purposes of the business letter genre here under consideration. An introduction to the site of this research follows in Chapter 2. A textual analysis following Swales and Lewin et al. is presented in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER TWO

2 Social action in practice

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical consideration of the social environment of a business constellation of practice (Wenger, 1998): the activities and purposes, situations and motives, tensions and contradictions within which genres, as ‘typified social actions’ (Miller, 1994a), appear to be located. Within the context of this business community, generally referred to as the LoyaltyOne service centre or correspondence department (see 2.3), the nature of the business letter genre will be discussed. That is, following Askehave and Swales (2001) (see 1.3.2), the purposes of the LoyaltyOne letter genre will be considered with reference to the knowledge and practice of the experienced members of the LoyaltyOne community.

2.2 Method

In this chapter a detailed description of the LoyaltyOne correspondence department community will be provided. This description is based upon three sources. The first and primary source is the author’s own experience as a full-time employee based in the correspondence department at the time of research. The author’s association with the company has continued on a regular casual basis since that time (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the issues raised by this association). Secondly, field notes were taken to augment personal experience. These include notes of meetings held at the time, informal interviews with colleagues and also a collection of internal emails constituting memoranda, questions, viewpoints and directives from the various people involved. Thirdly, and as a supplement to one and two, two questionnaires were also circulated to those correspondence department employees who agreed to take part.
CHAPTER TWO

To protect the identity and privacy of the participants, and as required by the company as part of the ethics agreement reached for this project, company and program names have been changed.

2.2.1 Questionnaire 1

Questionnaire 1 was designed to provide ethnographic information about the respondents’ perceptions of their working environment. Each question gave respondents the opportunity to write what they thought, rather than limiting them to a selection of possible answers. Each questionnaire returned thus represents a mini case-study: a snapshot of individuals’ perceptions of their working environment. The questionnaire was given to those writing team members who had read and signed an agreement, as required by the ethics approval for this research. It was handed out two weeks prior to the introduction of the style change, and 24 were returned out of a total of 53 employees.

There were two parts to this questionnaire. Part 1 asked 11 questions concerning the letter writing style and what was being referred to by the people involved as the forthcoming *style change*. Part 2 asked 13 questions relating to the COP and the individual. Questionnaire 1 is reproduced in Appendix A.

The questions in Part 1 aimed to probe the opinions and understanding of respondents with reference to the business letter writing that formed the primary focus of their employment requirement and the forthcoming style change. A number of issues arise from the use of this format. Even carefully worded questions sometimes allow the respondent more than one interpretation, and this happened in a few instances. Generally however, the questions did result in a range of answers that agreed with the understanding gained by the author from experience and anecdotal evidence. More commonly, the various interpretations of the questions displayed individuals’ perceptions of the importance of any given aspect of their work. So, when asked about their letters, some chose to remark on denotational content whereas others made a statement about lexis, format, context or presentation.
As a full-time employee and part of the LoyaltyOne correspondence department for over a year prior to the presentation of this questionnaire, the author noted a marked change in opinions throughout this period. As such, the understanding of each individual can only be a representation of his or her position at one point in time. As community members continued to experience many forms of social change during that time (see 4.4.1), their understanding of any particular area appeared to be in constant flux. For instance, a year prior to the presentation of this questionnaire, when a style change was first mooted, the reaction was instantly and strongly negative. Most of the respondents had since lived with the likelihood of a style change for over six months before the change actually took place, and in that time opinions moved towards acceptance, some grudging, others enthusiastic. A discussion of the writers’ views about their correspondence is provided in 2.8.1 below.

The aim of part 2 was to provide a ‘snapshot’ of then current impressions of the working environment (equipment, geography, climate) and the community in which the changes were to be centred. The questions concentrated on individuals, requesting that they provide a basic outline of their history within the LoyaltyOne community, their education, and their view of the workplace, positives and negatives. These impressions, which again were not intended to be statistically quantifiable, along with the author’s own observations allow for a detailed description of the community, as perceived internally, by its members.

Given the author’s own involvement within the research setting, it is likely that some answers to part 2, particularly those that were expected to be negative, may not be as frank as might be preferred. While the questionnaires were entirely confidential, some writers chose not to take part in case material that could identify them was made available to management, and those who did take part may potentially have been diplomatic in their responses. This is offset by the author’s personal knowledge of the community, and local, anecdotal insider evidence. While many writers chose not to answer ‘formal’ written questions, their responses to informal verbal discussions did not appear to be affected by the author’s position. A more detailed consideration of author participation, privacy and ethical issues is provided as part of Chapter 4 (see 4.2).
2.2.2 Questionnaire 2

Part 1 of questionnaire 2 was handed out as a separate sheet, three months after the style change had been implemented. It contained a list of 26 words or phrases that had been used by correspondence department writers in conversation throughout the period during which the style change was proposed and implemented. These terms included *formal*, *informal*, *old fashioned*, *easy to write*, *authoritative*, *chatty*, *hard to be sympathetic*, *Modern English*, *Standard English*, and so on. The writers were asked to tick a box corresponding to whether they thought the description matched one of four possibilities: the old style, the new style, both or neither. 24 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B.

Part 2 of questionnaire 2 was handed out a few days after part 1. Twenty questionnaires were returned. Participants were asked to provide some control details such as their team, sex, age bracket and time in the correspondence department, to enable some reference between the two questionnaires. 10 questions were asked, covering then current perceptions about the original style, the methods by which the change was facilitated, and the new style. Respondents were also asked to gauge their level of confidence writing the new style and to comment on their understanding of the term ‘business letter.’

Eight questions had three alternative answers provided, with a space below each question for respondents who did not feel the alternatives to be appropriate. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix C. It is likely that the answers given in this questionnaire are generally honest and considered. The change had taken place three months before and the questions asked did not have the same perceived impact on job security as in questionnaire 1. In asking respondents to rate the methods by which the change was facilitated, the author was asking colleagues to rate his direct involvement, however verbal feedback at the time of the change corresponds with the feedback provided in the questionnaires. This suggests that, overall, the responses are an accurate reflection of writers’ opinions.
2.3 The *LoyaltyOne* business environment: An overview

*TravelAir* is a limited company in the air travel industry, registered with the Australian Stock Exchange, and with an internationally recognised and competitive operation. In the current global marketplace it would seem not to be enough simply to sell a good product or service. Many companies, often in different countries, are competing for a share of the same market, and the consumer can be faced with a bewildering variety of choice. Insofar as the consumer increasingly expects value and service, the enticement of a valuable ‘extra’ for repeat custom appears to be a primary form of loyalty inducement. Loyalty or reward programs are provided by such diverse businesses as airlines, banks and credit card companies, hotels, booksellers, wine merchants, hardware stores, video hire companies and even car manufacturers. Some of these schemes number members in the millions around the world. *TravelAir* own a large and complex loyalty program, here called *LoyaltyOne*. The purpose of the *LoyaltyOne* Service Centre is to manage and administer the *LoyaltyOne* program, which, at the time of research, had about two and a half million members worldwide.

The *LoyaltyOne* Service Centre is managed by a service contractor, PSP Ltd. (Program Service Provider), which itself is owned by a large multinational corporation. The relationship between *TravelAir* and PSP is an unusual and intimate one. All *LoyaltyOne* Service Centre personnel are employed by PSP, however they work in a recognised *TravelAir* building using computer hardware, software, and confidential databases owned and provided by *TravelAir*. The general public are not aware that a contractor runs *TravelAir*’s loyalty program, and PSP’s contract requires that they do not disclose this fact. As such, PSP employees contact *LoyaltyOne* program members as representatives of *TravelAir*. *TravelAir* is also responsible for the terms and conditions of the *LoyaltyOne* program, and for brochures, newsletters, promotions, its internet site, advertisements, letterhead paper, rewards and merchandise, all of which help to define and promote the program.

The *LoyaltyOne* program, in association with programs run by affiliated companies, offers *Reward* points for air travel, hotel accommodation, car hire
and credit card use. A linked, but separate program called ClubOne offers pre-travel airport lounge access and complimentary LoyaltyOne membership for a yearly fee. There are four levels of LoyaltyOne membership, the upper three of which may only be obtained through increasingly regular use of TravelAir services, and the top two levels also offer complimentary ClubOne membership.

PSP employees at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre are responsible for looking after the program members, within the parameters provided by TravelAir. New members join either LoyaltyOne or ClubOne by sending in an application form, phoning the service centre or submitting an internet form. In each case the LoyaltyOne DOS-based software database (which includes ClubOne members) is updated manually from the information provided, and payments are sent directly to a TravelAir finance department in another city for processing. The service centre primarily answers queries and complaints from members to do with their membership account; the number of points they have; whether or not recent activity has been automatically included in their account, and if not, why not; what information they need to provide to prove their recent activity; why some activity is not eligible for points; why the Reward they wish to purchase with their points is not available; plus the usual administrative requirements such as changes of name due to marriage or divorce, changes of address, notification of death, and so on.

Employees of the LoyaltyOne Service Centre work in a 15 storey building in the central business district of a large Australian city. At the time of this research there was a specifically named ‘Correspondence Department’ dealing with correspondence generated by members of all levels of the LoyaltyOne program. The Correspondence Department was based primarily on the eighth floor, although the Email team was placed at the rear of the fifth floor, and a small independent team, dealing with the highest LoyaltyOne membership level only, was based on the seventh floor. Table 2.1 below shows the various teams and departments that form PSP Ltd. Their roles are further explained below.
Table 2.1 PSP teams and departments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building level</th>
<th>LoyaltyOne Business Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Floor 9</td>
<td>Data Entry, Corporate Membership Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor 8</td>
<td>Correspondence teams A &amp; B, Correspondence Administration teams I &amp; II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor 7</td>
<td>Multi-skill team E, Call centre teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor 6</td>
<td>Call centre teams, Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor 5</td>
<td>Correspondence team C, Rewards Department, Program Partner team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor 4 (shared)</td>
<td>Correspondence team D, Manager Information Services (MIS), Human Resources (HR), General Manager (GM), Payroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor 2 (shared)</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.1 Floor 9

The Data Entry department occupies most of the ninth floor. This department, split into three teams, is primarily responsible for updating the LoyaltyOne program database. This role includes entering the details of new members into the database from application forms in various media; entering points earned from members’ transactions that were not automatically credited to their accounts; updating personal details such as name and address changes, and so on.

Membership of ClubOne is available to groups as well as individuals, and ranges from small companies with ten ClubOne members to large public and private corporations, and government departments. Many of these groups have negotiated special rates and discounts with TravelAir, and the management of these ClubOne corporate accounts are the responsibility of the Corporate Membership Services team. A Team Leader manages each team, and the teams on the ninth floor are the responsibility of a PSP manager with an office on the same floor.
2.3.2 Floor 8

There are two correspondence teams on the eighth floor. Team A deals with *LoyaltyOne* level one members, who are generally irregular travellers and who form the bulk of *LoyaltyOne*’s membership base. Team B deals with members of levels two and three, and also *ClubOne* members. These members travel far more regularly and are more valuable to *TravelAir* for, though a much smaller group than the level one membership base, they account for a greater revenue percentage.

The eighth floor also houses groups responsible for cataloguing and filing nearly all incoming and outgoing correspondence. Faxes are received by two facsimile machines situated in an office in the rear centre of the floor. All correspondence addressed to the *LoyaltyOne* Post Office Box is opened by mail room staff and read by the coding/sequencing team (all part of Administration team I), from where it is sent to other areas of the Service Centre, a process which will be described further below.

In the front centre of the eighth floor is another office, from which the filing team (Administration team II) carries out its responsibilities, filing all closed *sequences* (correspondence), which are kept first in its office, then the basement of the building, and then a secure warehouse, until they can be legally destroyed after seven years.

2.3.3 Floor 7

The seventh floor is primarily a call centre environment, with incoming calls directed to available consultants as they finish their previous call. This floor is also home to team E, who look after the highest level of *LoyaltyOne* members exclusively. As such, this team combine the role of phone consultant and correspondence writer.
2.3.4 Floor 6

The sixth floor is also a call centre environment; however the front left side of the floor is home to the LoyaltyOne finance team, which deals primarily with queries about the fee related to joining the LoyaltyOne program.

2.3.5 Floor 5

Correspondence team C is located at the back of the fifth floor, and is primarily responsible for correspondence arriving in email format. At the time of this research it was the largest single correspondence team, with sixteen consultants and a team leader. The Program Partner team occupies one side of the fifth floor. This team deal with queries relating to points earned through companies other than TravelAir and its partners, who are also affiliated with the LoyaltyOne program, such as hotel chains and car hire companies.

The Rewards department occupies most of the fifth floor. This group deals with issues surrounding the use of points to book ‘free’ travel, and many of its operations are quite separate from those of the other LoyaltyOne departments. The Rewards department has its own phone consultants and data entry operators and its own manager, and it tends to be seen as a separate entity not directly related to the operations of the LoyaltyOne service centre of which it is a part.

2.3.6 Floor 4

Unlike the floors above, which are mostly open plan, the fourth floor has been partitioned into offices, and PSP share the space with one of TravelAir’s worldwide partners. PSP’s General Manager and his secretary are based on this floor, as well as PSP’s payroll officer, the Information Systems Manager, the Human Resources (HR) Manager and an HR officer who deals primarily with external position advertisement and interview selections. At the time of this research the three members of correspondence team D were also based on the fourth floor. This team deals with serious and complicated complaints or issues
that may involve potential legal action, possible fraud, complaints to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), requests for compensation, and so on.

2.3.7 Floor 2

The second floor is partitioned into larger rooms and offices, including the building’s now unused canteen, and is shared with TravelAir employees. One large room containing about 20 computers is used for training, and the two offices partitioned off this space house PSP’s joint training managers, and the training coordinator. Another windowless, often stuffy room nearby is also used for training. These rooms need to be booked, as they are shared with various TravelAir training units.

2.3.8 Other floors

The ground floor contains a small shop that sells a variety of food, some newspapers, magazines and other general goods. The security desk in the middle of the floor is always occupied during office hours, and security identification must be shown to gain access to the lifts, and thus the rest of the building. A large meeting room is also available on the ground floor and is occasionally booked by PSP for larger meetings, training and external group interviews. PSP employees know very little about the other floors, and never visit them, except for a few who use a small gym located on the fifteenth floor, at the top of the building, and PSP’s filing staff, who use an area in the basement to store older files before they are moved to secure warehouse storage. The third floor houses another company, which also comprises contractors working for TravelAir, and the rest of the building is used by TravelAir’s own employees.
CHAPTER TWO

2.4 Writing correspondence at LoyaltyOne

2.4.1 The Correspondence department environment

The purpose of this section is to describe the path an external communication may take, from the point at which it is received by the LoyaltyOne Service Centre through to its eventual destruction. There are numerous possible paths and this outline is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to map out the common processes in use at the Service Centre during the time this research was carried out. By providing this overview, an understanding may be obtained of the particular role of the writers within their business community, and also of the complex practices in which their comprehension of, and response to, incoming correspondence is embedded.

The most common form of incoming correspondence at the time of this research was the letter. The term ‘letter,’ as it is used here, generally refers to written or printed matter received via the postal service, or occasionally delivered, in person, directly to the Service Centre. A brief outline of letter processing will be presented first, followed by a more detailed analysis. This initial outline contains some terms marked in italic script. Terms referring to company teams briefly described in the previous section are followed by the relevant section number in parentheses. Other italicised words refer to common company jargon, which is explained in parentheses where necessary.

Almost all letters are initially processed by the Mail Room staff (2.3.2), who open and divide the mail into broad initial categories. Pre-printed forms, such as applications for membership, are separated and passed to Data Entry (2.3.1). Letters are passed to the Coding/sequencing Team (2.3.2), where they are coded (given a specific reference code) according to membership and enquiry type, and then sequenced (given a unique 8-digit number linked to membership number) as either a standard (pre-written) or custom letter, and batched (placed in groups) according to type.
Batches of letters that are to receive a standardised response are passed to Data Entry and/or the Program Partner team (2.3.5) if any action by these teams is required, and they are then passed to Filing (2.3.2). Letters that have been sequenced with a Standard Letter code are closed automatically and, where the code is attached to a letter, that response is printed the following working day and sent to another contracted service provider, where standard letters are automatically folded, enveloped, and sent out (see 3.10 for a consideration of current technologies and standards relating to letter production).

Batches of letters that require a customised response are also sent to Data Entry or Partner Products, as required, and then passed to the appropriate Correspondence Team (2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.5, 2.3.6). Batches are assigned to individual writers, who check that legitimate requests have been actioned, and complete any that have not. The writers then respond appropriately, usually by writing a letter that they then print, envelope and place in boxes marked domestic or international, to be passed to a mailing company and then to the postal service. Once the letter is complete the writer closes the sequence number in the database manually and the original correspondence, together with a copy of the writer’s reply, is passed to Filing.

The Filing staff then file the letter according to its sequence number. After a time, boxes of filed correspondence are taken down to the basement, where they can be recalled if further correspondence warrants it. Eventually, the boxes are moved to an off-site storage facility and kept for the legally appropriate time, before being destroyed.

As can be seen from the above, every letter that enters the LoyaltyOne Service Centre follows certain prescribed routes. These procedures are designed to ensure that no letters are lost, and that a given letter can be retrieved years after it has been received. Each letter is given a unique number (sequenced) and that number is usually recorded against the membership account with which it is related. As such, the correspondence received by the service centre can be considered the primary focus of the majority of departments that make up PSP, with the exception of the call centre. In COP terms, correspondence is the primary point around which communal practice and the negotiation of meaning
takes place. That is, the *LoyaltyOne* program itself provides the framework within which the correspondence has meaning, and it is the reason the correspondence exists. The program is an abstraction however: nothing more than a set of terms and conditions. The program framework becomes meaningful only when it can be applied, and for the writers and other departments mentioned above, that interaction, or practice, is made possible by the correspondence received in response to the *LoyaltyOne* program terms and conditions. For the correspondence department writers, the production of text in response to received letters also forms one of the primary ‘points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized’ (Wenger, 1998: 58), and this will be further considered below (see e.g. 2.9, 2.10, 4.4.3).

### 2.4.2 Vignette: An employee’s perspective

I read the next email. It’s from a fairly new member and there are a number of issues. Firstly the member wants to know if she can claim for a transaction that took place a couple of months before she joined. I flick the screen into USAS, type in her membership number and bring up her membership details. Checking the CR screen I confirm that the surname in the email is the same as the name in the membership. I then check the C2 screen, which shows the member’s email address, first name and date of birth. So far, so good. As an afterthought, I check the PCOR screen. Which confirms that the email I’m working on is an open sequence, so no one else has closed it. That happens sometimes. With the enormous backlog we have at the moment, members often send more than one email. In fact, there is a newer open sequence in this membership. The dates of the two are close, so the second email probably refers to the first one, and I’ll have to try and find it. The membership is quite new and there are no other sequences, so I don’t have to investigate any previous issues.

I next call up the LO screen, which has the date the member joined and the number of points in her account – none as yet. Our terms and conditions allow us to backdate memberships by 30 days. I have the discretion to go back a bit further if I believe the situation warrants it, and my Team Leader can go back even further. This member does not appear to have any commercial
significance however, so I’m going to tell her she can’t have those points. From the wording of her email, she wasn’t expecting them anyway.

The member goes on to ask about two other transactions. Their dates make them eligible, and she has given me enough information to find the first one in Purge. The second was a transaction with another company. They’re a partner, but we don’t have access to their transaction details, so I’ll have to ask the member to send in documentation.

I enter the information she’s provided in Purge and, after a lengthy wait, my computer shows the transaction. In fact, it’s a whole series of transactions, and they’re not discounts either. This changes things. With that many full-price transactions, this new member could go up a status level in a short time. A good-will gesture is certainly worth pursuing as a form of loyalty inducement.

I can see the outline of the transactions with our partner, but I will still need to ask for documentation before I can credit the points. As for backdating the member’s account, I ask a colleague across from me what he would do. He agrees with me. I know the information is in the DAD (Discretionary Authority Document), but it’s easier to wander over to my Team Leader and check with him. He writes and signs a short authorisation note on the email.

Back at my desk, I backdate the member’s account to the day of the first transaction, and leave a comment to that effect in the Comment screen. I then PUP (I assume this is an acronym, but I’ve never found out what it means – it is now a verb) on the backdated transaction, and the transaction that took place more recently with our company. I check the HALL screen to be sure I’ve entered the right information, and then the LO screen, to check the number of points.

The member’s recent transactions hadn’t tracked to her account because she hadn’t quoted her membership number at the time of making the transaction. I’ll need to tell her about that in my reply, however I am able to put her membership number into the transactions that are yet to be finalised. To do this, I open another DOS-based program, TUBE. I have to ask another colleague for help here, as we don’t do this very often and I’ve forgotten the commands.
That done, I check the member’s email. I haven’t missed anything, so I flick the computer into AmiPro and hotkey my personal email outline. I paste in a couple of macros (standard wording), make a few alterations and ensure that I’ve answered her direct questions and given her the information I think she needs. That is, I tell her that I’ve backdated her account, even though we don’t usually do this beyond 30 days (if you’re going to do something you don’t have to do, it’s a good idea to tell the member you’ve gone out of your way. The idea is to let them know that you’ve given them a personal response, and that they’ve received something they’re not really entitled to – if you don’t tell them, you raise the level of their expectations, which leads to problems when you have to refuse them something further down the track). I also tell her I’ve given her points for the other transaction with us, state her account balance, and ask for documentation for the partner transaction. This is the information she’s actually asked for. I also tell her what she needs to do so that transactions with our partners and us are credited to her account automatically, and then I tell her that I’ve done this on her behalf this time, so that her live (future) transactions should be recorded. I remind her to read the benefits booklet, and always to keep all documentation and check her account regularly (this is useful in case of any future disputes – this email will remain on file and if ever the member complains that she didn’t receive points, and does so beyond the 6 months in which we’re allowed to credit old transactions, we can refer her back to this email).

I re-read the email, check my spelling of the member’s name, then paste the wording into a blank email in Lotus Notes (not my personal email account – we have a standard box which all the email team use, so that we don’t get replies from members to our personal box). I write in the member’s email address, as it is on the email I’ve got printed next to me, and then send it.

I close the sequence in the PCOR screen under my three digit code (for stats purposes), leaving a two line, abbreviated note detailing what I’ve done, and what information I’ve given. This screen also records that the format of the correspondence was email (as opposed to letter or fax). I’ve decided to leave the other open sequence. It appears to be an email, and there are simply too many for it to be easy to locate; trying to do so will be a waste of time and the emphasis at the moment is on closing as many sequences as possible. I return
to AmiPro and print out my response, walk over to the printer and retrieve my print, which I staple on top of the member’s email. I circle the sequence number, write ‘closed’ with my name and the date, and add it to my ‘filing’ pile.

The above vignette (a technique found in Wenger, 1998) serves to illustrate, at least in part, the processes involved in the production of correspondence in team C. It is based on my personal experience and it is not comprehensive. While the processes described are a basic example only, they are indicative of the sort of computer-based investigation that must be carried out to achieve the required response. Accuracy of information is of paramount importance. The act of putting a response in writing has consequences beyond a verbal reply. Every time writers allow a piece of correspondence to be sent to a member they send out evidence of their ability not so much to write a letter as to investigate a case, provide a service and give appropriate, and possibly legally sensitive responses to queries. If a promise is made, the writers must be sure that they and the company are in a position to keep that promise. If directions or phone numbers are given, they must be correct and current. Writers must be able to support the decisions they have made both internally (by recourse to the program terms and conditions, the Discretionary Authority Document, to Team Leaders or Managers, to Filenotes and to Comments placed in the member’s computer-based file) and externally (by referring members to the publicly available program terms and conditions, which they accepted as part of their membership of the program).

This vignette was written to explicate a process rather than as an account of social practice. Those immediate social elements required as part of the process have been included: my queries to two colleagues and my Team Leader. There would have been other social interactions taking place throughout the duration of this process. As one of the experienced members of the community, I would have received my fair share of questions from those around me, some of which may have required me to leave my desk or to read and comment on a letter dealing with an entirely different issue. The team of which I was a part at this time was, at least on the surface, a close-knit group. All the usual social interactions associated with such a group would be going on as well – shared
comments, jokes, gossip, discussion of technical and external issues. At least one computer would have crashed (it may have been mine), and conversations would arise between various group members about last night, or the last time they got drunk, or what they’re doing tonight, about football tipping, TV shows, the latest film, or the last book they’d read, and so on. There may have been a visitor to our area from another team, someone may have wandered up to use the photocopier (the only one on the floor was behind my desk at the time), people would be passing to use the toilets or to make a drink (those facilities were also in an area behind team C), and at least one radio would be on just loud enough to make me aware of it occasionally. I would also be aware of local conversations, phone conversations, arguments, discussions and movement around me but not directed at me. The atmosphere within the team, the time of day, the day of the week, my own personal emotional state and the attitudes I perceived in others would also have an effect on the process described above and my individual practice, as would the tone of the letter to which I was responding, the perceived commercial value of the member and his experience of our service (either visible from his letter or from comments in the database from previous contact).

Despite the complex and comprehensive rules governing the LoyaltyOne program and the authority of the service centre employees, in practice there are many short-cuts, and many decisions which are based as much on the current state of mind and personality of a given writer as on the guidelines she is required to follow. The perspective presented above is entirely my own, and another individual may well have reacted differently to the member’s requests. Indeed, I had gained something of a reputation for saying ‘no’ to members, and my time in team D, responding to more serious and often threatening complaints, had made me rather cynical and inclined to assume that most complaints were merely a ploy to demand undeserved compensation. As such, both for me and for many other writers, there was often tension between the need to provide a service and maintain the loyalty of the members with whom we corresponded, and our reactions to letters that insisted or commanded, often in a manner that appeared abusive or condescending, and generally in complete
ignorance of the conditions of the *LoyaltyOne* program to which their membership bound them.

### 2.5 The *LoyaltyOne* community of practice

The description of the processes involved in writing a reply to a member may be somewhat more formally detailed through an explication of the diagram in Figure 2.1 below, which follows Johns (1997: 37) in considering the sources of genre knowledge. The diagram has been extended here to indicate the context of that knowledge, based on the notion of community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998), which forms the major unit of analysis in the following discussion.

**Figure 2.1 Genre and situated cognition: Elements of a writer’s knowledge in a business environment (modified from Johns, 1997: 37)**

The central circle represents an individual employee: a legitimate, experienced member of the *LoyaltyOne* Correspondence Department Community of
Practice (COP). I have labelled the circle ‘A Writer’ because it highlights an important aspect of employment that members of the Correspondence Department use to define their position and practice in relation to other areas of the Service Centre’s Constellation of Practice.

In any given circumstance of life we tend to use labels to represent ourselves and categorise others, and these labels can suggest much about the perceived importance of a specific area of activity. For instance, a single individual may, at the same point in time, be known variously as a father, a son, a husband, a writer, a saxophonist, and a lecturer. More generically, he may be labelled as a white, male, middle-aged professional.

The use of this type of labelling is an important source of contextualising in the media, primarily as a way of establishing character, significance or authority, and therefore newsworthiness (Bell, 1991: 196). So my hypothetical individual may be referred to as “the husband of famous composer X,” or “the author of X.” Such labelling is embedded in cultural norms, and often contentious for that reason: issues of gender and power relationships are implicitly coded in these terms (Kniffka, 1980, Davis and Walton, 1983).

At LoyaltyOne, the use of the term ‘writer’ and, for that matter, ‘Correspondence Department’ serves to separate one community from another through the definition of a particular job requirement. Writers contrast their position with that of the ‘phone consultants’ who work in a call centre environment.

The circle denoting ‘a writer’ has quite deliberately been placed mostly within the community of practice in which the individual works as an employee. While new employees will already have written communication skills learnt through their own past experiences, the majority of their knowledge about the specific genres in which they are now to write is likely to come from various sources within their new work community. That is, while the notion of a ‘business letter’ genre may well be a familiar one, the content of LoyaltyOne business letters is based on the terms and conditions of the LoyaltyOne program, requiring new employees to learn what they are allowed to say and how they are allowed to say it. These factors form part of the required genre knowledge for successful writing in the LoyaltyOne environment. As such,
although previous general knowledge of a business letter genre may assist new employees in their learning, such genre knowledge may provide little benefit and even, if rigidly held, be detrimental to the learning processes required to master what may appear to be a familiar genre, now in a new environment.

Perhaps the most obvious source of genre knowledge available to an experienced community member in the LoyaltyOne Correspondence Department can be considered a form of intertextuality: texts on the same or similar subjects, produced and developed primarily by individuals sharing information over a period of time. The use of previous texts serves several purposes in the context of the LoyaltyOne correspondence department: 1. it is authoritative, 2. it speeds up the writing process, 3. it provides continuity of style.

1. **It is authoritative.** Part of the process of becoming an experienced member of the Correspondence Department community involves gaining an awareness of what can and cannot be said to a customer. While this is true of verbal interaction, written communication is regarded as a particularly important area by management because, quite apart from an individual’s memory, it physically exists and so can usually be indisputable evidence in case of a dispute or claim. Initial legitimate peripheral participation reinforces this point quite explicitly: the letters of a new employee are checked for factual accuracy, tone, style, grammar and spelling. Previous text is indispensable to the new employee in such an environment, as it becomes an authority, a benchmark for what is expected. Its authority lies in its implicit acceptance by experienced members of the community, inherent in its dissemination and constant reuse.

2. **It speeds up the writing process.** Quantity and quality are often difficult issues in the LoyaltyOne Correspondence Department and are held in delicate balance. It is necessary both to produce accurate, well-written letters and to send out as many letters as possible each day. As many of the same issues are encountered on a daily basis, it becomes both unnecessary and tedious to re-write the same information afresh each time. The use of a word processor allows text to be copied into new letters in large chunks, sometimes of several paragraphs, which are
then minimally altered to fit the unique situation contained in the experience of the member concerned, as expressed in the form of her query.

3. *It provides continuity of style.* Writers are individuals and have their own likes and dislikes, style preference and writing processes. At the same time, they are paid employees of a company with its own ‘house style,’ which they are expected to follow. That style, its form and tone, is constantly reproduced and validated through the use of previous texts. This is not intended to imply stasis however. Indeed, the notion of constant reproduction, when applied each time to a unique situation by a writer with individual preferences, implies and allows for minor changes, which accumulate over time, allowing the style to evolve and adapt to different needs. That said, there are corporate and socially prescribed linguistic boundaries, discussed in 2.6 and Chapter 3, that create an environment in which any changes and individual preferences must live.

There would seem to be a clear link between the intertextual nature and varied uses of text as described above and Wenger’s (1998) concepts of negotiation of meaning, and particularly of reification. The correspondence produced by the community of practice (COP) serves as the primary interface between it and the disparate, distanced people it serves. As such, the production of text is one of the ‘points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized’ (1998: 58). The act of writing a letter gives form to a certain understanding. It creates a certain expression of that understanding. That form may then be challenged, modified, rejected or accepted, by those internal or external to the LoyaltyOne community, be they the writers and their immediate managers, recipients of the finished form, or influential TravelAir company executives. For example, the letters written by the correspondence teams interpret the terms and conditions of the LoyaltyOne program in certain ways, while also representing TravelAir and its relationship with its customers in a particular manner. The ‘style and tone’ change to be considered in this research came as a result of a TravelAir executive’s challenge to the way TravelAir’s relationships and attitudes were being represented. A more specific, personal
example of the business letter genre as a point of focus and, particularly, as a boundary object, will be discussed in 2.9 below.

Managers and writers alike tend to assume that work is individual: that each employee has a thorough knowledge of the *LoyaltyOne* program and that they spend most of their time sitting in their own space, carrying out their own investigations and writing their own responses. Clearly, however, in practice, cognition is situated; both personal and shared. Knowledge and memory within COP practice is held, by repetitive familiarity, as part of the writer’s own, personal understanding; it is also contained in the memories of other members of the community, and available physically or electronically, for example in the form of previous correspondence, catalogued by individuals for their own use, or available in a team or department repository. No one person can know everything necessary to do his or her job. As the vignette above showed in part, writers rely on group practice: they confirm their decisions with others, sometimes simply for reassurance about an area they already know, sometimes for confirmation of an area with which they are inexperienced.

For members of the correspondence teams, the letter (or fax or email – these terms identify media only, not genre, and are interchangeable unless otherwise stated) is the primary point of focus around which all other tools, materials and requirements are placed. In order successfully to complete a letter at *LoyaltyOne* writers must have available to them the information and knowledge presented in Figure 1.2. On the left side of the diagram is information related to individual members of the *LoyaltyOne* program. This includes the queries, complaints and requests received that must be answered, and the *TravelAir* database containing further details about each member. This is external information, assimilated and mediated within the correspondence department COP. The personal stories of different individuals are abstracted and placed within the context of the *LoyaltyOne* program. Extraneous information is generally ignored and the member is deliberately impersonalised: such things as hospitalisation, moving house or deaths in the family necessarily have little impact on an experienced writer, who is more interested in the dates of the transactions the member is querying.

The writers’ investigation may then run the gamut of resources available to them within their practice. Once they have a decision or answer they have
something to communicate. In the act of writing a letter-of-response, that answer, and their investigative practice, finds form and focus. How that answer may be expressed is arguably part of the same knowledge base that produces the answer. A writer learns to associate the answer and its expression so that the style and tone of a response are tacit – entirely submerged within the factual, denotational content of the response. As such, the genre knowledge provided on the right side of the diagram in Figure 2.1 above cannot really be separated out as recognised segments of knowledge independent from the practice of the writers as a whole.

In point of clarification, situated knowledge such as I am arguing here does not necessarily imply that such knowledge is not available in any other context, or that a writer cannot bring previously learnt perspectives into a new situation. Writers do reflect on the writing process. They are members of other COPs and they do have the ability to use what letter writing knowledge they may have gained at LoyaltyOne in external contexts. The nature of writing practice as it relates to the author’s experience of the LoyaltyOne correspondence department COP is further related and discussed in 2.9 below.

2.6 Practice: Writing roles

Beaufort’s notion of writing roles includes tasks that involve little or no writing, but that are related in various ways to community practice and the production of a final text (2000: 199). As noted in 1.3.3, these roles can serve to describe the variety of tasks undertaken within the LoyaltyOne correspondence department, and particularly as a means of following the socialisation of writers into the COP. The roles also demonstrate the community’s focus on the business letter, and the status awarded to certain tasks as a result. The description of writing roles below also serves as a foundation from which to describe how the writers and their writing tasks were affected by the style change, and also how these roles proved important in structuring the learning that needed to take place to enable the writers to
continue producing letters without losing a great deal of quantity and quality (see 4.4.3).

The writing roles detailed in Table 2.2 below, following Beaufort (2000), can be related to the socialisation of new writers into the COP, and can also demonstrate relationships between writing tasks, local and expert knowledge, and the shared cognition necessary for competence in the workplace practice. Each role is explained briefly in the context of the LoyaltyOne COPs, and compared to Beaufort’s findings, particularly where there is contrast.

The roles of observer and reader/researcher (2000: 198) were primarily means for legitimate peripheral participants (LPPs) to begin learning about the LoyaltyOne texts and the investigative processes required to understand the letter contents.

For a newcomer, the sheer number of possible complaints and queries and the variety of investigative methods could be daunting. Reading previous texts began the process of intertextual learning – of finding out simultaneously what could be said and how. Unlike Beaufort’s workplace, the nature of the job meant that the role of observer was generally limited to LPPs. Observing other writers did happen, but usually in the context of one of the other roles, such as editing or coaching, where the observer was also involved. The role of reader/researcher would usually be guided during early LPP, however this was an ongoing task.

Beaufort’s ghostwriter did not exist in the LoyaltyOne COP, in the sense of a writer creating text, for another’s signature, with little responsibility for content (2000: 200). However the role of ghostauthor is very similar. This role was for newcomers only and required a coach. The coach would carry out the investigation, and then tell the new writer what she should write. Standard paragraphs were commonly used and the new writer had little original writing to do. The letters sent out at this stage would bear the newcomer’s signature, however both the investigative work and the content would be guided by others.
### Table 2.2 Writing roles in the LoyaltyOne Correspondence Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Observes others’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader/researcher</td>
<td>Reads others’ texts to gain information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost author</td>
<td>Creates text and signs&lt;br&gt;Content guided by others (little input on content)&lt;br&gt;Regular use of boilerplate (standard paragraphs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Investigates what answer and explanation to provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervised author</td>
<td>Creates text and signs&lt;br&gt;Primary responsibility for content&lt;br&gt;Regular use of boilerplate (standard paragraphs)&lt;br&gt;Content/style accuracy checked by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author simple text</td>
<td>Creates text and signs&lt;br&gt;Regular use of boilerplate (standard paragraphs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author complex text</td>
<td>Creates text and signs&lt;br&gt;Primary responsibility for content&lt;br&gt;Some original material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Edits others’ texts for content, logic and style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proofreader/grammician</td>
<td>Corrects typographical and spelling errors&lt;br&gt;Edits others’ texts for grammatical correctness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High computer literacy</td>
<td>Able to control basic macro functions to speed processes&lt;br&gt;Able to install standard paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Trains others in writing roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author / inventor (complex, high-profile text)</td>
<td>Creates text and signs&lt;br&gt;Primary responsibility for content&lt;br&gt;Invents original material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-maker (high profile text editor)</td>
<td>Interprets policy&lt;br&gt;Authorised to advise on content accuracy/rhetorical style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The investigator and supervised author mark the next step in LPP and the move towards expertise. Here, the writer would be expected to research his reply and write the text with little guidance from a coach. The author now assumes primary responsibility for content and style, the accuracy of which is then checked by others. The role of investigator is a necessary and ongoing one, requiring a great deal of local knowledge. In practice, while the author is now responsible for her text, she will still make frequent use of the expertise and group cognition available to her, but to a greater extent than oldtimers, and with less efficiency, as she will not yet have learnt who best to approach about which subject or issue.

The end of supervision marks the transition to qualified full participation, or what Beaufort calls an ‘old newcomer’ (2000: 209). The writer now has sole responsibility for the texts he sends out, however he is not immediately expected to reach the quantity benchmarks set for experienced members of the COP. From this point, the author assumes the role of author simple text and, over time, enters fully into the core, expert practice of the community.

These steps form the initial socialisation into the correspondence COP and they are often interleaved, so that a novice will move roles from observer to supervised author to ghostwriter to investigator several times in the space of a morning. In the order presented above, the steps are most clearly defined for an external newcomer. An employee transferring from the call centre will already be an expert investigator and PSP oldtimer who will know what the primary textual content should be. Nonetheless, they are considered newcomers to COP writing practice and take the same steps in learning the style and tone in which they must write the answers they already know.

The extent to which the remaining writing roles will become part of the practice of an individual very much depends both on that individual’s abilities and preferences, and on the social environment and the needs of the COP. Given the repetitive nature of the writing job and PSP’s awareness that there was little opportunity for promotion within its flat structure, employees were encouraged to develop their abilities in other areas. As such, many writers had the opportunity to take on roles that were not officially part of their job description. This included coaching, which had an authorised role as well the more informal COP-based practice.
Every writer took on the role of author complex text whenever the batch of correspondence to which they had been assigned presented them with a more difficult task. Complex investigation and complex correspondence often went together, requiring the writer to spend a lot of time researching the issue as well as writing original material in a response. Most writers disliked the time and effort involved and few enjoyed completing such tasks. As a result, those who could write effective original material were generally accorded a higher status as writers, and almost always assumed the role of author/inventor. Those who could invent original text also tended to take more responsibility for the investigative procedure, and to learn from a variety of experts within the department COP and also from other teams within both PSP and TravelAir. These writers also tended to be good at those writing roles that did not require insider knowledge, which Beaufort separates but which here were usually the same: proofreader and grammarian (2000: 199). Following the perceived importance of the correspondence received at LoyaltyOne, expert writer/inventors were more apparent in team B than in A, and these skills were necessary (at the time) to become a team leader or a member of team D.

While the author/inventor would be expected to have expert, in-depth local knowledge, which usually involved networking and liaising outside PSP, all writers slowly developed their knowledge of the LoyaltyOne program over time, and many attained expertise in a given area. Sometimes this was formal, as when certain team members were always assigned letters with specific issues. Often, however, this seemed to be the result of the nature of practice and shared cognition: one writer would be considered an expert on one issue, another on something else, and they would be used as resources for the whole team, and sometimes across team boundaries. As such, most writers would assume the expert insider role of coach from time to time.

Coaches within a group of expert, full participants of the COP would have knowledge of a specific area, which occasionally they would be required to pass on. This is a defined role, different from group cognition. Another expert writer would assume the role of a trainee again, becoming an observer or ghost author, rather than casually using group expertise to confirm a certain point. Of course, the primary role of a coach would be to train LPPs, and many oldtimers would be asked to take on this role at some time.
The role of *editor* was usually combined with proofreader/grammarians, which was why newcomers generally did not undertake the latter task, as the editing aspect required the local knowledge of an oldtimer. Editing was often casually undertaken as part of group practice, as writers checked original wording with each other. Those perceived to be better writers were often called to take on all three roles simultaneously, as there were many writers who were not confident of their ability to write original text.

All writers, to an extent, were required to develop quite a high level of computer literacy; however some became expert at the various functions available to partially automate the writing process. Those with an external interest in computers tended to pick up this knowledge from the practice of others in the correspondence department, attaining *high computer literacy* within the COP context. They would often be in demand to assist those who wanted the automation but had no inclination to learn the technical knowledge involved. This role is arguably not a writing role in itself, however the use of various computer-related short-cuts and automation had become such a consistent part of the writers’ method of ‘writing’ a text, that it seems appropriate to include it here.

Beaufort’s coauthor and negotiator (2000: 199-202) were not present at *LoyaltyOne*. The nature of the *LoyaltyOne* program and the letters written to a paying membership required the authoritative role of *decision-maker*. Unofficially, some writers were able to assume this role in some circumstances; however it was occupied primarily by managers and team-leaders, by the writers of team D and, to an extent, those of team E. In dealing with very high status texts, decision-makers could ignore standard policies, reverse decisions made by others, and were authorised to deal with legally sensitive situations, including compensation. Decision-makers from management would not necessarily write text, and this would result in ghostwriting on rare occasions. They would, however, bear primary responsibility for content, their editing skills would be excellent, and their insider knowledge was generally of a different order to that of the writers who dealt with general day-to-day issues.

The role of decision-maker also demonstrates that LPP and the practices of a constellation of COPs is not the equivalent of moving from the edge of one COP to its centre. The higher status of the received correspondence dealt with
by decision-makers, the highly involved investigation and the level of original text required, all meant that an experienced member of team A, B or C, already an author of complex text and likely well on the way to being an author/inventor, would find himself on the periphery of a new COP, and with novice status despite his expert insider knowledge. The question of what constitutes a community or constellation of practice within the LoyaltyOne environment is further considered in 2.7 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing role</th>
<th>discourse community knowledge</th>
<th>subject matter knowledge</th>
<th>genre knowledge</th>
<th>rhetorical knowledge</th>
<th>process knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
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<td>Reader/researcher</td>
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<td>Ghost author</td>
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<td>Investigator</td>
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<td>Supervised author</td>
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<td>Author simple text</td>
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<td>Author complex text</td>
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<td>Proofreader/grammarian</td>
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<td>Editor</td>
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<tr>
<td>High computer literacy</td>
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<td>Coach</td>
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<td>Author / inventor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision-maker</td>
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<tr>
<td>General knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context-specific knowledge</td>
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**Figure 2.2 Relation of writing roles to context-specific knowledge (after Beaufort 2000)**

Figure 2.2 provides an indication of the insider knowledge required for the various roles identified above (Beaufort, 2000: 204). The three roles commonly assumed by a newcomer – observer, reader/researcher and ghost author –
CHAPTER TWO

required only general knowledge, and were assisted roles. As the newcomer gained confidence in investigative procedures required to answer incoming correspondence, he or she assumed the roles of investigator and supervised author, both of which required local knowledge. Within two to three months most writers had acquired enough local knowledge to take on the primary roles of author simple and complex texts.

The roles of proofreader, grammarian, editor and computer expert only required partial local knowledge. Socially, however, newcomers were still peripheral to practice of the community, relationally and in terms of their local knowledge, and it was therefore uncommon for the more experienced oldtimers to request a newcomer to take on these roles. Experienced writers who demonstrated proficiency in these areas and a willingness to share their knowledge generally took on the role of coach from time to time.

Most experienced writers who were particularly capable in the role of author complex text would also take on the role of author/inventor. Although all oldtimers did this when necessary, this role tended to reveal different levels of writing competence. Writers with a good general knowledge of standard written English were able to understand the nature of the *LoyaltyOne* text well enough to produce new material in the same style and tone. Writers who tended to rely on boilerplate and previous text were not able to take on the role of proofreader/grammarian and editor and struggled to create new text to an acceptable standard, both grammatically and rhetorically.

Figure 2.3 depicts the writing roles assumed over time, as a newcomer moved from peripheral legitimacy to knowing, local competence within the COP. Of course, the diagram is a representation in general terms only. For example, some old newcomers would be proofreading and authoring more complex text well before developing the ease of practice that marks even a new oldtimer.

On the other hand, some oldtimers never take on the role of proofreader and prefer to avoid authoring complex texts if possible. Newcomers from other areas of the company would, in many respects, have the knowledge and experience of oldtimers, while their new position in the correspondence department would require them to be in the role of supervised author.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<th>New Oldtimer</th>
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*Figure 2.3 Writing roles and stages of apprenticeship (after Beaufort 2000)*
2.7 The *LoyaltyOne* correspondence department: Community or constellation of practice?

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) consideration of Communities of Practice (COP) was primarily in conjunction with the concepts of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation. In his 1998 monograph, Wenger describes ‘three dimensions of the relation by which practice is the source of coherence of a community […]’:

1. mutual engagement

2. a joint enterprise

3. a shared repertoire’

(1998: 73). It therefore follows that distinct differences in practice should represent an inherent COP boundary. The nature of Wenger’s three dimensions suggest, however, that such a boundary does not have to be explicit, and the existence of more than one criterion implies that boundaries can be indistinct, not necessarily entailing an entirely separate COP where just one criterion is not met. In terms of practice it can be argued that there are several distinct COPs that make up the *LoyaltyOne* Service Centre constellation of practice, but also that boundaries are blurred amongst groups whose practice is only marginally different, such as the correspondence teams that make up a large part of the correspondence department.

In order to clarify this aspect of the COP framework I will describe the interactions between communities from the perspective of a member of one of the writing teams on the eighth floor. Perspectives shift with each individual and group however, and so it is likely that my account will not be entirely objective, and some of the more implicit, unspoken boundaries and peripheries, by their very nature, may be disputed by other *LoyaltyOne* employees. Part of the descriptive ability of COP as a concept lies in its acceptance of a certain level of subjectivity in the description of social networks, as well as its implicit recognition that observation at any level of abstraction is inevitably tainted by the observer, whose very presence must modify what is observed (Labov, 1972).
The following description is based partly on my own experience in a number of roles within the company, and partly on conversations and feedback from other employees (from all areas and levels of LoyaltyOne, including management). For a detailed consideration of the significance of my participation within the COP, as a member of their practice, a researcher and observer, and a ‘change agent’, see Chapter 4.

Team A could arguably be considered a Community of Practice (COP) in itself. When I first joined the team it certainly seemed so to me. Team A was my point of entry into the shared repertoire of the correspondence department; however I quickly discovered that a number of subtle and not-so-subtle boundaries separated team A from the practice of the rest of the community. The obvious and formal boundary was provided by the company. Team A were considered to be a separate team. We were known by our team name, we had our own team leader, and we were responsible for correspondence from the lowest membership level of the LoyaltyOne program. We were therefore separate from Team B, who had their own team leader and who were responsible for two membership levels above ours, as well as members of ClubOne. Each team had its own separate holidays’ calendar and RDO (Rostered Day Off) timetable. Geographically, only two members of team A sat adjacent members of team B.

These official boundaries led to differences in the nature of the joint enterprise team A shared with other teams. We had in common our roles as writers and our general knowledge of the computer systems, database environments and the basic, globally applicable rules of the LoyaltyOne program. Thus we had a joint repertoire with teams B and C. Our particular role, however, meant that our perspective was limited to one level of the LoyaltyOne program. We were experts in the specific queries we received related to that program level, and there were certain complicated issues, such as the Annual Service Fee, about which we would be consulted by members of team B, who seldom received queries relating to it.

Full participation in team A (and therefore the correspondence department) did not, however, equate with full membership of any other team within the correspondence department. The work of each team was complementary and
overlapped, however I discovered that changing teams put me in the position of being both a full participant and a peripheral one at the same time. My knowledge of the *LoyaltyOne* program in general, and my expertise with team A issues in particular meant that I was still a full member of the correspondence COP when I moved to team C. At the same time I had virtually no knowledge of the common issues addressed by writers corresponding with members in the higher levels of the *LoyaltyOne* program, and I knew next to nothing of the *ClubOne* program.

At first glance, then, a case could be made for each of the correspondence teams to be considered a COP in their own right. This view makes perhaps too much of the differences in the joint enterprise, and discounts the elastic nature of Lave and Wenger’s notion of legitimate peripheral participation.

Up to now I have concentrated on the joint enterprise and shared repertoire of employees from the deliberately narrow perspective of engagement in the work practices for which they and I were originally employed. I have taken no account of the wider mutual engagement linked to the social environment created by people spending a significant amount of their daily life working along side each other.

These more subtle boundaries were social, subjective, and did not necessarily apply to any one team as a whole. For example, a core group within team A was made up of some employees who had been with the company for some time. Although their most obvious common ground was their membership of team A, it did not follow that other more recent members of team A would, or could, become members of that group. Other relationships were formed by people who joined the company and went through initial training at the same time. These relationships often remained after the group had split up and individuals had been placed with different departments and on different floors. Still other relationships formed between those who had a similar cultural background, notably Greek and Italian, or those who found that they had personal interests in common. Company-specific responsibility also created a sense of community. The role of decision-maker discussed in 2.6 above was a formal, authorised role, which gave team leaders and members of team D
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greater responsibilities and required them to deal with more involved complaints. As such, there was considerable exchange of information between these individuals, even though they were separated physically.

2.8 So, what is a ‘business letter’?

2.8.1 Correspondence department perspectives

In order to gain an insight into the LoyaltyOne correspondence writers’ concept of the business letter, particularly as it relates to their own letter writing, a series of questions were asked over two questionnaires. The final question of the second questionnaire quite specifically asked “What do you understand the term ‘business letter’ to mean?” (Q2.10). The nineteen responses were quite varied, describing letters in terms of their purpose, content, form, style and tone.

Some writers defined a business letter by using the descriptive element contained in the label itself. Examples include: “Communication about issues relating to an organisation of business, ie between customer and business or vice versa” (Q2.10: R10) and “Communicating with clients or potential clients on behalf of a company” (Q2.10: R11). This definition is denotative and very general. It sees business letters as a classificatory category. That is, a letter, which is a structured form of textual communication, may be classified according to the nature of the individuals or institutions with whom it is used to communicate. One or two responses did narrow this definition somewhat: “Conveys information about a company…” (Q2.10: R4) and “A letter that provides information about the company and its product…” (Q2.10: R16). While such a definition allows a vague recognition of content and therefore purpose, rhetorical purpose – for example, the end for which company information is provided – is not a consideration.
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This definition can be found in guides on good business writing. For instance, Barrass states that ‘Business letters, normally on headed notepaper (letterhead), are used when communicating by post or facsimile (fax) with people outside your organization’ (2002: 18). This requirement for letterhead is also mentioned by one respondent: “This might sound simplistic, but a business letter has a letterhead!” (Q2.10: R7).

Many of the responses, however, appear to have taken this general definition for granted, choosing instead to remark upon the connotations raised by this categorisation, as they saw them. One popular descriptive assumption made about business letters was that they are formal (Q2.10: R7, R17-19). This is another quite vague label, which could equally describe content, form, style or tone. In most cases where respondents have used the term formal, additional terms have been provided that appear to define their intent. These included: “Very straight to the point” (Q2.10: R19), “In a sense it has a dry tone, as if it has been done by a robot or a drone!” (Q2.10: R7), and “It should maintain that customer/provider distance and a sense of professionalism and authority” (Q2.10: R17).

In Hallidayan terms, the primary issue here is the tenor of business letters, that is, the perceived status of those taking part in the communication and the relationships between them. The last quotation above uses the word ‘distance,’ with its intended sense of dissociation and aloofness, emphasising the perceived position of greater knowledge, and therefore social power (authority), a business employee might have over a member of the general public. The notion of authoritative distance raises a number of questions. Is such a view current, in terms of the relationship between customer and business? Is it an attempt to justify a style that has been called verbose (TravelAir unpublished creative brief 1999) and pompous? Which came first for this particular writer – the notion of formal business relations or the formality of the writing style?

Alternatively, the sense of formality may refer to the relationship of business writer to public as a means of distinguishing it from more informal relations between friends or colleagues. There is a certain cultural expectation that strangers in certain contexts communicate formally and, for many writers, the business context carries that expectation.
More specifically, some writers, particularly those in teams B and D, saw their correspondence as relating to business travellers and company executives rather than to holidaymakers and pleasure travellers. While the leisure traveller makes up the majority of the membership of the LoyaltyOne program, the much smaller group of business travellers accounts for a high percentage of business. As such, their queries and complaints carry more significance for the company, and letters written to them had a correspondingly high status. In general, such letters tended to be written to men in their forties and above, many of whom carried titles such as manager, director and so on, and again, the style and tone of the LoyaltyOne letters reflected this, as far as the writers were concerned.

Given also the relative youth of many of the writers, the sense of formal distance and respect could be quite high, despite often derogatory comments aimed at the complainant and the complaint from the distant safety of the COP. This too is reflected in a perceived need to remain highly formal – as a means of injecting authority and expert knowledge into a reply, so as to be taken seriously.

### 2.8.2 Reflections on genre labelling in practice

Traditional generic classifications are pitched at such a broad level of generality that they can describe only superficial parameters of form or content. For example, “the business letter,” as discussed in traditional writing textbooks, is depicted in largely formal terms with only vague comments about content (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 14).

Swales has pointed out that genre nomenclature as used by a community ‘is an important source of insight’ (1990: 54). He goes on to suggest that “[genre] names may be increasingly adopted first by overlapping or close discourse communities and then by farther and broader communities’ (1990: 55). Whatever the cause, the term ‘business letter’ is recognised widely enough to have spawned books on the subject in the English language for well over a hundred years (1826, 1843, Gardner, 1919, Collier, 1921). The term is so prevalent that any attempt to define it faces similar issues to those of ‘Standard
English,’ another powerful, emotive but indefinite term. As such, the business letter label would appear to be similar to Swales’ notion of an institutional label as opposed to a descriptive one (1990: 55). That is, the label is merely a common name used to identify widely differing texts by their business setting – they are written in, for or by a business. For example, in an explicitly non-academic, self-help book titled ‘The secrets of successful business letters’ (Goodworth, 1986), the variety of labels treated as subcategories of the business letter include letters of apology, job description, recruitment advertising, acknowledging applications, formal and informal reports, sales letters, debt collection letters, admonitory letters, and a variety of office memoranda.

Swales makes another important point about the nature of labels when he comments ‘names tend to persevere against a background of substantial change in activity’ (1990: 55). The growth of the service industry in recent times, the advent of computers, word-processors, fax machines and email, perceptions of advertising, levels of education and wealth, the potential of English as a global lingua franca – there are many areas of real or possible change that could affect individual and community concepts of what constitutes a business letter. As this study deals with an intentional change to what, for want of a better term, I am currently calling the **LoyaltyOne** business letter, a detailed consideration of the possible reasons for change will be provided in Chapter 4 (see e.g. 4.4.2, 4.4.3). The purpose here is to make the point that notions of writing in a business environment are likely to be influenced, to some extent, by events and circumstances, both current and historic, and by individuals or communities, external to the COP.

There may be a further consequence of Swales’ points that genre labels may be broadly adopted, used institutionally, and preserved in the face of change. That is, well-known and ill-defined ‘catch-all’ labels may carry such a variety of connotations for individuals that the use of the label within a COP may itself prejudice their views and understanding of their writing. In other words, choosing a generic label with a far wider scope than that of the specific genres owned by the COP problematises that label as a source of insight both because the label itself is known beyond the local community, giving rise to external and inaccurate assumptions about the nature of the text to be discussed, and
because the members of the COP themselves may then equate their genre to a wider and unquantifiable generic set, a form of reflection they would not regularly use within the COP.

In the example of this research, the term ‘business letter’ tends not to be used in everyday interaction within the COP. It is simply a taken-for-granted term that is, generally, neither challenged when used nor used from day to day. The term only came into prominent use during the change this study chronicles, which gave rise to a higher than usual level of employee reflection on the nature of the texts being produced. The possibility of change caused a high degree of uncertainty and tension, and the implicit dissatisfaction with the status quo inherent in a requirement for change produced an animated and defensive response.

2.8.3 The purposes of LoyaltyOne business correspondence

The primary rhetorical function in LoyaltyOne correspondence is the provision of solicited information about aspects of the LoyaltyOne and ClubOne programs. That is, the correspondence is almost always in response to a request of some sort, and its major goal is to deal with that request, whether it is to answer a query or complaint or to confirm a decision and provide a reason for that decision.

In all cases here under consideration, the LoyaltyOne business letter genre is made up of responses to communication initiated by members of the program or interested non-members. It is very rare that a letter sent or call made by an employee of the service centre will initiate contact with someone outside the PSP or TravelAir organisations, excepting employees’ personal communications, of course. Service centre initiated contact is only made when an error is discovered or when difficult external circumstances may require investigation, such as possible fraud, or perhaps where an estranged couple are disputing custody of a minor and the legal issues surrounding the ownership and security of a membership account are questioned. Generally, such communication is as complicated as it is rare, and it falls outside the scope of this research.
In questionnaire 1 the writers were asked their opinion both of their own letters
and the letters sent out by the service centre in general (Q1.1-2). Many
responses acknowledged this primary function, stating that their letters were
explanatory and informative (Q1.1: R1,17-19,21,22; Q1.2: R18). In the same
vein many responses gave an indication of the extent of the explanatory
information provided, using terms such as: detailed (Q1.1: R1,16), exacting
(Q1.1: R1), thorough (Q1.1: R7), comprehensive (Q1.1: R8,15), and accurate
(Q1.1: R20,21).

The writers also clearly indicated the presence of another primary social
function of their letters, involving a clarification of the relationship between
TravelAir and the members of its loyalty program. Many writers appeared very
sensitive to the way in which their correspondence might be perceived by the
recipient. For example, as the following quotation from a response to
questionnaire 1 puts it:

The way we correspond with [TravelAir’s] customers forms a
relationship or can sometimes end a relationship. We need to sound
caring, helpful… & customer orientated… (Q1.3: R9).

This raises an interesting issue as it brings into focus the writers’ ability to
create, determine or invent (Bartholomae 1985: 134, in Johns, 1997: 20) a
prototype LoyaltyOne program member, thus enabling them to make
generalisations and so perceive members’ likely expectations. These functions
fall within a general communicative purpose that is readily summed up in the
name by which the PSP constellation of practice is known to the public, which
is also the authority the writers place under their signature and name: the
TravelAir LoyaltyOne Service Centre. That is, the entire function of a loyalty
program is to encourage customer loyalty to the company who provide it and,
as part of that function, the service centre is there to provide a service, to
encourage and retain the loyalty of the program membership. As the TravelAir
manager responsible for the LoyaltyOne service centre put it, the ‘key idea…
or message to be communicated’ to the member is that ‘TravelAir values your
membership’ and therefore, that the ‘audience net takeaway’ should be that ‘I
am a valued customer of TravelAir and TravelAir are working to make my
experiences increasingly pleasant and less stressful’ (unpublished TravelAir creative brief: 2-3).

There are two related aspects of this purpose of providing a service:

1. to promote an individual relationship with the customer

2. to give customers the sense that they are valued by TravelAir

There is no face to face contact with members of the LoyaltyOne program. Contact is by phone or correspondence. The scope of this study does not include the call centre and the views and perspectives of phone communication are those of the author and correspondence department employees.

2.9 Writing as operation: Repetition, regularity and context-specific knowledge

One important outcome of full participation in the correspondence department COP is the repetitive regularity of the correspondence issues, and the constant provision of the same answers using the same wording. This is an area worth consideration as part of a discussion of the writers’ understanding and labelling of their writing.

The LoyaltyOne program is large and there are many themes, and variations of those themes, appearing constantly. To a newcomer, the variety of queries and complaints and the allowable levels of response to them can seem overwhelming and can create a considerable amount of anxiety, an apprehension voiced in the words ‘I’ll never remember all this!’ My own experience as a newly legitimate peripheral participant in the correspondence department followed the same course: for weeks I found that I had to ask for help on every other letter either because I did not know how to find the answer to the query raised, or because I did not know how to acceptably phrase the answer textually once I knew it. As time went by however, fewer letters held
questions I had not encountered before, and when they did, I usually knew where to go, or who to go to, to obtain the answers I needed.

The lowest expectation the company has of writers (in teams A and B) is that they write approximately 75 letters in a standard five day working week, which equates to closing about 2.5 files an hour (not all require a response, and occasionally a member is contacted via phone rather than correspondence). Email queries tend to require less investigation, and so writers in team C are expected to write about 100 responses in a week. In four weeks, a writer is likely to have written a minimum of 300 letters and, in some cases, will have closed over 500 files.

The point here is that the constant, repetitive regularity of issue and response is likely to have the effect of utterly overwhelming a writer’s previous understanding and expectation of business letters. The style used by LoyaltyOne, regardless of how it is first experienced, quickly becomes the norm, both by personal repetition and by the (at least implicit) acceptance of the experienced members of the COP.

In Activity theory, the claim is that as operations are regularly repeated they can become routine, to the extent that they require little or no conscious effort or explicit thought. As Leont’ev puts it, ‘[i]t is generally the fate of operations that, sooner or later, they become a function of a machine’ (Leont’ev 1981: 64, in Dias et al. 1999: 27). By the time, in three or four months, a writer has written well over 1,000 letters certain aspects of that writing process will no longer be an action: certain words or phrases, structural elements such as the placing of date, reference number and address, certain keystrokes required to access pages of data, become automatic operations, subsumed under other goals and actions.

The nature of the writers’ acceptance of the style and form of the letters they write is in marked contrast to the position of Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), whose research covered areas of the academic disciplines. They noted that:

Fully invested disciplinary actors are typically well aware of the textual patterns and epistemological norms of their discourse community, but are also aware of the need to be at the cutting edge, to push for novelty and originality (1995:25).
The writers, as individuals, come to *LoyaltyOne* to do a job. They are interested in getting on with that job efficiently, and in such a way that they create between and around themselves an environment in which the automatic and repetitive nature of the job is at least partially subsumed under other aspects of their interaction that make the day bearable (Wenger, 1998: 47). They know they are employed to provide a service but they have little or no interest in the people to whom they write: they’ve heard it all before. For them, the character of the public is very one-dimensional because each letter represents a member of the *LoyaltyOne* program and the only aspect of life the *LoyaltyOne* employees hear about from members is that part relating to *Reward points*, to questions and complaints about service. To the writers, the general public (at least in the area of their employment) is, for the most part, arrogant and ignorant.

The form and style of *LoyaltyOne* correspondence was seldom consciously considered by the writers until they began to hear rumours about a proposed change. As the accepted and primary job descriptive label ‘writer’ suggests, many are proud of their writing ability and believe themselves to be ‘good’ writers, able to bring their own individual style to their writing. Many writers, particularly in teams B, D and E had learned the accepted department style well enough to feel that they could write in their own way within it. As such, these writers knew the accepted patterns implicitly, having *operationalised* them to the extent that they preferred not to rely on the ‘standard paragraphs’ then available, but rather had their own prototypical letters, from which they would pull words and phrases as required. Some writers in teams A and C were not as confident or competent in their writing, and relied more heavily on any pre-written material they could access, to the extent that they would often use a paragraph that did not specifically answer the question they had been asked. Even in these cases, however, the use of standard wording that related to well known issues had become automatic to the level of being an *operation*.

I would argue therefore that many of the writers were not well aware of the textual patterns of their letters at a conscious level, and felt no need to vary those patterns. Generally, their reflections on the form and style of their letters were in the form of broad and emotive generalities. In part, this may have been
due to their long association with, and ownership of, the *LoyaltyOne* letters they wrote, in contrast with their exposure to other styles, most of which they would have experienced as readers in their lives outside the working environment.

In terms of COP Wenger argues that ‘The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do’ (1998: 47). To return to the diagram showing elements of a writer’s knowledge in Figure 2.1, the position of the circle denoting the writer acknowledges that he or she experiences influences external to the COP, that may affect that writer’s knowledge and, through daily interaction, the knowledge of other members of the COP. The element important to the notion of shared knowledge within a COP is the necessity of daily interaction, in an environment where such interaction has already created structure: ‘…tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations and contracts…’ (Wenger, 1998: 47). It could be argued that if a writer’s knowledge of her texts within the COP is largely tacit (and operationalised), then external influences, be they texts or critiques of texts, will often not be relevant for her.

In their summary of studies that have ‘deepened and widened our understanding of the roles of discourse in contemporary society’ Askehave and Swales state that

> it is becoming increasingly accepted that cognition is at least partly ‘situated’ in the milieu in which it evolves (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995), and that rhetorical knowledge is at least partly ‘local’ (Prior, 1998) and thus acquired in and shaped by particular educational and personal circumstances (2001: 197).

A number of current theoretical perspectives, including both COP and AT, in different ways, argue that certain operations or practices are carried out below the conscious level, and that these events are linked to specific actions or social contexts. For example, I know that typing ‘prf py//rcfoc’ in a DOS-based database window on my computer at the *LoyaltyOne* service centre will, providing other known parameters have been met, take me to a certain screen
within that window that will allow me to carry out a specific task. If asked, I can also explain that ‘prf’ means ‘profile’, which refers to a membership account, ‘py’ refers to the ‘payment screen’, the ‘//’ is shorthand as I can type the membership number in between the two slashes if I wish, but if not the program will default to the account I’m already in, and ‘rcfoc’ stands for ‘replacement card free of charge,’ and its use after the slashes will cue the program to provide me with a screen already partly filled in, thus speeding up the process of ordering a free replacement membership card for a member. My knowledge of such acronyms is not shared by all at the LoyaltyOne service centre, and is not required. In fact, the same screen can now be accessed by the click of a mouse. I choose to type in the command however, because it is now largely an automatic function for me – I do not think about what it means when I use it, it resides in my memory and is triggered as an operation subsumed under the action of getting a card sent out, which is part of a larger process which will include my letter to the member, and conclude when I have ‘closed the sequence’ (to use LoyaltyOne jargon).

The operation and action described above forms part of the knowledge I need to do my job at LoyaltyOne, knowledge I have gained by doing that job, and that particular function, regularly over time. Its specific functionality makes such knowledge useless in any other context, and seldom comes to mind outside that context. I doubt I could write down half of the LoyaltyOne DOS-based database commands I know, unless I happen to use them while at work (and then I would have no need to write them down). In the same way, many of the words and phrases that come to mind when I write letters on behalf of TravelAir are at the level of an operation – subsumed under larger activities and, particularly in the case of keywords and phrases (see e.g. 3.3.1), linked to the content of the LoyaltyOne program itself. It could therefore be argued that, while some of these phrases may not be useless in other contexts, an individual may be unable to recall them in a situation external to the context in which they were originally learned and frequently used.
2.10 Situated rhetorical action and the letter as a reified boundary object

2.10.1 Negotiation of meaning and reified boundary objects

Genres appear to hold two opposites in tension. There are always dynamic, situated elements of an individual text written in the knowledge of previous texts, preferred structures and powerful traditions. The repetitive regularity described in section 2.9 above can lead to an almost automatic knowledge of prescribed correspondence norms. At the same time, however, writers experience unique situations which, in some cases, confound their rhetorical customs and cause them to reassess their generic knowledge. In such cases, the operational aspects of writing become actions once more consciously considered. An example of this sort of circumstance is given below.

When TravelAir first used email addresses in their database for direct marketing purposes (EDM, see also 4.4.1) many customers complained about what they perceived to be an invasion of privacy. I was asked to write a letter of response that covered the issues raised by these program members. In COP terms the letter was my point of focus – to write it I had to discuss what was appropriate with authorities in a number of departments, which involved a new look at the terms and conditions the members accepted on joining the program as well as new laws governing Electronic Direct Marketing and privacy issues. Once written, the letter was then sent to various departments for approval, including TravelAir’s legal department. In this case, the making of new policy centred on the need to respond to irate customers about an issue that had not been properly thought through until the complaints were received. But this letter had a still wider focus: the wider interaction with TravelAir department managers raised issues with my direct employer (PSP) as to the nature both of my personal employment and PSP’s contract requirements, and, as an eventual result, the LoyaltyOne database was enhanced to allow email addresses to be stored with a checkbox that would prevent their use in direct marketing if a
member so desired. As the initial author of the text, however, the pressure of writing for me lay not so much in the policy content as in the register: how I ‘spoke’ to the member on behalf of *TravelAir*, how much I said (what I inferred and what I did not say) and the ‘style’ of my formality and politeness. The need for approval by authorities external to the COP in which my writing style was recognised and approved placed strain on me personally because I was not sure that I knew what was required.

The letter was a boundary object, a reified artefact provided by a member of one COP that risked ‘divergent interpretations’ (Wenger, 1998: 111) by members of other COPs, including the customers to whom it was to be sent. The complexity of interaction over this one letter, simplified in this brief description, indicates the letter’s position as a focal point for the negotiation of meaning. In so doing, this particular example highlights the way in which both the process of business writing and the resultant text may serve as the event around which multifaceted, intricate social actions are debated and resolved. To an outsider reading it, this letter would appear to be just another example of the type of letters I wrote day in, day out. Such a reader may assume that I should have had no difficulty writing it once I knew the factual content of my answer. After all, I was already writing within the business letter genre as a fully participating member of the COP that owned it. Freedman notes that genres are:

…actions, events, and (or) responses to recurring situations or contexts (with the context generally understood to involve a complex of social, cultural, and sometimes disciplinary dimensions) (1993a: 225).

The example of this particular letter problematises, to an extent, the notion of recurring situations, or recurring rhetorical actions. This letter unmistakably belonged to the same genre as all the other letters I have written for the *LoyaltyOne* program. In many ways, this was a recurring event: I was writing to a *LoyaltyOne* member about an issue to do with the program, just as I had many times before. The particular query it answered, however, was new, both to me and to the company, requiring an uncommonly intense negotiation of meaning to come to an acceptable conclusion (a social process entirely invisible in the completed text). While the negotiation in this case was
significant it was not all that unusual. No business stands still and writers commonly deal with new rules and regulations, new marketing strategies, short-term competitions and special offers, each with their own conditions, each provoking new letters of query and complaint from customers. In this dynamic environment my knowledge of the ‘business letter’ genre, its features and rules – the kind of knowledge that could be taught in schools – was next to useless. The structural ‘how’ of a genre cannot functionally be separated from the contextual ‘what’ and ‘why’. Of course I used my knowledge of the genre, which included my knowledge of the *LoyaltyOne* program and the usual expectations of the business environment in which I worked. Dias et al. appear to be correct, however, when they maintain that writing is ‘profoundly situated’ (1999: 220). I struggled to write the text because of the social, political and technical nuances of a situation I had not before encountered. There are almost always aspects of a letter that make it unique. Therefore, recurring rhetorical situations only recur in the most general sense.

Arguably, I was an expert in the genre at the time. Newcomers to the *LoyaltyOne* correspondence department, including those who have come from ‘the phones’ and so already have an understanding of the *LoyaltyOne* program often more detailed than that of the writers, yet find themselves having to learn what is involved in the accurate production of the *LoyaltyOne* business letter genre, regardless of any genre knowledge they may have obtained prior to their employment.

In COP terms, individual letters in the *LoyaltyOne* business letter genre are reified boundary objects around which, to varying degrees, negotiations of meaning take place. This complex situatedness is simply not visible to a text based analysis, nor would it be easy to explicate in a classroom.

### 2.10.2 Text hierarchies and situated rhetorical action

Anne Beaufort (2000) provides another perspective from which the dynamic nature of *LoyaltyOne* texts may be viewed. The notion of *text hierarchies* recognises that a COP will attach more importance to certain genres, based on the perceived goals and value assumptions of the discourse community (2000: 194). As the ‘focus of identification’ in COP terms (Wenger, 1998: 209), the
LoyaltyOne business letter is the most important genre produced by the writers of the correspondence department COP. This, of course, is hardly surprising as the writers at LoyaltyOne, unlike those at Beaufort’s research site, arguably create only the one generic type. Thus, for the notion of hierarchy to make sense in this instance, it should be noted that more importance is attached to certain letters within the business letter genre. This importance is often tacit, revealed more often by the actions and discussion of the writers than by any formal rule or guideline. As Beaufort notes, the goals, or communicative purposes of the community, necessarily influence writers’ perceptions of their text (2000: 194).

The primary purposes of the LoyaltyOne community are to retain loyalty and provide service (2.8.3). In practice, this foregrounds certain kinds of letters. Writers tend to find saying ‘no’ to be rhetorically complex precisely because a refusal impacts directly upon their ability to achieve these purposes. Continued dialogue on the same issue is also an area that receives particular attention. Writers are very conscious of a ‘second response,’ and a third becomes highly significant.

The number of responses required by a correspondent was important for several reasons. Direct responses to a writer’s reply were called ‘attentions’ because they were ‘attentioned’ to a specific writer, rather than being sent in to LoyaltyOne as a group entity. Though for the most part an unspoken rule of thumb, the number of ‘attentions’ a writer received was often taken as an indication of their writing ability. The notion of service required that a writer answer all a member’s questions in the first response, and do so in such a way that the member did not need to write in again. Consequently, a second response on the same issue was often perceived to mean a failure of communication in the first response, and a third often involved the writer’s team leader, and represented problems with both the communicative purposes of loyalty retention and service, and issues of quantity and quality. Receiving replies meant more work and a greater volume of letters as well as suggesting a lack of quality in the previous responses.

Of course, this is a simplification. Many responses required replies from the member and, no matter how carefully worded, saying no would often result in a negative reply that required a sympathetic response in order to attempt to
maintain what would often appear – both to the writer and to the member – to be the illusion of service. Other replies would be positive in nature.

The point is that the more complex the rhetorical requirements of the text, as perceived by the writers, the more conscious they would become of the content and structure of their response, regardless of the number of times they had answered similar queries before. Writers who were capable of responding to long, complicated complaints were respected as senior members of the COP. Indeed, this kind of rhetorical hierarchy was sufficiently formalised at the time of this research that team D was an established team specifically responsible for the creation of this kind of text.

The letter I have described in 2.10.1 above crossed many boundaries and was a more unusual requirement of my senior position at the time. While it may be argued that most writers would not have quite the same experience on a daily basis, by viewing the LoyaltyOne business letter in terms of rhetorical hierarchies, it can be shown that regularity and repetition, and even local, expert genre knowledge, does not necessarily imply that recurring rhetorical situations may be dealt with at an operationalised, systematic or tacit level. In this sense, at least, genre knowledge is dynamic. Rhetorical situations within the LoyaltyOne correspondence department COP are constantly changing and their relative importance to the community leads to collaboration and confrontation, recommendations and revision. Such levels of interaction and writing experience are simply not available in a classroom, and much of the learning that takes place at LoyaltyOne does so through practice and negotiation – and it is learning that, at the same time, has the potential to alter perceptions through collaboration, placing the learning experience in a context where novice and expert, newcomer and oldtimer alike learn from each other, and in the process, establish and maintain an identity.
2.11 Fixed and unchanging, fluid and dynamic: A duality?

The diagram in Figure 2.4 (see also 1.2.1) serves to illustrate the tension between the fixed and fluid aspects of genre as a form of duality, following Wenger’s diagram of participation and reification in explication of meaning (1998: 63). Wenger describes a duality as:

A single conceptual unit that is formed by two inseparable and mutually constitutive elements whose inherent tension and complementarity give the concept richness and dynamism (1998: 66).

As such, they are not absolute opposites. They always occur together, there cannot be one without the other. Each *LoyaltyOne* business letter is an individual, unique rhetorical text, partly because each is part of a dialogue with an individual member who may react very differently to the same text, partly because each one is the responsibility of an employee within the correspondence department, who must be able to justify his use of that text. At the same time, each text is the product of a community with powerful
normative traditions and prescriptions and an enormous amount of previous text to call on in defence of those expectations.

Nor does a duality form a spectrum of possibilities, where more of one necessarily implies less of another. New letters answering new queries and complaints must be written on a regular basis, each writer makes unique choices and no two letters by different authors on the same subject are ever exactly the same. Even within quite strict prescriptive company style preferences writers are able to make choices about grammar and lexis, implicitly or explicitly. As Wenger argues, both elements of the duality are always involved, and both can take different forms and degrees (1998: 67).

A duality describes interplay between elements and so is not classificatory. (Wenger, 1998: 68) In this way, genres do not have to be classified as either fixed and unchanging or fluid and dynamic. Nor are they grouped as more-or-less one or the other. Genres are not, as Schryer (1994) suggests, stabilised-for-now, at least to the extent that such a label may give the impression that a genre may be categorised primarily as a fixed form of text that may change in some marked way at some future time. On the other hand, Schryer’s term is quite appropriate where it is taken to imply that a genre has evolved to a certain point along with a social need and will stay that way until an upheaval forces change (in which case the term describes the events under scrutiny in this research quite well).

2.12 Media: Social constraints, formalities and choice

But people, who are normally competent and confident letter writers somehow find themselves hesitant when it comes to business e-mail. This is probably because it is very hard to find the right tone – it is too easy to drop into the casual conversation mode (Callis, 2001: 184).

While the textual information in the body of several items of business correspondence might be the same, word for word, the immediate context, or
framing, of that text differs quite dramatically according to the media used. These constraints and formalities are often due to social conventions, and the apparent necessity of some of them is as likely to be based on social perception as on any physical, objective need. For example, there is no technological reason preventing a fax from being formatted in exactly the same fashion as a letter (minus only colour). And as Yates and Orlikowski point out, although fields enabling the routing of emails had to be readable by computers, the memo layout of emails is not required, which ‘shows that designers (whether implicitly or explicitly) retained elements of an existing and familiar genre in moving to a new medium’ (1992: 316).

The difference in expectations surrounding the response times of different media is also worth noting here. Emails and faxes can both be received near instantaneously. Faxes, as a form of print media, generally have the same expectation of response time as does the letter sent via the postal service. The LoyaltyOne service centre seldom receives complaints about a delay in response, even when the response takes several weeks. Email, on the other hand, has come to be associated with the expectations of immediate speech. The service centre regularly receives duplicates of emails, or complaints from people who have not received a response within 24 hours to three days. It is not uncommon to read emails that assume the possibility of such a quick response, for example ‘I’m travelling tomorrow and…’ or ‘My points expire in two days time….’ In the majority of these cases the service centre is unable to respond within the time constraints set by the member.

If a single genre may make use of several media then, arguably, an important first move is the decision about which medium to use. Such decisions are clearly part of genre knowledge, and yet the parameters on which choices are made are wide ranging, and not limited to written information that may be found in a corpus of texts. Media choice is thus an important example of the complex interplay between decisions at a textual level and actions at a social level, between the community of business writers, with its preferences and company policies, and the correspondents to whom they reply, whose situations and demands also require consideration. Some of the questions writers may ask when considering their choice of media are presented in Table 2.3 below.
Table 2.3 Issues constraining media choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues constraining media choice</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do I respond in the same medium?</td>
<td>Yes – general practice in the <em>LoyaltyOne</em> correspondence department at the time of this research. Subsequently, phone and email communication has gained preference, regardless of the original medium.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some common exceptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is an urgent response required?</td>
<td>Date sensitive correspondence is coded for urgent response, and media choice is based upon time and the availability of the correspondent. An urgent response will usually involve phone or fax.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a response in a specific medium been requested?</td>
<td>General practice is to respond as requested by the correspondent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the correspondent overseas?</td>
<td>Time and possible language differences, and cost of international calls make phone calls less likely. Mail may take longer to arrive and so another medium may be preferable. Fax, and more recently, email may be preferred choices here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the information required complex?</td>
<td>A phone call may be preferred over correspondence that may be lengthy and difficult to write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are we saying no?</td>
<td>Correspondence is preferable to the possibility of a phone confrontation, particularly as many business respondents will still ‘want it in writing.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is my preferred medium available?</td>
<td>Media choice is constrained by the availability and accuracy of phone and fax numbers, and mail and email addresses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.13 Summary

The description of the LoyaltyOne correspondence department provided above is necessarily brief and incomplete. The intention here has been to provide an overview centred on the primary function of the department – to write letters of response. Very little has been said about the relationships between the various teams and between different levels of management, or about the day to day tensions and camaraderie between different groups of people, whether it be in terms of age, ethnic background, gender, sexuality or the differences in inter-departmental opinions. A more comprehensive ethnographic description of the correspondence department and the LoyaltyOne service centre would doubtless provide more perspectives on the situatedness of writing within a workplace; however it is beyond the scope of this study.

In using Communities of Practice as the primary source for providing information about the correspondence department, this chapter expands on the notion of a discourse community as used by Swales (1990) and Beaufort (1997) and follows Askehave and Swales (2001) in providing communicative purposes through a detailed consideration of the community which owns the genre.

In considering the LoyaltyOne working environment, this chapter has focussed on the LoyaltyOne business letter genre and the role and perception of writing and writers within the community. A number of conclusions can be drawn:

1. In the correspondence department, the business letter genre is both a boundary object and a focal point for the negotiation of meaning. It is an end result of numerous investigative processes: a product by which the ability of correspondence department employees is measured.

2. The primary content and style of the genre is highly stable, based on a long history of similar instances. Many letters are very repetitive and many phrases, lexis and grammar have been operationalised and do not need to be actively considered.

3. At the same time, the genre is highly dynamic. Every custom letter answers a question made unique by the particular situation of the
member to whom it is a response. The genre is the focal point of a
community, inspiring disagreement and confrontation as well as
consensus. Its content is subject to regular change due to new offers,
competitions and conditions.

4. Writing at *LoyaltyOne* is situated, complex and prestigious. Newcomers
go through a process of apprenticeship, where they must learn what they
can say and how they can say it, regardless of previous genre
knowledge.

5. In practice, writing at *LoyaltyOne* is seldom entirely individual. Even
experienced employees rely on local knowledge held by shared
cognition to complete their job requirements successfully, day to day.

The social perspective of this study is continued in Chapter 4. Chapter 3
provides a textual analysis of the *LoyaltyOne* business letter genre, based on
the communicative purposes discussed in this chapter.
3 Textual analysis

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a textual analysis of the original *LoyaltyOne* business letter genre, based on the genre analysis of Swales (1990) and Lewin et al. (2001). The chapter opens with a review of the literature and the analytical approach followed herein. Details of the corpora and methods used are provided in section 3.3. The moves and acts that comprise the *LoyaltyOne* business letter-of-reply are detailed in section 3.7, followed by a consideration of common structures (3.8), complexity, and issues surrounding subjectivity and communicative purpose (3.9). The chapter closes with an examination of elements not generally included in genre analysis, moving towards social context with a consideration of paratext, the role of media, and a brief exploration of customisable standard letters (3.10).

3.2 Genre as text analysis (Literature review)

A wide variety of text or discourse analysis methods have been described in linguistics and related fields. These methods have been used to examine an equally wide variety of subject matter, from advertising (Cook, 1992) and the media (Bell, 1991) to office memos (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992), fund-raising letters (Mann and Thompson, 1992), hospital records (Schryer, 1993), research texts (Bazerman, 1988, Lewin et al., 2001), editorial letters to international journal contributors (Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans, 2002), and more.

In studies involving the notion of genre, opinion appears somewhat divided as to the appropriate methods of text description and their centrality (or otherwise) to the genre concept. For example, if textual analysis could be said
merely to catalogue lexical and grammatical regularities, while the nature of genre and its use is primarily found through an investigation of the communities of which the genres are an integral part, then it might be argued that any recognised, peer-accepted method of analysis would be appropriate. This would seem to be the position of Dias et al. (1999), who make use of a variety of methodologies such as the T-unit in syntax (Hunt, 1970, Hillocks Jr., 1986), the classification of aims of discourse as rhetorical patterns (Kinneavy, 1980), the categorisation of the nature of argumentation (Toulmin et al., 1979), and Fairclough’s (1995) work in critical discourse analysis (see e.g. Dias et al., 1999: 48-57, 123). Interestingly, Dias et al. do not use textual analyses specifically linked to theories of genre, such as Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), and they explicitly distance themselves from the genre analysis of ‘the Sydney position’ (Dias et al., 1999: 22, see e.g. Cope and Kalantzis, 1993). In their final chapter, Dias et al. write:

It may have struck readers that for a book about writing, surprisingly little writing, in the usual sense of texts, gets quoted and discussed. But that, of course, reflects the way we have had to refocus our operating notions of what writing is, …toward a vision of a complex network of activities in which composition represents only one strand. Even the texts themselves …derive their meaning as much from the activity systems in which they are embedded as from their denotational content (1999: 222).

By using a variety of textual analyses and concentrating on the complex issues surrounding the social location of textual production, Dias et al. implicitly question the viability of any form of textual analysis, at least where such an analysis claims to describe generic structures in such a way that they appear to exist (and can therefore be taught) entirely independent of the particular social environment in which they are embedded. That is, if it is possible to account for most texts by dealing with genre from the perspective of social action rather than textual regularity (Dias et al., 1999: 18) there would appear to be little or no need for textual analyses as a means of category construction.

The many forms of textual analysis in the social disciplines complement the move away from positivistic, empirical notions of a single, objective truth and
reason (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 12), to the many forms of qualitative research that rely on cultural perspectives, that recognise the subjectivity of the researcher, and that acknowledge that the choice of any given form of analysis relies in part on the researcher’s world view, and in part on the perspective the researcher wishes to present to the world. If, then, the study of genres involves research into the particular social environment in which a text is produced, if writing is a situated activity, and if the purposes of a text are derived from and defined by the social context of its writing, then the justification of textual analysis as the primary, or only method of constructing and of understanding genres would appear to be problematic.

This seems to be the position of Askehave and Swales (2001) who argue that using textual analysis alone in the construction of genre is inappropriate. They suggest that where research uses the ‘traditional text-first or ‘linguistic’ approach’ to assign purpose and thus construct a genre, it is necessary to consider the context surrounding the genre in order to then ‘repurpose’ the genre and review its status (2001: 207). In this way, moving away from Swales’ 1990 position, they also relegate communicative purpose from its primary role ‘for sorting discourses into generic categories’ (2001: 207-8), preferring instead to prioritise a study of the community within which genres are produced. Fairclough presents a similar argument for the interaction between text and the social environments in which it is produced, listing several important contextual areas which inform the critical analysis of discourse, including the analysis of text production and consumption, the analysis of institutional and wider social and cultural practices, and the dialectical recognition that text is both constituted by and constitutive of society and culture (1995: 33-4).

Of particular concern here, then, is the question of which form of textual analysis, if any, is relevant to this research, and on what basis the use of a given analysis is justified.

The notion of textual or discourse analysis generally assumes the existence of common elements, or possibly a structure, operating at some level within texts. That is, an analysis either attempts to find – or is carried out in accordance with
– a set of defined parameters perceived to be common to a category of texts. So, for example, Propp (1928/1958) investigated 100 Russian fairy tales, Lévi-Strauss collected hundreds of North and South American myths (e.g. 1964, 1966, see Spivey, 1997: 104), and van Dijk (1985), Bell (1991) and Fairclough (1995) defined models for analysing media genres. In each case the analyst was interested in finding common elements at some level, other than at the grammatical structure of the language, that manifest overt or covert assumptions and practices in the text, such as meaning, purpose, ideology, culture and other areas of social concern.

The use of any given method of textual analysis is perhaps not so much an arbitrary decision, but rather is based on the researchers’ context: their knowledge of their field, their world view and the underlying philosophy on which any particular analytical method is based, and the outcomes or results the researcher may want to achieve.

There are a number of related issues that require consideration in this context:

1. the underlying and often implicit philosophical premises (3.2.1);
2. the practical intent of the research and its concomitant ideologies (3.2.2); and
3. the perceived nature of genre, its boundaries and ownership (3.2.3).

### 3.2.1 Counting ‘isms’: A confusion of metaphors

The urge to label and categorise has led to the naming of numerous philosophical perspectives, many of which are related or linked to each other in various ways. Current keywords include modernism and postmodernism, structuralism and post-structuralism, constructivism, deconstructionism, social constructionism and dialogism. The schools of thought denoted by these terms are often confusing to follow due in part, as Nystrand et al. note, to such classifications and definitions being contingent upon changing historical perspectives (1993: 285), as well as over-simplification or misuse by the media, and different interpretations by different academic fields. For example, Nystrand et al. point out that Chomsky ‘claimed to be attacking the tenets of Bloomfield’s linguistic structuralism…’ and then suggest that Bloomfield
belongs in the formalist tradition while Chomsky occupies ‘a central role in the
mainstream of structuralist inquiry’ (1993: 285). In another example, Nystrand
et al. separate constructivism and social constructionism (1993: 302-3). They
see Chomsky’s generative grammar as a ‘constructivist framework’ (1993:
287), and highlight the constructivist notions of individual agent and the
cognitive representation of text (1993: 281). For them, social constructionism
is primarily concerned with contextualising writing within social relationships.
Nystrand et al. suggest that, historically, research within the constructivist
tradition was influenced post-Chomsky by the work of Searle, Labov and
Hymes, among others (1993: 287-8), but that the advent of social
constructionism can be traced to the notion of discourse communities, ‘a
relatively abstract notion derived from a philosophical and literary tradition
investigating the sociology of knowledge and meaning […] to describe the
social and historical nature of writing’ (1993: 289). Spivey, however, argues
that social constructionism is merely a label used to distinguish the ‘social
constructivist work presenting a large, abstract societal group […] as a single
constructive agent’ from ‘constructivist scholarship that emphasizes the
cognitive processes of individuals’ (1997: 19). Spivey’s argument against the
use of the constructionism label is based on what she sees as a problematic
definition, as it is used to represent particular positions in studies on coherence
in reading and, in the field of history, an emphasis on historians’ individual

In her discussion of the ‘Constructive Processes of Individuals and Groups’
Spivey includes a short section on the notion of ‘Dyads as Agents’, referencing
Wertsch and Vygotsky and noting that ‘The social in [research by social
constructivists emphasizing small groups as agents] often referred to dyadic or
other small-group processes instead of the constructive processes of such large
social groups as societies…’ (1997: 18). In this case, the problematic term is
dyad, as Spivey appears to have borrowed it and re-defined it within the
constructivist tradition whereas Nystrand et al. follow Bakhtin and dialogism,
seeing the dyad as the focus of analysis of text as ‘the product of the reciprocal
relationship between speaker and listener, addressee and addressee…’
What Spivey refers to as ‘The Shifting Lens of Constructivism’ (1997: 23), Nystrand et al. prefer to call structuralism, as they place both constructivism and social constructionism within what they call the ‘philosophical method’ of structuralism (1993: 303). This is problematic, as Nystrand et al. note indirectly later in their discussion:

…the term social has recently been overused and has begun to conflate fundamentally different and even incompatible approaches to writing, text, and sources of meaning. Not all social models are poststructuralist; many social accounts might better be called “neostructuralist” whereas others are dialogical (1993: 304).

It would appear that structuralism and poststructuralism are also overused terms, to the extent that Pavel (2001) is compelled to modify both nouns with French in order to clarify his specific review of French thought and primarily the writings of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida. For Pavel, both terms refer to works of philosophy characterised by errors in the use of linguistic concepts, anti-humanism, the death of the author and the destruction of truth and subjectivity (2001: 6).

Such a view of structuralism would appear to diverge from Berkenkotter’s (1993) conception of the constructivist, or naturalistic paradigm. Berkenkotter argues that the epistemological core of constructivist inquiry is:

…anti-positivist and anti-empiricist in that it rejects the “realist” methodological perspective of conventional social science research with its separation of subject and object, its distanced stance of the researcher, and its assumptions regarding value-neutral inquiry (1993: 296).

Given such arguments, it is unclear quite where dialogism and “neostructuralism” diverge, at least at a methodological level.

There is not space in this thesis to take this background discussion further. The point is that research perspectives are influenced by current and personal beliefs about the nature of human experience, and these beliefs (or theories) are
themseleves influenced by historical beliefs, the work carried out as a result of those beliefs, and further by the often critical narratives that chronicle their development: ‘how one builds on another, at once responding to and conditioning the positions of those that come both before and after’ (Nystrand et al., 1993: 271). Stubbs recognises the importance that can be attached to particular models of interpretation:

...questions of text, audience and interpretation are not, as they say, merely of academic interest. [...] Changed views about their relations have been at the root of religious and social revolutions (1996: 9).

The theory of genre analysis (or genre studies, etc.) has certainly produced some heated debate around its value as a pedagogical device. Much of the debate seems to stem from incompatible notions about structure and context, and the relation of, and level of focus on, text to social action.

3.2.2 The issue of research perspectives

Social research does not, as Giddens points out, require theories to be ‘expressible as a set of deductively related laws or generalizations’. Rather, Giddens argues that explanations do not have to be in the form of generalisations at all (1984: xix). The same can perhaps be said of theories of textual analysis in socio-linguistics. Dias et al., in considering the change from academic to workplace settings, conclude that ‘learning to write in particular contexts is indistinguishable from learning to participate in the full range of actions that constitute the activity in those contexts’ (1999: 220). They are primarily concerned with the differing methods of learning extant in academic and workplace settings following their research into ‘the relationships between writing in school and writing in the workplace’ (1999: 3). As such, they concentrate on the purposes and structures of genres from the perspective of writing as highly contextualised acting, thus, in their view, obviating the need to provide comprehensive textual structures or common textual elements.

Lewin et al. (2001), on the other hand, come from a quite different ideological perspective based primarily around classroom teaching and the teaching of
English to non-native speakers, such as in the fields of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Lewin et al. agree with Williams and Colomb (1993) ‘who suggest that explicit teaching of salient features of genres is beneficial’ (2001: 3). Their textual analysis assumes a ‘static nature to genres for extended periods’ (2001: 3) and there might perhaps be some irony in their desire to empower students through an explication of a genre’s ideological commitments and consequences based on the development of a structural analysis that might be said to prescribe and uncritically endorse and maintain that genre’s prestige.

Part of the issue of research perspectives is in the degree to which any method of analysis is based on the nature of the genres under review. A great deal of research and discussion about the subjects of genre, discourse analysis, rhetoric and education has taken place around a critical consideration of academic genres in particular. For example, Berkenkotter notes that:

No one conducting educational research in the 1990s can be oblivious to the many discussions occurring in various forums about which research methods are the most useful for understanding what it means to be communicatively competent in the uses of written discourse (1993: 294).

Berkenkotter goes on to cite a number of studies by interpretive anthropologists and sociologists of science that are concerned with the genres of the sciences and social sciences (e.g. Geertz, 1983, Latour, 1987, Ashmore, 1989). Much work on scientific rhetoric in academic disciplines has since been carried out (Bazerman, 1988, Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995, Swales, 1990), highlighting the ‘socially and historically constituted nature’ (Berkenkotter, 1993: 294) of research texts. A number of works on textual or genre analyses have dealt specifically with traditional elements of the research article – Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion – including Crookes (1986), Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988), Swales (1990), Dubois (1997) and Lewin et al. (2001). As such, some of the conclusions drawn about the nature of genres and appropriate methods of genre analysis may arguably be incorrect, or at the very least, need to be reconsidered, when applied to genres operating outside academic institutions.
For example, Berkenkotter and Huckin’s position that ‘Fully invested disciplinary actors are typically well aware of the textual patterns and epistemological norms of their discourse community’ (1995: 25) does not capture the relationship of the majority of LoyaltyOne correspondence department employees to their daily letter writing activities (see 2.9 for a detailed discussion). Indeed, employees’ knowledge of textual patterns is often tacit or can only be verbalised in the most general terms. In her 1993 paper, Berkenkotter comments:

Genres, as they have been studied in the disciplines, are inherently dynamic, constantly (if gradually) changing over time in response to the sociocognitive needs of communities of users. At the same time, the written genres through which we communicate formally with our colleagues appear to be curiously impervious to the winds of reflexivity blowing across the academic landscape (1993: 301).

Again, while this may be an accurate description of some genres in academic communities, it does not fit the LoyaltyOne business letter genre considered in this research. The much smaller scale of the parent community, the constant and repetitive nature of the writing, and the social and psychological outcomes of ownership and participation within the community, all created a situation in which the genre remained static for an extended length of time, regardless of movements elsewhere in business circles. When change did come it was not gradual and it paid little heed to the needs or preferences of those who actually wrote within the genre.

There are other differences in research perspective. Bhatia (1993) examines only one sales letter and does so apparently without reference to the expert opinion of members of the parent community responsible for the letter. Dias et al. (1999) choose an ethnomethodological approach that does not include genre analysis in a textual form at all.
3.2.3 Genre boundaries and ownership

In many cases, texts appear categorised in popular taxonomic forms that may be recognisable in far wider contexts than Swales’ (1990) discourse community: myth, narrative, interview, documentary, soap, business letter, grocery list, academic research papers, and so on. The use of Communities of Practice (COP) in this research has much the same effect as the notion of discourse community, narrowing the scope by which a genre may be defined in order to consider writing in particular contexts as social action. (note: the use of COP was a decision made independent, and at the time without knowledge, of the work undertaken by Dias et al., however their work and conclusions have certainly impacted on the direction of this research, and the subsequent position of the author within the field). This use of a specific community (Beaufort, 1997, and see 1.4.1) limits the study of genre in this case to one which privileges the writer, and the process of writing as social action over the comprehension of readers external to the community. In this research at least, there needs to be some recognition that the writers have a limited relationship with their external readers. Those readers certainly recognise and interact with the text and arguably produce text that can be considered part of the business letter genre. These texts form a complementary, necessary, ‘other half’ of the business letter genre as an interaction, or conversation.

3.2.4 Influences, and the approach of this study.

The kind of analysis which you make of any complex thing depends on the purpose you have in view. [...] All these different analyses might be equally correct, but they would be useful for different purposes (Lewis, 1947: 173).

Given such differences and following Giddens’ argument against generalisations, it appears quite appropriate to approach the use of genre analysis from a variety of perspectives and to recognise that it may be neither possible nor desirable to realise one overarching theory of genre applicable to all research requirements. It is, of course, therefore necessary to define what is
meant by genre analysis in this research, the particular areas of literature on
which this research sets its foundations and the questions and research situation
which has led to the use of a given textual analysis.

The primary initial influence on this research was the social constructionism of
Swales (1990) following Miller (1984, and see also, 1994a). This approach
appeared to be appropriate because of its recognition of the production of text
within the context of a particular discourse community, while at the same time
it offered a framework for the analysis of text produced within that community.
For reasons outlined in Chapter 1 (1.4) the notion of discourse community has
been replaced by the more comprehensive theoretical position of communities
of practice (cf. Wenger, 1998, Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the LoyaltyOne
business environment and correspondence community has been described
primarily in COP terms in Chapter 2.

The event around which this research was based was an intentional, abrupt
change to the ‘style and tone’ of the business letters written by the LoyaltyOne
community, as requested by external management and designed by an
advertising and marketing agency. Thus, a major aspect of this research was
quite specifically concerned with the textual differences between the two
styles. Swales’ genre analysis continued to appeal due to the notion of
discourse community, which implicitly placed emphasis on the author and the
audience within the authorial context; clearly an advantage in a business
situation where the intended audience was external to the community, and so a
rather abstracted concept for the participants (note: for reasons of ethics
approval, time, and contact limitations, the reactions of the external, intended
audience was out of the scope of this study).

Research interest in communicative intent as a criterion of textual analysis has
highlighted the ability of textual elements to represent different purposes when
placed within a variety of textual settings. For example, as Lewin et al. point
out, literature references can be non-syntactic or syntactic, and they may or
may not cite specific literature (2001: 26). Each use may reflect a different
purpose, or the purpose may be the same and simply manifested in a different
way. The genre analysis method of Lewin et al. (2001) is further considered in
section 3.3.2 below.
3.3 Method

There are two distinct areas of correspondence at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre, recognised and labelled by the COP as Standard letters and Custom letters. Standard letters are pre-written letters used to answer common queries and are sent to hundreds of members on a daily basis. At the time of this research standards were sent in two media: either by facsimile machine or by the postal service (more recent technical innovations have allowed email standards as well). Custom letters are those written each day by LoyaltyOne employees in the correspondence teams, answering specific queries which, for a variety of reasons, make them unsuitable for answer by a standard letter (see 2.4 for an explanation of LoyaltyOne custom and standard letters, and 3.10.2 for a critical consideration of the validity of these categories).

When the style change was first considered there were 175 standard letters, and these letters form an initial corpus on which the text analysis to follow is based. Further to this corpus, correspondence in all media, saved electronically over one month by teams A and B in their daily routine, forms another corpus containing 2,021 items of correspondence. In this corpus the body text (between the salutation line and complimentary close) of the correspondence only is retained, and all references to individual authors, correspondents, and identifiable program material have been removed to maintain confidentiality. Investigations carried out with concordance software used Wordsmith Tools by Mike Scott (2003) and Concordance by R J C Watt (2002, Watt, n.d.).

3.3.1 Notes on original correspondence corpora

The textual analysis presented below is based upon two corpora. The first corpus contains the original LoyaltyOne standard letters and the basic statistics of this corpus are presented in Table 3.1 Basic statistics of the LoyaltyOne original standard letter corpus. The second corpus contains 2,021 items of custom correspondence written by employees across the LoyaltyOne correspondence department over about a month. In both cases only the body of the correspondence has been retained, between the salutation (Dear name) and
the complimentary close (Yours sincerely). The custom letter corpus statistics presented in Table 3.2 are approximate, and a number of issues need to be noted. Where letter examples are provided from the original custom corpus the letter number appears in brackets.

Table 3.1 Basic statistics of the LoyaltyOne original standard letter corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LoyaltyOne original standard letters corpus</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard letters</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count (tokens)</td>
<td>23,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words (types)</td>
<td>1,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type/token ratio</td>
<td>0.0493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>1,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/sentence</td>
<td>16.6493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean average words per letter</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Basic statistics of the LoyaltyOne original custom letter corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LoyaltyOne original custom letters corpus</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custom letters</td>
<td>2,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete word count (tokens)</td>
<td>359,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words (types)</td>
<td>4,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count using stop list</td>
<td>356,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words using stop list</td>
<td>3,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type/token ratio</td>
<td>0.01037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>21,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/sentence</td>
<td>16.8456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean average words per letter</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In creating the concordance for the custom corpus the data used only included letters of the alphabet, the hyphen and the apostrophe, otherwise ignoring numbers and other forms of punctuation. The number of word types includes spelling errors, words with a single quotation mark next to them (‘The) or a possessive apostrophe (TravelAir’s), and proper names appearing in the body of the letters (of people, hotels, airports and cities primarily). Declensions are
also counted separately. Once the full corpus was created, a stop list was compiled, which removed over a thousand instances of proper names, (excluding all business key words and primary location names). The type/token ratio is very low, reflecting the nature of the corpora. As would be expected in letters dealing with a limited number of subjects within a single business area, there are high levels of repetition, including keywords that highlight the common subjects of the material. Business specific nouns and noun phrases are repeated constantly – often several times in one letter – and their occurrence is detailed in Table 3.3 below, and further discussed in their role as semantic participants in section 3.6 below.

Table 3.3 Key nouns and phrases in LoyaltyOne letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of custom letters: 2,021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keywords: occurrence of business specific labelling nouns</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TravelAir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoyaltyOne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant/s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the most frequent words are listed in Table 3.4 below. The most frequent pronouns and possessives indicate the correspondence nature of the corpus. Third person pronouns are used, however ‘you’ and ‘your’ are by far the most common terms in the corpus as a whole, indicating the importance of the recipient and the relational nature of letters. The presence of the first person pronoun ‘I’ is somewhat unusual and not an accurate indication of its use in the original style. None of the original standard letters contained ‘I,’ and its use in custom letters prior to the style change was a recent development. This was brought about by the realisation that first person would be part of the shift in style, and that it would be useful for staff to begin to use it, and so become comfortable with its use (see 4.4). As the original custom corpus consists of correspondence written just two months prior to the style change, the first person pronoun had begun to appear far more regularly than would have been the case a few months earlier, when no one in Teams A, B and C, which produce the greatest volume of correspondence, used ‘I.’

Table 3.4 Frequent words in LoyaltyOne custom letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns / possessives</th>
<th>Prepositions</th>
<th>articles</th>
<th>Facts and hedging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>your</td>
<td>to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>for</td>
<td></td>
<td>are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>of</td>
<td></td>
<td>can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our</td>
<td>on</td>
<td></td>
<td>have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>us</td>
<td>at</td>
<td></td>
<td>is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>in</td>
<td></td>
<td>will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their</td>
<td>with</td>
<td></td>
<td>may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>might</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prepositions of place, including both position and movement, and time are very common. This is a reflection of the major theme of LoyaltyOne correspondence, which deals with travel and the rewards to which customers are entitled for their use of company and partner products and services. So
CHAPTER THREE

letters confirm the crediting of points to an account for travel with an airline, or accommodation at a hotel, on a certain date, at a certain time, and so on.

Most of the LoyaltyOne correspondence deals in definites, in facts and figures and actions that either have or have not occurred. Thus, there is very little hedging. ‘May’ is often used to soften a request for a response (…may we please request you to contact… (2)) or as a courteous way of broaching a subject (Firstly, may we advise… (5)). It is also used where an advertisement of sorts is introduced (You may be interested to know that you can access your account online… (e.g. 3)), an aspect of the LoyaltyOne letters which is further considered in 3.7.12, Chapter 4 and particularly 5.2.6.1. Occasionally, ‘may’ is also used in a position where ‘can’ would seem more appropriate, with no hedging implied: Please forward [your invoices] so that we may review your claim (3).

3.3.2 A critique of the genre analysis method presented by Lewin, Fine and Young (2001)

The following textual analysis of the LoyaltyOne business letter genre is based primarily on the approach outlined by Lewin, Fine and Young (2001), following Swales (1990). In this approach, the structure of written texts is determined by their rhetorical function, elements which, in turn, are defined by their communicative purposes (2001: 17, 22). The use of communicative purpose as the criterion for establishing rhetorical function has recently received critical attention (Askehave and Swales, 2001), and its problematic nature is considered in Chapter 1 (1.3.2), and is further discussed below.

The key issue in the analysis of generic text structure seems to be the identification of an appropriate unit of analysis. That is, there is a need to determine the extent, or boundaries, of a move (Lewin et al., 2001: 26), and the criteria by which the notion of communicative purpose or intent is defined: the basis on which moves are named.

In previous research, many different criteria have been used to define units of analysis capable of determining what areas of text/speech are accomplishing what communicative purpose. The issue is partly one of mapping – that is,
which features of language can form a base on which to map the notion of a
move, where ‘move’ is a ‘generic structure’ defined by its ‘communicative
function’ (Lewin et al., 2001: 23). Features of language used as a coding
system by various authors include grammatical units such as the sentence
(Crookes, 1986) or the independent clause (Dubois, 1997), lexicogrammatical
features (Hopkins and Dudley-Evans, 1988), or semantic units (Swales, 1990)
in Lewin et al. 2001: 18, 26).

Lewin et al. quote two of Swales’ semantically realised moves in the
Introductions of research articles – establishing the niche and occupying the
niche (2001: 26). As these named moves do not appear appropriate for their
own material, they go on to suggest their own set of moves: claim relevance,
establish the gap the present research is meant to fill, and preview the authors’

Based on this notion of moves, Lewin et al. then go on to define a second unit,
the act (after Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), thus:

The minimal constituent realizing a communicative purpose is an act,
while a move is composed of a head act plus slots for pre- and post-

Moves are defined as ‘expressing … different purposes’ (2001: 27) and acts
constitute moves by providing instantiations of communicative purpose, which
together form aspects of an over-riding or prioritised communicative intent.
For example, in Introductions, the move preview the authors’ contribution is
constituted by three acts: preview, review results of study and state the
hypothesis. The first of these acts appears to be obligatory and so is the ‘head’
act, while the other two are ‘post-head’ acts (2001:34).

Lewin et al. attend quite rigorously to the realisation of moves. They note that
previous authors used various criteria, such as syntactic functions (subject is
realised by X), lexicogrammatical signals (ie: ‘an examination’ is a lexical item
evidencing the report of a finding), or location (such as move 1 is always the
initial move in a text). In attempting to establish a standardised definition of
moves their preferred option for systematising various forms of realisations is
to use a system network after Martin (1985, 1992) to clarify ‘the kinds of participants and processes necessary in order to realise different acts’ (2001: 28-30).

While this clarification of criteria involving the recognition of moves and acts is useful, significantly there appears to be no discussion of the criteria necessary to identify how the initial understanding of communicative purpose is arrived at. That is, there is no discussion of the processes by which the move *preview the authors’ contribution* is arrived at as the viable, or only, reading of the text and its authors’ intentions and priorities. For instance, in the example used above, there seems to be nothing to prevent another researcher from claiming that the important act for reader and author, and therefore the head act and move, is in fact *state the hypothesis*, and the other acts are therefore pre-head modifiers providing additional information about the hypothesis. In an earlier example, Bhatia (1993: 45) opens his discussion of sales promotion letters by describing their social context and extrapolating five communicative purposes based on that context. He then goes on to present specific moves used in a sales promotion letter to achieve its communicative purposes (1993: 46-59). The purposes themselves are described without reference to a method used to arrive at them. Bhatia claims that ‘the main function of a sales promotion letter is persuasive, in the sense that its writer aims to elicit a specific response from its reader(s)’ (1993: 45). He continues by claiming that ‘the most important function of the letter is to offer an appraisal of the product or service [being promoted]’ (1993: 46). As an alternative, it could be argued that the primary function of a sales promotion letter is to introduce potential customers to a product or service about which they were not previously aware. If this were the case, then the persuasion and appraisal contained in such a letter could arguably be subsumed under the function of creating awareness, as necessary but secondary requirements.

Lewin et al. note that ‘[a]fter examining SSR texts, we identified three reoccurring moves… We did not begin with a set of categories and attempt to match the corpus to the categories’ (2001: 27). Their method and the moves so identified appear somewhat arbitrary, and this is significant because the moves apparently reflect generic commonalities – precisely those things which, it is
contended, allow us to identify that a given text is an instantiation of a given genre.

The problem seems to be that the notion of communicative purpose relies on social context, which appears fluid by nature; dynamic, contested, open to dispute and reliant upon the different perspectives of those taking part in communication, whether they are (or see themselves at that time as) authors or recipients.

Lewin et al. note in their methods section (2001: 23-36) that there is no criteria in previous work for realising rhetorical structures (moves), and so they can’t be independently identified. While they then go on to provide very useful units of analysis allowing diverse linguistic forms to be recognised as instantiations of the same moves, the moves themselves are arbitrarily identified based on the researchers’ understanding of the material they are considering, and just as arbitrarily labelled. It would seem likely that very few authors write their articles with these sorts of moves consciously in mind, nor would they necessarily agree with the importance placed on certain acts over others in the delineation of ‘moves’.

Following Askehave and Swales (2001) and Dias et al. (1999) this research first considers the social context in which text is produced (see Chapter 2). The communicative purposes outlined below have been established by reference to the local communities of practice, as an extension of Swales’ (1990) notion of the parent discourse community, and through a critical consideration of popular educational business literature dealing with business communication.
3.4 Primary rhetorical functions

Inexperienced writers say NO first – and then provide the explanation or context… (McKeown, 1987: 71).

An effective letter gets to the point in the first sentence, whether it’s good news […] or bad news… (Gentle, 2002: 87).

The content of a letter – that information for which the letter has been written – is primarily contained in the body of the letter, the section of text between the salutation line and the complimentary close. Most books on effective writing concentrate on this area and try to provide guidelines not so much on what may be said but rather on how it can, and even should, be said. That is, guides cover appropriate formatting and lexis, and some aspects of the structuring, or ordering, of information. They promote aspects of grammar such as the use of active rather than passive structure, the use and layout of paragraphs, the use of first person and so on. They talk about tone, often using negative descriptors such as ‘indifferent, superior, wooden’ (McKeown, 1987: 63), ‘formal, stilted language’ or ‘steeped in humility, deference and formality’ (Gentle, 2002: 87), without clearly defining the elements of phrases or sentences that create such a tone, although lists of prohibited words may be provided. In following, or attempting to dictate, certain trends or fashions, writing guides often contradict each other.

For example, as shown in the quotations above, there are differences of opinion over whether the context and explanation of a negative decision should be given before or after the decision itself is communicated. Such differences can be presented with an often emotive or judgemental justification of the writer’s position. In this case, you are ‘inexperienced’ if you say no before providing an explanation, and you are ‘ineffective’ if you do not. There is usually a reasoned argument of some kind underpinning such theses, and such choices are likely to affect the position of moves, or at least the position of their constitutive acts.

Therefore, in order to begin an examination of the moves and acts that make up the body text of the LoyaltyOne business letter, it is first necessary to consider
the genre’s primary rhetorical functions, as defined by its communicative purposes (Lewin et al., 2001: 17).

As discussed and defined in 2.8.3 the *LoyaltyOne* business correspondence serves as a vehicle for a number of rhetorical functions which are considered primary by groups within the service centre. Perhaps the most obvious function of the *LoyaltyOne* business letter is that, rhetorically, it is a response, a reply. That is, with very few exceptions, *LoyaltyOne* correspondence is solicited. Letters reply to specific queries generated by people with the expectation that they will receive a relevant answer. As was noted in 2.4.2:

> Every time writers allow a piece of correspondence to be sent to a member they send out evidence of their ability not so much to write a letter as to investigate a case, provide a service and give appropriate, and possibly legally sensitive responses to queries.

When writing letters, *LoyaltyOne* writers are very aware that the information they provide has to be correct. A finished letter is the result of a writing process embedded within practices of investigation: of reference to diverse texts, such as databases, previous letters, standard paragraphs, and publicly available terms and conditions; and of actions taken by the writer or other departments of the service centre. All replies to incoming correspondence are based on such investigations, with the primary aim of providing a service: of, where possible, presenting the member with a helpful, timely, and positive experience of the *TravelAir* company.

There are two related purposes that can be generalised from these functions, and which are discussed in detail in 2.8.3:

1. to promote an individual relationship with the customer

2. to give customers the sense that they are valued by *TravelAir*
CHAPTER THREE

3.5 Defining moves: Communicative purpose and relationships

The definition of moves and acts in *LoyaltyOne* business correspondence proved to be a surprisingly difficult task. This was due primarily to the problem of establishing what single significant communicative purpose might be realised by any one move. The problems seemed to stem from two aspects of business letter writing. Firstly, as replies, these letters form only part of a conversation. Some aspects of a service centre writer’s response to an individual are due in part to the tone set by the letter to which he or she is replying, and in part to the writer’s own emotional state and reaction to that letter. As noted in 2.4.2, the amount of investigating done, and the decisions a writer may make are not solely a product of the terms and conditions of the *LoyaltyOne* program. Secondly, the long history of letter writing in the English language has led to a number of traditional formats such as the opening ‘Dear…’ and closing ‘Yours sincerely’. Some of these formats are so commonly used as to appear taken for granted and perhaps meaningless, except as a framing device. And yet, in most cases, many alternatives are available, thus requiring the researcher to investigate why a given traditional format may be preferred.

Both these problems have a particular issue in common: *LoyaltyOne* correspondence is relational. The notion of communicative purpose tends to prioritise the notion of communicating factual or objective information, and so *LoyaltyOne* letters reply to questions and complaints with answers and explanations. An example of a common move communicating that an action has been carried out would be:

The points for your [transaction] have now been credited to your account (1).

This passive construction is a regular feature of *LoyaltyOne* correspondence. It allows the writer to foreground that aspect of the communication in which the reader is most likely to be interested: the subject of the sentence is the points that have been earned.
Human communication, however, carries with it relational implications. Necessary components of a letter might include politeness, courtesy, goodwill, friendliness and respect. As noted in Chapter 2 (section 2.8) both the writers at the LoyaltyOne service centre and TravelAir management recognised the importance of creating the sense of a relationship, of cultivating a particular image of relationship, through the correspondence of the service centre. The construction above is often preceded by variations of:

We are pleased to advise that… (21)

Arguably, this is a redundant phrase. No objective information is provided and it would seem pointless for the writer to explicitly advise the reader that they are about to be advised. The function of this fragment appears to be to inform the reader about an emotional condition. As such, it appears to be a different move, or act, from the construction it precedes.

This relational aspect of text tends to be placed under the notion of style, or Hallidayan register, which has previously been conflated with genre, particularly in the area of Systemic Functional Linguistics (see Chapter 1, section 1.6, and e.g. Martin, 1992, Lewin et al., 2001: 12). As suggested above, knowing how to use a given genre entails knowing precisely what and how something may be said in a given, regular social situation. In this sense genre and register cannot simply be separated, but may be said to form a duality, as shown in Figure 3.1 below. If a given genre is, as Swales argued, owned by a given discourse community, then it follows that two separate communities writing business letters could each be said to own a different genre. It may be that each genre exhibits the same communicative purposes, their only difference being an element of register such as tenor (or the formality of the style used) – and this despite the same social context of a relationship between similar sized businesses and their clients. If writing is embedded as part of the social activity of a given community, then it would seem problematic to assume that either genre or register can be known separately, or that either one on its own can necessarily be the subject of an abstract cognition independent of a given social context.
Figure 3.1 Genre and register as a duality

As such, knowledge of a given genre, within a given social setting, must equate to knowledge of a given style or register (and vice versa) as much as to the particular knowledge of content required by different businesses. Interestingly enough, it may also be possible to show that register is not simply defined by social context, in the sense that a given set of social parameters will always prescribe the register to be used. Rather, elements of register, such as tenor, can be deliberately manipulated by an author in an attempt to dictate how a relationship will be perceived by a reader. Of course, modern readers, used to a deluge of advertising in all forms of media, can often be quite cynically aware of this manipulation, even as they respond to it.

The following discussion of the salutation and opening paragraph of original LoyaltyOne business correspondence serves as an example of the link between genre and the elements of register. Initially, a close examination of the corpora discussed above (section 3.3.1) yielded the move and acts presented in Table 3.5 below.
Table 3.5 Component acts of Move 1: Acknowledge received correspondence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move 1: Acknowledge received correspondence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act A: Acknowledge receipt of correspondence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your (recent) correspondence (of date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for forwarding your application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are writing in reference to your letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We write in response to a facsimile we received from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act B: Summarise subject of received correspondence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…regarding… the allocation of points to your TravelAir account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the TravelAir LoyaltyOne program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the theft of your membership card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…requesting… the cancellation of your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the primary rhetorical function of *replying with information and explanations*, the communicative purposes suggested in Table 3.5 appear to be quite accurate. The following example is the one most commonly found in the original LoyaltyOne standard letters (with minor variations):

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding the allocation of points to your TravelAir LoyaltyOne account.

The use of thank you – the aphetic form of I thank you – is a common tradition in letter writing and could be considered part of a ceremonial generic usage rather than necessarily as an expression of gratitude. This is picked up by Gentle who argues ‘Why waste the most precious line of your letter with a thank you which, very often, is not even sincere?’ He goes on to suggest that ‘Starting with thank you makes sense only if the purpose of the letter is to genuinely thank your reader for something.’ (2002: 87).

By claiming that he is refuting ‘common myths’ (2002: 87), Gentle recognises that writing makes use of traditions, expectations, individual experience, teaching, and the copying of previous material. Writers often rely on certain
normative assumptions, themselves based partly on a large body of previous writing and partly on the social and cultural histories already known and also embodied in previous texts. In other books on business writing, however, authors have acknowledged some of the reasons for the common use of thank you. It is courteous to acknowledge the time a correspondent has taken to write her letter (Callis, 2001: 171). Fletcher and Gowing suggest that the structure of a ‘simple answer to a simple request’ should be ‘thanks’ and then ‘response’, arguing that ‘simple requests require only normal politeness’ (1987: 70). Their structure for a complex letter also begins with thanks and their structure for a letter of complaint begins with thanks and sympathy. They argue:


Rules of courtesy and politeness arise out of the need to create a sense of relationship. This need is not made explicit in guides on business writing and, as demonstrated by Gentle’s argument, often is simply not understood. In the same way, the labelling of the rhetorical action in Move 1 and Act A in Table 3.5 above capture only one aspect of the communicative purpose generating an acknowledgment of received correspondence. Gentle goes on to argue that acknowledging receipt of a letter (Act A) in a reply is also unnecessary as it is stating the obvious (2002: 89). The same could be argued of providing a summary of the letter’s subject (Act B).

The point here is that communicative purpose should not be merely about the provision of information. As such, the move and acts in Table 3.5 do not adequately describe the intent of the text, which is plural in nature. A more complete identification of rhetorical function is provided in Table 3.6.
Table 3.6 Revised component acts of Move 1: Greet correspondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move 1: Greet correspondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act A: Greeting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(set tenor of reply; show courtesy; respond to tenor of source)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sir or Madam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Ms Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act B: Acknowledge receipt of correspondence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of goodwill/courtesy; recognise/accept role of response)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your (recent) correspondence (of date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for forwarding your application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are writing in reference to your letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We write in response to a facsimile we received from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act C: Summarise subject of received correspondence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of goodwill/courtesy; promote positive relationship; identify major issue)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...regarding... the allocation of points to your TravelAir account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the TravelAir LoyaltyOne program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the theft of your membership card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...requesting...the cancellation of your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3.6 Move 1 recognises the social context based on the overarching communicative purpose, which is the requirement that the loyalty and custom of LoyaltyOne members be retained, as far as possible within the limits of the program rules and employees’ discretionary authority. This purpose underlies the politeness and face-saving strategies present in the corpus, at least as much as traditional letter-writing formalities or culturally expected relational choices.
3.6 Semantic participants

As Lewin et al. note in their study there are common semantic participants in a generic corpus (2001: 30). It is useful to identify these participants initially, as a means of then determining how these participants are placed linguistically within a letter.

Figure 3.2 Semantic participants in the LoyaltyOne business letter corpus

The primary participants are provided in Figure 3.2. The first two participants, company and recipient, represent the two sides of the dialogue of which LoyaltyOne business letters are a part. Every letter contains several references to each of these participants:

1. **Company**: the company can be represented by an individual writer, or sometimes an individual named and so responsible for the text (but not the author as such). In both cases, these individuals are referred to by name and signature and occasionally by the use of I. The company can
also be represented directly by name, as **TravelAir**, or by the pronouns **we/our**. In addition, the **LoyaltyOne** Service Centre as a specific group within the **TravelAir** organisation can also be represented, usually referred to as **LoyaltyOne Service Centre, consultants**, and **we/our**.

2. **Recipient**: the letter recipient, usually an individual who has sent in a request or complaint on their own behalf or for others. Usually a **TravelAir** customer and member of the **LoyaltyOne** or **ClubOne** programs. Commonly referred to by surname and title, or as **you/your**.

The next three primary participants are directly related to the nature and purpose of the business of the **LoyaltyOne** service centre. As with any business, correspondence between the company and its customers revolves around the product or service the company provides:

3. **Transaction**: to earn **LoyaltyOne** points a member must have a transaction with **TravelAir** or an affiliated company. Transactions are referred to by type, such as **flight**, **hotel stay** or **car hire**, and the details of a transaction are often provided, including dates, the name of the company the transaction was with, reference numbers, and so on.

4. **Product**: the products dealt with by the service centre are primarily **LoyaltyOne** and **ClubOne** membership accounts. References to product can therefore include specifics such as a membership account number, or simply **your account**, leaflets and booklets, the membership card, and the program terms and conditions. The **TravelAir** and **LoyaltyOne** websites are also included here, as they are discussed and used in the same way as printed booklets (the creation and maintenance of the websites are not a service centre concern).

5. **Currency**: this term refers primarily to **LoyaltyOne points**. Whereas the notion of **product** refers to the static elements, or framework of the business, **currency** refers to the dynamic, valued asset produced by the loyalty program framework. The other asset referred to in **LoyaltyOne**
letters is monetary – usually application fees, or charges for replacement cards, and so on.

The final semantic participant demonstrates the relational nature of the LoyaltyOne business letter. While the primary content deals with company products and services, relating to the questions of the member, an equally important communicative purpose has to do with relational maintenance, and the semantic participant here refers to channels of communication. While this is, in some ways, an extension of the methodology presented by Lewin et al. (2001), it is also possible to argue that the provision of service is itself a product of the LoyaltyOne service centre. From this perspective, communication channels are an important and regular feature of LoyaltyOne business letters:

6. Communication channels: the description of these channels refers to the mode of communication, such as phone, email, fax and so on. Direct references include phone numbers and email addresses.
3.7 Moves and Acts in *LoyaltyOne* Business letters-of-reply

The following analysis has been split into three sections, corresponding with the three parts of the *LoyaltyOne* business letter: the introduction, the response, and the exit. A discussion of the nature of each part is provided, followed by a description of the moves and their component acts, as found in each part of the letter.

3.7.1 Part 1: The introduction: Responding to initiated dialogue

The first paragraph of *LoyaltyOne* correspondence forms an introduction to the substance of the letter. It is another framing device of sorts as it does not tell the recipient anything new about the subject-matter of their original query. The first paragraph is often referred to as the ‘intro’ by writers at *LoyaltyOne*, and a number of alternative versions are provided as ‘macros’ (community jargon referring to standard paragraphs, or boilerplate) for the writers to place into their correspondence. Intros are used in all letters regardless of the rest of the content. Indeed, the rhetorical format of letter writing follows a very old narrative form – that of the three part *beginning, middle* and *end*, and each part has a noticeably different function and can usefully be separated for the purposes of analysis.

3.7.1.1 Move 1: Respond to initiated dialogue

Move 1 is defined by the nature of the *LoyaltyOne* business letter genre. In nearly all cases (probably over 99%) the *LoyaltyOne* writer is writing a reply in response to a letter. The conversation is always initiated by the member, or customer. The acts that make up Move 1 are detailed in Table 3.7 and discussed individually below.
Table 3.7 Component acts of Move 1: Respond to initiated dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE 1 – RESPOND TO INITIATED DIALOGUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Greet correspondent, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(set tenor of reply; show courtesy; respond to tenor of source)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sir or Madam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Ms Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Sue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Acknowledge receipt of correspondence, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of courtesy; valuing recipient; recognise/accept role of response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your correspondence dated… (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your e-mail of…(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your recent correspondence… (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your facsimile received… (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your letter of [date] addressed to Mr Manage, General Manager TravelAir department… (154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Summarise received correspondence, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of courtesy; promote positive relationship; identify major issue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…concerning the allocation of points to your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership account. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…regarding your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership accounts. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…regarding your LoyaltyOne application. (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Remark on possible expectations of dialogue (writer/media/time), e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of courtesy/empathy; acknowledge expectations where not met)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We sincerely apologise for the delay in responding to your letter. (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regret the delay in our response. (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We tried on 2 previous occasions to send this letter to your e-mail address […] with no success. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Manage has requested I respond on his behalf. (154)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.1.2 Obligatory Act A: Greet correspondent

The use of ‘Dear’ is an international custom in English language letter writing. It is ‘the accepted convention for address [that] does not imply any affection’ according to Callis (2001: 169). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) notes that ‘[i]n the introductory address or subscription of a letter […] Dear Sir (or Dear Mr. A.) has become since the 17th c. the ordinary polite form of addressing an equal’ (1989: 300). The OED traces the use of this form in letter writing back to the fifteenth century. LoyaltyOne correspondence is formal at least to the extent that the writer seldom knows the recipient personally. The
greeting ‘Dear’ reflects this, preferred over other forms of greeting such as ‘Hi’. ‘Dear’ does also denote ‘high value,’ and ‘high estimation,’ (OED) and it therefore seems appropriate for correspondence intended to place value on the recipient. ‘Hello’ is sometimes used in TravelAir’s unsolicited promotional material, however in a LoyaltyOne letter of response the only appropriate greeting is considered to be ‘Dear’.

Barrass comments that ‘[i]the salutation in a formal letter should be Dear Sirs, Dear Sir, or Dear Madam, or Dear Sir/Madam, but in a less formal (more personal) letter the name of the recipient should be included in the address and in the salutation’ (2002: 20). Barrass’ notion of what constitutes a formal letter is not defined and his position is perhaps a bit surprising for a recent manual aimed at the scientific community. An earlier British publication originally written for accountants notes in its second edition that ‘[i]t should be part of the courtesy of a letter to address the reader by name if possible’, and that ‘[y]ou do not need to know your reader well’ (Fletcher and Gowing, 1987: 74). Another recent British guide concurs, suggesting the use of the formal greeting ‘Dear Sir/Madam’ only in instances where the writer does not know the name of the recipient (Callis, 2001: 169). It is interesting to note that very recent guides still recommend the chauvinistic, or perhaps conventional (Swales, 1990: 196), use of ‘Dear Sirs’ when addressing a letter to a company (Callis, 2001: 170, Barrass, 2002: 20) even though, as Fletcher and Gowing note, ‘this has the false implication that all significant employees will be men, not women’ (1987: 74).

In setting the formality of the relationship by referring to the recipient by name the usual format is to use a person’s title and surname, so ‘Mr Smith’ or ‘Ms Jones’. Occasionally, where a fax has been received and it has proved impossible to decipher a name or gender, ‘Sir/Madam’ will be used, however this is rare. It is fairly common for a writer to receive more than one letter from a given member. In these cases, the writer has the option of following the level of formality preferred by the recipient. All writers include their first name and surname at the end of a letter, and customer responses often use a writer’s first name. The writer can then choose to reciprocate.
3.7.1.3 Obligatory Act B: Acknowledge receipt of correspondence

Thank you for the documentation which was recently faxed to this office in support of your claim for missing points. (688)

As already noted above (see 3.5) this act states the obvious. Stating what the recipient must already know by having received the response suggests that the motive here is not to present factual information, but is rather a courteous acknowledgement of contact. The important lexical item is ‘thank you’, which suggests a customer focus, as the grammatical subject, the writer, is implied rather than stated. Occasionally, a different opening may be used:

Reference is made to correspondence forwarded to this office… (703)
I write in reply to your e-mails dated [date]. (723)
We refer to your facsimile received [date] regarding… (724)

In the first instance (letter 703), the writer is replying to the member rather than to the travel agent who sent in the documents. While ‘thank you’ is not used, the act is still one of formal and courteous acknowledgement. ‘Thank you’ does, however, have at least the connotation of gratitude in this use, and carries an implication that TravelAir values their customers and are happy to receive correspondence from them. As such, ‘thank you’ is the most commonly used form of acknowledgement in the original custom corpus, found in more than 90% of correspondence.

The inclusion of a date was common, although its use was somewhat disputed at LoyaltyOne. A date can potentially be legally sensitive, particularly where a complaint or request requires action in a given time. Some writers used ‘Thank you for your letter of [date]’ or ‘your letter dated [date],’ where the date given would be the date the letter was written or sent. Other writers used ‘your letter received [date],’ which was in many ways a more accurate and useful date. Emails and faxes are received within a day and so date issues were less ambiguous in these media. Very few LoyaltyOne letters were date sensitive and so no official guidelines were provided to writers. In the same way, very few letters on the same issue from the same member would be received within a
short period of time, so the need for a date to differentiate between letters was also unnecessary. As such, the provision of a date seemed to be simply a part of the courtesy of acknowledging receipt of a given letter, a generic expectation like the use of ‘Dear,’ linked to the wider social expectation of generic business letter writing, and not to have any purposeful import for the COP.

3.7.1.4 Optional Act A: Summarise received correspondence

In most cases where a summary is provided, it covers either the general theme of the letter to which it replies, or it specifies the primary issue. As an act of summary, optional act A can potentially feature all the possible participants of the LoyaltyOne letter genre (with the exception of communication channels, see Figure 3.2 in section 3.5), as shown in Table 3.7.

…regarding your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership accounts. (2)

Many letters keep the subject summary very general, simply referring to the sender’s membership account, as above. This is a ‘catch-all’ summary that says very little about the original letter or the issues raised. It serves to remind the reader of his or her query, and to frame the reply to follow. As such, it is an act of courtesy, introducing and leading the reader into the subject of the letter, rather than beginning with a reply, which might be considered rather abrupt. This opening is so commonly written that it, along with obligatory Act B, form a standard paragraph, or ‘macro’, with the title ‘Intro2’ which the writers accessed using AmiPro’s (Lotus word processing software) ‘hotkey’ function:

Thank you for your correspondence of *** regarding your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership account.

Another common variation of the general theme summary has also received institutional approval, available to writers as standard paragraph ‘Intro1’:

Thank you for your correspondence of *** regarding point allocation to your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership account.
Once again, the theme is quite general, and it refers to perhaps the most common request received at the service centre – the crediting of points to a member’s account. These two sentences, with minor variations, form the vast majority of the realisation of Move 1.

A more explicit theme is often provided when the recipient has made some sort of complaint. In this case, the particular issue is referred to, or summarised. This might be so that the reader knows their complaint has been understood and acknowledged, as much as to remind them of the letter they sent. It is also used where the original letter is longer and more complex, and where a more general thematic summary such as those above does not readily apply:

Thank you for your letter received 12 February regarding your request for vegetarian meals and exit row seating on TravelAir services.

This act is usually signalled lexically with an active participle: regarding, concerning, informing us of; or with a prepositional phrase: in/with reference to, in support of; however there are other ways of summarising the subject of the received mail:

Thank you for your application to enrol in... (626)

### 3.7.1.5 Optional Act B: Remark on possible expectations of dialogue (writer/media/time)

This act is part of the initial greeting and response because it refers to the discourse itself rather than to the subject at issue. That is, a note is often placed here if there has been a change in media format, a delay in response, or if someone other than the addressee is writing. In each case, there is an acknowledgement and/or an explanation for the benefit of the recipient.

Where the writer believes a response has taken more time than can be reasonably expected, an apology is often included here:
We sincerely apologise for the delay in responding to your letter. (23)

Again, recognising the recipient’s perspective suggests that the company values its customers – that they are important, that their loyalty, their custom and their time is appreciated.

Respondents often write to the LoyaltyOne General Manager (GM). This is likely to be because all standard letters are signed by the GM, as his name is not advertised outside the service centre. Although the public are not aware of it, the LoyaltyOne service centre is managed by a contracted company, and so the LoyaltyOne service centre GM is not directly employed by TravelAir. Respondents will also often write to the TravelAir Relationship Marketing GM, whose name appears on the LoyaltyOne membership welcome letter and in the newsletters. The GMs seldom respond themselves except under very unusual circumstances, and so they will not usually even see the letters addressed to them. It is courteous, however, to recognise that a respondent has written to a specific person, and to let them know that the writer is writing with the authority of that person:

Thank you for your letter of 12 February addressed to Mr J Smith, General Manager Relationship Marketing, regarding your TravelAir ClubOne membership and lounge access. Mr Smith has requested I respond on his behalf. (154)

In these cases, the summary also acknowledges that the letter has been written to a specific person, and so Optional Acts A and B can be closely connected.

At the time of this study most replies were sent in the same medium as the letters they answered. Where writers assume the recipient will expect a given media, they will explain why they have used a different one. The most likely use of this act is where a member has sent in an email and the writer’s response email has been ‘bounced’ back by the recipient’s ‘server’. The email is then commonly converted to a letter and sent by post:

We tried on 2 previous occasions to send this letter to your e-mail address [name@domain.com] with no success.
Generally, this act is not used for any other issues with media. The other common variation is an inability to respond by fax. Due to differences between media, it is quite usual to find that faxes have been sent from public services such as those available in some shops. As such, there tends to be an assumption that the respondent is not expecting a return fax, and so a change in medium does not warrant a comment in the response.

3.7.1.6 Why are these four acts together, and why do they make up a single move?

The first two above acts are obligatory – they appear in all LoyaltyOne replies and they always appear together, though they may be separated visually by a ‘Re:’ line displaying several names and membership numbers. Rhetorically, the act of greeting does not stand often alone: a comment of some sort must follow. This is reflected grammatically: the greeting is a fragment followed by a comma (or nothing, but never a period). The summary is part of the same sentence as the acknowledgement, and is commonly a noun phrase extending the object of the sentence:

Thank you for your letter regarding your TravelAir LoyaltyOne account.

The variations of Optional Act B have in common a referral to some aspect of the discourse rather than its subject. In many cases, they also form part of an extension of the sentence object ‘letter’:

Thank you for your email addressed to [Name], regarding…

Where another sentence is included it will often refer to the previous one, as in ‘I have been asked to respond on Name’s behalf’. If not, it will usually occur in the same paragraph.
3.7.2 Part 2: Relating the news: Responding to the content

If the ‘intro’ is the beginning of a letter, the middle of the letter is its substance, the actual response to the request or complaint the member has made. Naturally enough, a larger variety of moves can be seen and there is increased scope for the writer to display personal preferences or idiosyncrasies. That said, a LoyaltyOne business letter, in common with business letters in general, seldom includes a second page, and so the level of complexity, and therefore the number of available moves, is correspondingly small. Add to that the repetitive nature of the issues dealt with, and the writers’ access to their own and company approved standard wording, and it is not surprising to find little variation in the way acts are realised.

It will be seen that several acts within the following moves are the same. In particular, the act of providing an explanation or justification of a response appears, in some form, in all the moves of part two. Initially it did seem appropriate to make this act a separate move in its own right, however it soon became apparent that the provision of an explanation does not stand on its own, but is rather linked to the subject-matter it discusses and extends. For example, an explanation is optional when a response contains good news, however it is obligatory when the response is bad news.

The first four moves are defined by the nature of LoyaltyOne correspondence. They are responses, written in reply to queries and complaints received from LoyaltyOne and ClubOne members, and other interested parties. They are:

- Move A: Positive response to request for action
- Move B: Negative response to request for action
- Move C: Response to request for information
- Move D: Response to complaint

Borrowing Freadman’s (1987) tennis metaphor, the ball is in the writer’s court. LoyaltyOne mail is not unsolicited. The Service Centre exists to provide a service, and the writers’ job is to provide that service, maintaining, as best they can, the relationship members have with TravelAir, even when the writers have
to say no. The writer has received a serve. He or she must send the ball back. The first four moves are entirely directed by the nature of the correspondence received. The emphasis is on what the writers as agents have or have not been able to do, on the service they can give, on the way they respond to a complaint. In sending the ball back, the writer is looking to make a winning shot: no return shot is expected or requested.

The other two moves, however, put the ball back into the recipient’s court in a way that invites a response of some sort – requests action from the recipient:

Move E: Request response
Move F: Advise recipient to take action

Move E can continue the tennis metaphor, as the writer has sent the ball back to the recipient’s court in such a way that a response is expected. In Move F, however, the metaphor breaks down, as the writer is suggesting that the recipient hit a ball into someone else’s court. That is, the recipient is given information on how to do something, or who to contact when an issue does not involve the LoyaltyOne service centre.

3.7.3 Move A: Positive response to request for action

In a service-based culture like that of the LoyaltyOne Service Centre, moves A and B, not surprisingly, are the most regular requirement of business letter writing. Indeed, originally, these two moves, one relating good news and the other bad, were included as one move. The rhetorical action seems to be the same. Its primary communicative purpose is to let the recipient know the outcome of his or her request, regardless of whether the news is good or bad, whether the points requested have been credited or not. In this sense the moves are the same – a response to a request for something to be done.

There are, however, some noticeable differences in the way good news or bad news is delivered, particularly the necessity for an explanation when delivering bad news, as well as differing lexical items and keywords. For this reason the
two have been separated. The component acts of Move A are summarised in Table 3.8 and each act is discussed in detail below.

Table 3.8 Component acts of Move A: Positive response to request for action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE A – POSITIVE RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform of action taken, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The points for your [transaction] have now been credited to your account. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furthermore, your and Mr Member's mailing addresses have been updated in our records… (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…Mr Member's membership is now cancelled. (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Optional:**                                    |
| a. Introduce writer response/anticipate likely emotional response of recipient, e.g.: |
| *(act of empathy/understanding; act of courtesy)* |
| We are pleased to advise that your accounts have now been credited… (6) |
| b. Inform results of action taken, e.g.:         |
| …and your future membership correspondence will be sent to your home address… (4) |
| A detailed summary of these points will appear on a forthcoming statement. (5) |
| For your reference your total points balance to date is 41,616 points. (5) |
| c. Provide explanation or justification for action taken, e.g.: |
| As your [transactions] automatically tracked to your cancelled account… (12) |
| As we have recorded activity in your membership prior to your points expiring… (36) |
| As requested by Dan… (43) |

3.7.3.1 **Obligatory Act: Inform of action taken**

Interestingly, and perhaps contrary to expectations, it is good news that tends to be couched in passive voice, whereas bad news is generally presented in active voice. The most common result of a request for action is that of points being credited to an account:

The points for your [transaction] have now been credited to your account. (1)
The passive construction seems quite appropriate in these cases, as the subject of the sentence becomes ‘the points for your transaction,’ where the semantic property of currency is highlighted, or simply ‘your points,’ where both the recipient and currency predominate. The sentence subject (currency) is also the subject of the request, the subject the recipient is interested in. This construction comes naturally to the writer, who may well not have been the agent who credited the points, as that is another department’s responsibility. The passive construction uses the present perfect to communicate a state: ‘have been’, ‘have now been’. Good news, of course, seldom generates a response. The recipient is not interested in the agent responsible for carrying out her request, as long as it has been done.

It should be noted here that this construction often does not stand on its own, but rather follows a sentence fragment the realises optional act A. Where this is the case, the full sentence is in active voice and the grammatical subject of the sentence is the company (see the next section).

3.7.3.2 Optional Act A: Introduce writer response / anticipate likely emotional response of recipient

This act is usually a sentence fragment such as ‘We are pleased to advise that’ or ‘We wish to advise that’. Like the acknowledgement and summary of the introductory move, this fragment appears to be unnecessary grammatically and rhetorically, as there is no need to explicitly inform the reader that they are about to be advised of something when the advice itself can stand alone.

One application of this fragment is the use of an emotive term such as the adjective ‘pleased’ or verb ‘regret’ to anticipate the likely reaction of the recipient to the news, and therefore, as the emotion is linked to the writer or company as agent, to empathise with the recipient, or at least to recognise and acknowledge their feelings. This particular use can be linked to the primary purpose of maintaining a relationship with the respondent.
‘We are pleased to advise that’ gives away what is to follow, and changes the passive construction of the sentence that usually follows, turning it into a noun clause as part of an active construction:

We are pleased to advise that your points have been credited.

Fragments such as ‘We wish to advise that’ do not give away the content of the sentence to follow, nor do they anticipate the reader’s emotional response. As noted above, they do serve to place an otherwise passive construction into active voice. They frame the writer’s response with relational elements of courtesy or politeness, as ‘wish’ or ‘would like’ are ways of seeking permission from the reader to continue his or her dialogue.

3.7.3.3 Optional Act B: Inform results of action taken

This act is optional, however it is very common after advice of good news and it is generally seen to be an act of courtesy – the provision of further information directly related to the request and of interest to the recipient. It is usually either a sentence within the paragraph in which the action is related, or it follows as a single sentence paragraph. It also appears as a sentence following the coordinator ‘and’, as the result is closely linked to the action taken:

Your points have been credited and will appear on a forthcoming statement.

As a result of the above accreditation, your account has now been upgraded… (1)

For your records, your current balance is… (114)

3.7.3.4 Optional Act C: Provide explanation or justification for action taken

This act is not common when good news has been given as it is not particularly necessary to provide justification: there is an assumption that the member is more interested in the positive response to the action they requested than in the
reason why the response was positive. Writers are most likely to provide an explanation when they want to let the member know that they have made an exception; where the member has written a complaint because nothing appears to have been done; or where the request has come from someone other than the member, such as a travel agent:

   As your [transactions] automatically tracked to your cancelled account… (12)
   As we have recorded activity in your membership prior to your points expiring… (36)
   As requested by Dan… (43)

A common lexical indicator of an explanation is ‘as’, which appears to be preferred to ‘because’. That is, the explanation is most often given as an adverbial clause of reason with the conjunction ‘as’.
### 3.7.4 Move B: Negative response to request for action

#### Table 3.9 Component acts of Move B: Negative response to request for action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE B – NEGATIVE RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Inform of action not taken</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…we are not in a position to process a refund… (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…we are unable to credit your accounts with… (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…we are unable to transfer points from one LoyaltyOne account to another… (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…your remaining ACME Airlines flights have not been credited…(1467)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Provide explanation or justification for action not taken</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…as program conditions do not allow for this. (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…as your stay at this property occurred when your membership account was in suspense. (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…LoyaltyOne points are not credited for travel on flight awards. Consequently… (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…as this particular carrier is not affiliated with the LoyaltyOne program. (111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Introduce subject/anticipate likely emotional response of recipient</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of empathy/understanding; act of courtesy)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regret we are unable to credit your accounts… (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Member, whilst we empathise with your positions, we sincerely regret that… (296)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We apologise for any inconvenience or frustration that may be caused by this… (1830)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wish to advise that… (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Inform results of action not taken</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In view of the above, please find enclosed all relevant documentation relating to your ACME Airlines travel. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. <strong>Suggest means to prevent future negative response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid disappointment in the future, we recommend that you… (1800)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We draw your attention to the Members Guidebook which lists our partners… (1800)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.7.4.1 Obligatory Act A: Inform of action not taken

Unlike the passive voice of good news, bad news often seems to require an agent, as writers needs to refer to their inability to carry out a request.
Grammatically, the sentence is written in the present tense, and the agent tends to be the plural ‘we’ referring to *TravelAir* rather than an individual:

We are unable to credit your account…
We are not able to credit your account with points…

Cases where bad news is reported using a passive construction in the custom corpus are not so common, and tend to be used when the first point in a letter is the good news of Move A.

…your car rentals on [date] have not been credited… (1399)

Bad news is delivered in a way that attempts to soften the impact on the reader. That is, a blunt, direct ‘We cannot credit your account’ is not used. Rather preference is given to ‘we are unable to’, and most correspondence features this use of the brief and somewhat indirect negative – ‘unable’ generally being preferred to ‘not able’, and so on. The use of ‘are unable to’ is also a more formal construction in the present tense (Eastwood, 1994: 124).

Occasionally, a writer will not directly refer to his or her inability to carry out an action, but rather to the rule or condition that is ‘responsible’ for that inability:

The […] code shown […] indicates that this particular transaction […] is ineligible for points. (219)

Here, the bad news is given at the end and as part of an explanation, with no reference to the action of crediting an account included.

### 3.7.4.2 Obligatory Act B: Provide explanation or justification for action not taken

This act is optional for good news, but obligatory where a customer is told that her request cannot be met. The explanation can be placed either before or after
the bad news itself is related. As such, either obligatory act can take the head
act position.

It would be impolite to present bad news to a customer without clearly
explaining the reason her request for action has not been carried out. The
explanation is also obligatory because of the primary purpose of the
LoyaltyOne program, which is to retain the loyalty of TravelAir’s customers.
Saying no to a customer represents a conflict of interest, and some justification
for the negative response is therefore required.

3.7.4.3 Optional Act A: Introduce subject/anticipate likely emotional
response of recipient

Implicitly, ‘We regret to advise’ is used because writers do not want to give
bad news: in this way they can empathise with the recipient’s disappointment.
The fragment also prepares the reader for what is to follow, framing the bad
news with a courteous recognition that the reader will not enjoy receiving the
news. It is a device: few writers care or actually feel any form of regret – quite
the opposite on some occasions. Their motive is to pander to a dissatisfied
member, to soften their rejection of a request.

3.7.4.4 Optional Act B: Inform results of action not taken

This act aims to clarify the outcome of a negative response to a request. The
primary semantic participants of LoyaltyOne letters are transactions leading to
additional currency (see 3.6) and so saying no to a member generally means
nothing has changed: no additional points have been added to the member’s
account. As such, this move is less common where bad news is presented.

3.7.4.5 Optional Act C: Suggest means to prevent future negative
response

This act is only found where bad news is given and it is both an act of courtesy
and a recognition of the value placed on a member’s return custom. The most
common cause of a negative response is customer ignorance of the LoyaltyOne
terms and conditions. Thus, at one end of the scale, some customers send in a request for points for a transaction with a company not affiliated with TravelAir, or even in competition with them. Other requests are for transactions where only certain types are eligible, and these distinctions usually appear ‘in the fine print’ and cause considerable confusion amongst both customers and many TravelAir employees.

Optional act C, therefore, directs the customer’s attention to ways in which they can confirm the eligibility of their intended transactions. This act assumes, often explicitly, that the customer will continue his relationship with TravelAir:

To avoid disappointment in the future… (1800)

The act recognises the importance of this knowledge to the customer, and the courtesy of providing it is also intended to forestall a request for clarification or a complaint that the information was not previously available:

We draw your attention to the [Members Guidebook] which lists our partners… (1800)

If you'd like to know more about the Terms and Conditions of the program, please refer to [Members Guidebook], which you would have received when you joined (1936).
3.7.5 Move C: Respond to request for information

Table 3.10 Component acts of Move C: Respond to request for information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE C – RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce and provide information requested or relevant, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wish to advise your points balance stands currently at 49,390. Of these, 24,731 points are due to expire on [date], and the rest on [date]. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As requested, we advise that the PIN of your membership is [numbers]. (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For future reference, […] it is necessary to quote your name, exactly as it appears on your membership card, together with your membership number when making your reservation… (164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide explanation for, or describe use of given information, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You will need to quote this number whenever you contact the LoyaltyOne Service Centre, when viewing your account details on-line and when redeeming points to claim Awards. (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…in order to ensure the automatic crediting of points… (164)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Requests for information are becoming more common due to the rise in email usage. In general, letters and faxes contain requests for action (Move A), as few people will write to request information when a phone call provides an immediate and often more detailed response. That said, phone calls place a customer in a queue that, at peak times particularly, can leave them ‘on hold’ listening to looped music and the same spoken information for quite some time. As most such queries are not urgent, email allows a customer to write a quick question, such as ‘how many points have I got?’ or ‘Did I get points for my last flight?’ or ‘When do my points expire?’ and send it immediately. They can then get on with other things, and expect to receive an answer in a few days.

3.7.5.1 Obligatory Act: Introduce and provide information requested or relevant

Occasionally, letters or faxes will ask for information. In general, this would be secondary to a request for action or a complaint, as a letter or fax would seem
to require more time and effort than a simple request for information is worth, particularly when the information may usually be gained through reading the program literature or phoning the Service Centre directly. The advent of email communication has provided a new medium in which to request information, perhaps due to its association with the conversational speed of direct, verbal dialogue. At the time of this research email volumes were climbing, however the bulk of the corpus available in this case features fax and letter correspondence primarily.

There are two reasons for the provision of information. The first is, of course, because it has been explicitly requested by the respondent. Common requests for information include ‘how many points do I have, and when do they expire?’, ‘What is my PIN number?’, ‘Can I earn points for transactions with this company or in that class of travel?’ and so on. The second occurs where the writer sees a link between a request for action or a request for other information and information of which the writer is aware but in all probability the member is not.

For example, when a member writes in asking for points for a transaction that has not appeared on their account, the writer will often provide information on how to ensure that points are credited automatically. This provision of relevant information is separate from information given as part of an explanation, which appears as an act within Moves A (optional act C), B (obligatory act B), and E (obligatory act B). It is similar to optional act C of Move B: Suggest means to prevent future negative response, however the provision of information in Move C is not usually connected to a request for action, and so is required as a separate move.

3.7.5.2 Optional Act: Provide explanation for, or describe use of given information

Some information is considered self explanatory, however writers have the option of providing more detail if they believe it necessary. This is an act of courtesy, a provision of service and, from the writers’ perspective, a means (with the obligatory act above) of anticipating and hopefully preventing further
questions on the same issue, and therefore further communication, from the member.

3.7.6 Move D: Respond to complaint

Table 3.11 Component acts of Move D: Response to complaint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE D – RESPONSE TO COMPLAINT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Summarise/acknowledge issue/request, refer to correspondence</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of empathy/respect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…you were unable to access your account via our website. (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There may well be occasions when you notice vacant seats after boarding a flight that were previously unavailable. (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…if there was any misunderstanding when you contacted [TravelAir department]. (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…being unable to access the ClubOne lounge recently prior to your [Partner Flight]… (154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>State company policy/rules/understanding of situation</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of courtesy/respect, appeal/recognition of importance of relationship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My investigations confirm that you have full website access… (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…once issued, the ticket may be upgraded within 72 hours of departure, provided there are seats available in the redemption class. (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would take this opportunity to remind you that the ClubOne lounge access… requires those seeking access to be holding a valid boarding pass for onward travel with [Airline]. (154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While [Airline] are now a LoyaltyOne partner, they are not associated with the ClubOne program. (155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Empathise with recipient’s apparent/likely feelings</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of empathy/respect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was most concerned to learn… (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am sorry if you were unaware of this previously or if there was any misunderstanding when you contacted [TravelAir department]. (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can understand your disappointment in […] and regret any inconvenience caused. (154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Provide explanation/apology for, or justification of issue</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(act of courtesy/respect, appeal/recognition of importance of relationship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This happens for a number of reasons, including passengers cancelling their travel at the last moment or failing to check-in for their flight prior to the closure of the flight for departure. (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not practical to allow access for those passengers who, for one reason or another, are not travelling on a TravelAir marketed flight. (154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This access policy is designed to ensure maximum comfort in the space available for eligible members travelling with [Airlines]. (155)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next to requests for action, complaints or requests for compensation (action) that arise out of a complaint, are the most commonly received letters at the LoyaltyOne service centre. Complimentary letters do arrive, but they are far from common. It seems that consumers take good service for granted, and a good experience is seldom written about, no matter how appreciative the recipient. In general, complaints are also not simply written to advise the company concerned about the experience. They are written because the customer wants to get something out of the company. As such, many letters of complaint are demands for some form of compensation. They are often angry, insulting letters, and they frequently make demands based around threats: ‘I’ll never travel with you again’ or ‘You’ve lost a customer, and I’ll tell my family and friends how you treated me’ and so on.

Despite the at times complex and lengthy creative process involved in responding to a complaint, the generic structure of such a response is usually quite simple. It requires only four interlocking acts, two of which are optional, making up just one move, which is generally placed between the opening Move 1 and a closing move (see 3.7.9). That said, complaints that require the writer to include information about an action, advice about future requests, or a request for further information, can involve other moves. This is somewhat problematic in terms of this presentation of moves and acts as discrete units of purpose, and this complex issue will be further discussed in 3.9 below.

3.7.6.1 Obligatory Act A: Summarise/acknowledge issue, refer to correspondence

This act is obligatory and important, as the writer’s summary often forms a comment or takes a particular angle on the complaint, which may not necessarily agree with the respondent’s claims. The careful wording of a response to a complaint is due to a clash between two competing purposes. On the one hand, the writer is aware of the need to retain customer loyalty and to respond in a placatory manner. On the other, the writer must avoid admitting liability unless warranted. The writer must also avoid calling the member a liar and yet must not concede fault unless that fault can be proved in writing. In an increasingly litigious environment and with watchdog bodies such as the ACCC available to consumers, written responses to complaints can require a
very delicate authoring process, sometimes involving numerous departments (see 2.10.1 for an example).

3.7.6.2 Obligatory Act B: State company policy/rules/understanding of situation

Stating company policy can be a dangerous act in terms of the primary communicative purpose of retaining a relationship with a customer. A statement of policy, or terms, though in one sense an explanation or justification, offers no grace, no recognition, to the reader. It merely states ‘this is the way it is’ which, while it may be a reason in itself why customers do not receive the service they expect, does not explain why the policy is the way it is. Of course, in many cases a policy needs no justification. For example, if a member complains that he did not receive points with a company that is not affiliated with the LoyaltyOne program, no explanation other than the reason itself is necessary. If, however, a member complains because he received fewer points for a transaction than he had done previously, then it would seem inappropriate simply to state the new rules, and an explanation of the change is likely to be required.

3.7.6.3 Optional Act A: Empathise with recipient’s apparent/likely feelings

In the face of a complaint, and aware of the requirement to retain a relationship, writers need to be able to display some empathy with the member. For the writer personally this may go against their actual reaction to a complaint, which they may feel to be arrogant, demanding, insulting, ignorant, threatening or dishonest.

Lexical terms used to refer to the writer’s reactions include: concern, sorry, regret; and to refer to the recipient: disappointment, inconvenience, frustration.

While this act is not obligatory, its use is linked to the perceived severity of the complaint, which is garnered from the writer’s reading of the complaint. The more anger shown, the more justified the complaint, the more likely it is that this act will be used.
3.7.6.4 Optional Act B: Provide explanation/apology for, or justification of issue

As with the previous act, this act is also optional but linked to the severity of the complaint and the nature of the issue involved. The primary intention of this act is one of explanation, although it can be expressed in a way that suggests an apology or a justification. In many ways, this is the most important act and, realistically, it is seldom optional as it softens the often legalistic and impersonal statement of policy and program terms required as a response to many complaints.

3.7.7 Move E: Request response

Table 3.12 Component acts of Move E: Request response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE E – REQUEST RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Request further dialogue with LoyaltyOne Service Centre, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please forward a clear copy of your original itinerary and ticket coupons... (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We ask that you kindly forward the required documentation within fourteen days, together with a copy of this e-mail... (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May we please request you to contact our Service Centre... (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...please confirm if you still wish to have your addresses changed to [country]. (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will need a copy of your marriage certificate... (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Explain/justify request for response, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...so that we may review your claim. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...in order to avoid further delay. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...and update your addresses in our records. (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In view of this information, should you still wish to cancel the above mentioned membership accounts... (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to award points to your account for your [transaction]... (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...before we are able to change your name in our records and issue you with a new card. (33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Optional:**

Offer means of response, e.g.: (act of courtesy)

Your documentation can be forwarded by mail to this office at... (11)

...and fax this to the TravelAir LoyaltyOne Service Centre on [number]. (35)
This is the first of two moves that have as their primary function a request for action on the part of the recipient.

3.7.7.1 **Obligatory Act A: Request further dialogue with **LoyaltyOne** Service Centre

This act specifically asks the recipient to respond back to the service centre, and often to the particular writer requesting the response. Lexically, this act is characterised by words such as: please, ask, request; and verbs such as: confirm, forward, contact.

3.7.7.2 **Obligatory Act B: Explain/justify request for response**

Wherever a request is made for the member to take action, a reason is given. The reason is often in two parts – why the information is being requested, and what action will be taken as a result. These two explanations are not always inseparable, and so can appear as one construction.

3.7.7.3 **Optional Act: Offer means of response**

This act has been marked optional because there are many times when it is not used. Its use is, however, linked to the medium in which the writer is responding. Both fax headers and *LoyaltyOne* header paper contain contact details as part of the paratext, or framing text of business correspondence. Their presence makes this act optional in those media. Email, however, contains very little paratext (that may be controlled by the sender), and so contact details are necessary. Even here, the act is optional, depending on the circumstances.

3.7.8 **Move F: Advise recipient to take action**

This move is also a request for action by the recipient, however it differs from Move E in that the action does not involve contacting the service centre to continue the dialogue begun in the recipient’s first letter. As such, the subjects
that might be covered in this act range across a broad spectrum, from advice to
do with the *LoyaltyOne* program, such as how to ensure that points are credited
automatically, to suggestions on how to achieve various goals involving other
*TravelAir* departments or other companies involved in the travel industry.

**Table 3.13 Component acts of Move F: Advise recipient to take action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE F – ADVISE RECIPIENT TO TAKE ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Advise what action to take</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…may we please request you to contact [TravelAir department]… (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…you are required to contact your booking agent… (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…please ensure that your correct LoyaltyOne number is entered for future bookings. (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please call [TravelAir department]… (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…we recommend that you contact your chosen [destination] in advance… (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Explain/justify advice</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For information on award bookings… (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As detailed in the letter forwarded to you by [program partner]… (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to avoid any further confusion… (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…this office is unable to make or change reservations. (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid disappointment in the future… (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…to check whether it is affiliated. (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Detail how to take action</strong>, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…on [numbers]. (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…on [number] from anywhere in [Country]… (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.7.8.1 Obligatory Act A: Advise what action to take**

Writers are often careful about how they advise a member. Their role of providing a service puts them in a delicate position as they are unable to instruct or command the recipient. Advice about action tends to be tentative, with the writer asking permission of the recipient or making a suggestion:

…may we please request… (2)

…we would always encourage you to… (1425)
Common lexical items: recommend, suggest, request, please.

3.7.8.2 Obligatory Act B: Explain/justify advice

Unlike the other moves where this act is featured, in this move it is obligatory. Again, the advice does not stand on its own, but clarifies the presence of the Act A for the reader as a courtesy, to facilitate an understanding of the request.

3.7.8.3 Optional Act: Detail how to take action

While this act is optional, there are rules for its use. Primarily, as with Move D, this act supplies the recipient with the knowledge necessary to take the suggested action: usually a phone number or other contact details. This information is usually provided if the writer knows it, and so the act is dependant on the nature of the action the recipient needs to take, and how closely it is related to the services of which the service centre is aware. So, for example, if a member needs to get in touch with a third party affiliated with TravelAir, such as credit card companies, the writers have phone numbers to hand. If, however, the recipient needs to contact his own travel agent, the means to do this does not need to be provided.

This act can be a bonus to writers who wish to offer outstanding customer service. There are many instances where a writer, knowing the industry and with the immediate resources of the service centre, will go out of her way to find out information for a customer because the customer has asked, even though the request may have nothing to do with the LoyaltyOne program directly. For example, the service centre does not deal in lost luggage, however the writers do have access to phone listings of all national airports, and a little effort can result in greater service for the customer.
3.7.9 Part 3: The exit: Closing the communication

As well as ‘intros’, LoyaltyOne writers recognise ‘exits’ – methods of drawing a response to a close, often providing specific information unrelated to the subject of the letter, and elements that appear to be traditional rhetorical indicators of an ending in correspondence. There are four moves available here:

- Move I – Recognise value of relationship/communication
- Move II – Invite future contact
- Move III – Promote other company products
- Move IV – Formal close

3.7.10 Move I: Recognise value of relationship/communication

This move is the most explicit response to the primary communicative purpose of recognising and continuing a relationship with the customer. While providing requested information in a courteous and timely manner implies that the relationship is valued, this move foregrounds that relationship, making it the grammatical subject or object, and the rhetorical subject of the text.
Table 3.14 Component acts of Move I: Recognise value of relationship/communication

MOVE I – RECOGNISE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIP/COMMUNICATION

Obligatory:

**Offer appreciation of recipient**, e.g.:

(\textit{act of courtesy/respect/value})

Thank you for your support and patronage of TravelAir and our program partners. (1)

I appreciate the time you have taken to bring these matters to our attention and take this opportunity to thank you and your husband for your continuing and valued support of the TravelAir LoyaltyOne program. (4)

Thank you for taking the time to write to us. (13)

Your past custom and support of TravelAir is greatly appreciated… (42)

Whilst we do very much appreciate your loyalty to TravelAir… (102)

Lastly, we thank you for the feedback concerning our [program partner]… (128)

Optional:

a. **Empathise with recipient’s apparent/likely feelings**, e.g.:

(\textit{act of empathy/understanding})

I sincerely regret your disappointment… (154)

b. **Solicit understanding and continuing support**, e.g.:

(\textit{act seeking understanding; act of respect/value})

…we do hope to continue this relationship with you. (42)

…trust you will understand that we are not in a position to deviate from our program rules. (76)

…but I hope that the information provided has clarified your concerns. (109)

…and trust that your future dealings with TravelAir will be equally as rewarding. (117)

We trust that this explanation, together with the many ongoing benefits available to members of the LoyaltyOne program will allow TravelAir to continue to enjoy your support for many years to come. (155)

### 3.7.10.1 Obligatory Act: Offer appreciation of recipient

Specific lexical signals of value include: verbs – appreciate, thank and value, and those items valued are nouns: time, loyalty, support, patronage, custom and feedback. Sentence construction can be both passive or active voice, though active is preferred, and certainly the agency doing the appreciation would seem to be an appropriate grammatical subject. Where passive is used, it is usually part of a complex sentence which does include active voice, and it is primarily
3.7.10.2 Optional Act A: Empathise with recipient’s apparent/likely feelings

Where this appears, it is often a repeat act, having occurred as part of a response to a complaint. As such, it is intended to reinforce to the recipient that the writer/company understands her feelings and regrets the situation, even as they neither admit liability nor provide a solution or reparation.

3.7.10.3 Optional Act B: Solicit understanding and continuing support

The lexical items associated with the agent in this act indicate a desire for an outcome on the part of the writer: verbs include hope and trust, and clarify. The appeal to the recipient is in the form of lexical items such as: allow, understand, continue.
3.7.11 Move II: Invite future contact

Table 3.15 Component acts of Move II: Invite future contact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE II – INVITE FUTURE CONTACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer future dialogue, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of courtesy/value)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us… (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please feel free to contact our Service Centre… (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should you have any queries regarding the above please do not hesitate to contact our Customer Service centre… (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a prompt response, you can e-mail us… (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Offer methods of future contact, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of courtesy)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…on 12 34 56… (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…at <a href="mailto:loyaltyone@travelair.com">loyaltyone@travelair.com</a>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Advise regarding required information, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of courtesy)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…quoting your membership number. (37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.11.1 Obligatory Act: Offer future dialogue

This move is the most common employed in *LoyaltyOne* correspondence as a means of drawing the response to a close. It carries a high relational commitment – the offer of further dialogue. Generally, it is only absent in complaints, and in second or third responses to the same issue (which tend to become complaints, of course). Other than those occasions where an issue needs to be closed, further dialogue is welcomed and explicitly offered. As such, the writers rely on the thoroughness of their initial answer to prevent a second communication on the same issue, and the offer of further dialogue is intended for future queries, should they arise.

Couched as an offer of further contact, this act frequently attempts to steer the recipient towards the use of a different medium – namely the telephone – implicitly discouraging further correspondence.
3.7.11.2 Optional Act A: Offer methods of future contact

Whether a phone number or email address is actually specified in the text tends to depend on the media being used. It is not really necessary in local and national letters as the headed paper has all standard contact information pre-printed. International phone numbers are supplied, and numbers and addresses are a more relevant feature of emails, where all text is supplied by the writer. Generally, numbers and addresses are added to the end of a sentence in a prepositional phrase.

3.7.11.3 Optional Act B: Advise regarding required information

Occasionally, additional advice will be provided regarding the information a customer should have available when they make contact with the service centre. This is an act of courtesy, intended to facilitate further communication.

3.7.12 Move III: Promote other company products

Table 3.16 Component acts of Move III: Promote other company products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE III – PROMOTE OTHER COMPANY PRODUCTS/SERVICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertise a product, product feature or service, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may be interested to know that you can access your account (security protected) on-line through the TravelAir website… (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain the benefits of the product</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.12.1 Obligatory Act: Advertise a product, product feature or service

This move was fairly new to the LoyaltyOne letter and is further discussed in 4.4.2 and 5.2.6.1. As a form of deliberate advertising, this move does not seem
to fit comfortably into a letter of response. Where the identification of benefits or products appears in the body of the letter, they are usually in response to a question by the respondent, or as the result of a perceived need on the part of the writer. As such, information about benefits and products appears as an act subordinate to other moves, usually as part of an explanation due to the notification of an action or a result.

The promotion of a product feature or benefit does, however, act as an extra and useful piece of information. That is, letters of response do not include the sort of promotion that would require the recipient to spend money – they are not generally intended to be a sales pitch in that sense. Rather, they seek to augment the member’s existing knowledge. At present, about the only feature that is promoted in this way is the TravelAir website. While the member does need to have access to a computer and modem, the service itself is free and available to them as an existing member.

3.7.12.2 Optional Act: Explain the benefits of the product

This optional act does not appear in the original style corpora. Its explanatory function is an intuitive addition to an extent, and is included from experience gained within the LoyaltyOne correspondence department community of practice. It was used on occasion; however its use does not seem regular enough to appear in the custom corpus (which contains letters written over one month). This act does more commonly appear in the new style corpora considered in Chapter 5, and its appearance here may be somewhat anticipatory. As noted above, Move III was a rather uncomfortable response to a recent addition to LoyaltyOne communicative purposes, which had to do primarily with advertising and marketing TravelAir’s presence on the internet (see 4.4.2). This issue will be discussed in some detail in 5.2.6.
3.7.13 Move IV: Formal close

Table 3.17 Component acts of Move IV: Formal close

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVE IV – FORMAL CLOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obligatory:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Complimentary close</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of courtesy; in keeping with tenor of opening)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yours sincerely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Signature, name and position</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(act of courtesy, respect)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The TravelAir LoyaltyOne Service Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TravelAir Relationship Marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.13.1 Obligatory Act A: Complimentary close

There are choices available in this act, although ‘Yours sincerely’ is the only company approved realisation for letters and faxes unless the opening greeting does not include a name, in which case ‘Yours faithfully’ is sometimes used. As such, the formal close follows standard convention. In emails, the somewhat less formal close ‘Regards’ is allowed, as is ‘Kind regards’ and ‘Sincerely.’

3.7.13.2 Obligatory Act B: Signature, name and position

First name and surname are obligatory at the end of the letter, along with a signature and the departmental position of the writer. The provision of the name of the writer is courteous, providing an individual point of contact and personalising the response to an extent. This personalisation has become more noticeable in the email medium, as many other companies end email responses with a team name rather than an individual (British Airways, for example).
In the same way, naming the specific department of which the writer is a representative is a courteous provision of information should further contact be required. This relational aspect of Move IV becomes particularly important following a response to a complaint or escalated issue. In such cases the position and department ratify the authority of the writer, for example ‘Customer Services Manager’ or ‘General Manager’ and so on. This is therefore also an act of respect, as the senior position of the writer suggests that a complaint has been taken seriously and heard at the higher management levels of the company.

3.8 The structure of moves

The analysis above has suggested that there are three parts to the LoyaltyOne business letter and has identified a total of 11 possible moves:

Opening

Move 1: Respond to initiated dialogue (obligatory)

Response (at least one of these moves required)

Move A: Positive Response to request for action

Move B: Negative Response to request for action

Move C: Response to request for information

Move D: Response to complaint

Move E: Request response

Move F: Advise recipient to take action

Closing (Move I and/or II required)

Move I: Recognise value of relationship/communication

Move II: Invite future contact

Move III: Promote other company products

Move IV: Formal close (obligatory)
While it is theoretically possible for all 11 moves to appear in one letter, this is very uncommon. This section identifies the structures most commonly found in *LoyaltyOne* business letters.

Move 1 is obligatory in all letters and always comes first. In general, at least one of Moves A, B, C or D must also be present. Moves E and F do not often occur on their own. Usually, at least one of Moves I, II or III will also be present, and Move IV is obligatory and always comes last. Moves A, B, C, D, E and F can appear together, and can also appear more than once in the same letter.

Perhaps the simplest structure, and one that forms the basis of most *LoyaltyOne* letters, is in response to a request for action:

- **Move 1:** Respond to initiated dialogue
- **Move A or B:** Positive/negative response to request for action
- **Move I:** Recognise value of relationship/communication
- **Move II:** Invite future contact
- **Move IV:** Formal close

Such simple responses were not common in the custom corpus, which was drawn primarily from letters and faxes. With 175 standard letters available, straightforward queries received a pre-written response. The most common request by far was for the crediting of points that had not been credited to a member’s account automatically. These requests were dealt with by the data entry department and members received a standard letter letting them know that their correspondence had arrived and was being processed (standard letter 14) or had been completed (standard letter 6, see Table 3.18 below). Only a small percentage of the thousands of requests received each week contained ineligible transactions requiring a custom response. A high percentage of custom responses were therefore at least partially negative, making Move B the most common response move. As such, most custom letters containing the positive Move A would also have to include one of the other response moves (Moves B – F), in order to be complex enough to require a custom response.
Table 3.18 The structure of moves in standard letter 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Standard Corpus: Letter 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move 1: Respond to initiated dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move A: Respond to request for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II: Invite future contact, in which is included Move III: Promote other company products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move I: Recognise value of relationship/communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move IV: Formal close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.18 shows an example of the basic structure of moves in the LoyaltyOne business letter-of-reply. The inclusion of the realisation of Move III in standard letter 6 was a recent addition, for reasons discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Table 3.19 shows a similar example. In this case, the single response move is Move E, Request response. Most standard letters contained a single response move. Custom letters could be considerably more complex, an issue which is further discussed in the following section.
### Table 3.19 The structure of moves in standard letter 4

| Move I: Respond to initiated dialogue | Dear [field],
| - | Thank you for alerting us to the points discrepancy on your recent LoyaltyOne statement. |
| Move E: Request response | To assist us in considering the discrepancy, we need from you the related documentation in support of your claim. This should be in the form of tickets and *original* [invoices] for any [transactions] in question; a copy of any rental agreement for car hire claims; or the complete hotel account pertaining to any accommodation. |
| - | Once we receive the relevant paperwork we will ensure that all valid points are credited to your membership as quickly as possible. |
| Move II: Invite future contact, in which is included Move III: Promote other company products | If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to write to us again or call us at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre and speak to one of our consultants. You can also reach us by e-mail or, if you wish, access your account (security protected) at the TravelAir website. |
| Move I: Recognise value of relationship/communication | Thank you for your valued support of TravelAir. |
| Move IV: Formal close | Yours sincerely, |
3.9 Moves and complexity: Complaints

I have argued elsewhere (3.3.2) that the differentiation of moves and their associated acts, and the discrete units of communicative action defined by this method, is potentially arbitrary and subjective, and as such, possibly oversimplistic. This seems to be the case even in a short and relatively simple genre such as the business letter. This is demonstrated in part by the difficulty I experienced in formulating moves and their subordinate acts. For example, acts of justification or explanation appear in more than one move. As they appear to represent the same purpose, it is arguably more appropriate to create a single move rather than several subordinate acts. This notion was abandoned due to my realisation that such acts were always subordinate to the primary purposes contained in the moves (as described in 3.7 above). For example, Moves A and B are primarily separate because in A (good news) the act of explanation or justification is entirely optional, whereas in Move B (bad news) it is obligatory.

An alternative method might have been to create a single move for explanations and use a flow-diagram or system network to define when the move was obligatory and when optional. The disadvantage of such a system would be the further complication of the genre method, as moves would become subordinate to each other in certain contexts. This would place some moves on a level with acts, adding confusion to the point where their use as a descriptive tool becomes questionable.

Figure 3.3 presents an analysis of the moves and acts in letter 1425 of the custom letter corpus. This is a fairly long letter by LoyaltyOne standards, primarily due to the number of transactions being queried. The complaints referred to are common and not particularly difficult to answer. While most writers could investigate the issues raised, this reply refers to previous correspondence and the issues have become escalated, requiring a response from a senior employee. Figure 3.4 presents an analysis of letter 603 of the custom letter corpus. This letter also answers an escalated complaint. It can be broken down into four separate issues concerning the same subject – TravelAir ClubOne lounge access, facilities at a specific lounge, and the treatment of the customer, both at the lounge and in subsequent responses to her complaint by the service centre. Letter 1425 is of interest because of the number of different
moves it contains, as well as several repetitions of moves. Letter 603 contains repetitions of one response move, and its realisations are quite complex.

The analysis of letter 1425 shows that moves are often not discrete units following one after another. In the case of a complaint, Move D is always the primary response. Because explanatory acts are, of necessity, contained in more than one response move, an explanation can serve two moves simultaneously. This has happened in the case of Moves D and F at the beginning of letter 1425. After acknowledging the customer’s complaint (Move D, Obl. Act a), the writer immediately provides an answer to the primary issue, which is that the customer’s points have not automatically been credited to her account. The writer states the company understanding of the situation (Move D, Obl. Act b), that points are not always credited automatically, and goes on to explain why this is the case (Move D, Opt. Act b). While not obligatory in the response to a complaint, this act is nevertheless very common, as it is an appeal to the customer’s reason – an attempt to maintain a relationship by addressing a concern.

Having given an explanation in response to the complaint, the writer then provides two methods by which the customer can ensure that she will not lose her points if they are not credited automatically (Move F, Obl. Act a). The explanation given as part of Move D (Opt. Act b) does stand on its own and so does not require the realisations that form part of Move F. As the writer has chosen to provide this advice, however, the explanation as a realisation of Move D, Optional Act b: Provide explanation/apology for, or justification of issue, becomes also a realisation of Move F, Obligatory Act b: Explain/justify advice.
And an adjustment has now been made to your travel of [date].

Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

Thank you for your facsimile of [date] to our General Manager [Name] regarding the tracking of points to your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership account and related issues.

[Name] has asked me to respond on his behalf.

I am concerned by some of your comments and am disappointed that you didn’t feel that you received the assistance you expected from the Service Centre.

In response to your general concern, regrettably, there will certainly be instances where the crediting of program partner points is not always automatic.

With many partners and varying systems in place and despite the best of intentions, the autotracking process for some hotel groups especially is still being fine-tuned. Furthermore, with a number of hotels the transactions are forwarded to a central point for processing. It is not unusual for these to take up to six or eight weeks to come through.

Consequently, we would always encourage you to hold onto your documentation until the points have appeared on your account or, alternatively, if you are anxious for the points to be credited, simply forward the invoices to us for action or referral as needed.

On the issue of your travel with [Partner], as explained previously, the crediting of points for flights undertaken with our partner airlines differs from that of flights with TravelAir, in that claims for points must be supported by original boarding passes and copies of flight ticket coupons.

Among other things, this is because the class of travel featured on the boarding pass does not always reflect the fare type purchased.

At any case, in this instance I have referred the three outstanding sectors to [Partner], and your account will be credited with the relevant points upon confirmation of your claim. This process can take two or three weeks so we thank you for your patience in this matter.

I am happy to advise that your account has now been credited with points for your [flight details and dates] travel.

A summary of these points, as well as your [car hire], will appear on a forthcoming statement and, as usual, can be viewed on-line on the TravelAir website www.loyaltyone.com.

Finally, I wish to confirm that your [flight details] travel on [date] tracked automatically as did your [flight details and date] (as per our facsimile of [date]).

And an adjustment has now been made to your travel of [date].

Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

Incidentally, Mr Name’s two flight of last month have been credited to his account.

We appreciate your taking the time to write to us and trust that all the issues you raised have now been resolved to your satisfaction.

If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to write to us again or call us at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre and speak to one of our consultants.

Thank you for your support and patronage of TravelAir and our program partners.

Figure 3.3 Moves, acts and realisations in custom letter 1425
Thank you for your correspondence of [date] to [Name], Marketing Coordinator, Customer Loyalty Programs, regarding the TravelAir ClubOne [facility] at [City]. I am responding on [Name]'s behalf.

I was concerned to read your correspondence and regret your unhappiness with the response you received from [Name]. I would like to re-visit the areas of concerns to you and clarify the information you were given during your phone conversation with [Name].

The TravelAir ClubOne access guidelines require members to present their membership card with a boarding pass for onward TravelAir travel that day to access TravelAir ClubOne facilities. When travelling with a TravelAir ClubOne partner airline, a boarding pass for same-day onward travel with the airline in question must be shown, along with the member's TravelAir ClubOne card, to access their [facilities].

I am sorry if you were not aware of this previously, however the program conditions are detailed in the TravelAir ClubOne [Benefits Guidebook], a copy of which you would have received when you joined TravelAir ClubOne.

While local TravelAir ClubOne [facility] managers do have a certain flexibility in granting access, they are obliged to ensure that sufficient room is available [...] for those TravelAir ClubOne members, [level 1 and 2 LoyaltyOne members], and other qualifying [partner] members who are travelling on TravelAir services that day. Accordingly, there may be occasions when your request for [facility] access outside of the published guidelines cannot be accommodated.

I deeply regret if this policy causes you distress. However, I would seek your understanding as someone who has purchased a ClubOne membership for the very reasons, and benefits, that we wish to maintain.

The [City facility] was refurbished in [date]. As a result of the refurbishment, seating capacity has been increased from 28 to 45, two work stations have been added [...] and there are now separate male and female toilets. A small meeting room, separated from the main [facility] by a glass petition, has also been created. This renovation brought the level of facilities offered at the [City] lounge into line with the standard of TravelAir ClubOne [facilities] in major [cities] within [Country]. However, the menu in the TravelAir ClubOne [facility] at [City] is not the same as [other facilities], primarily due to the significantly lower number of passengers who use the facility. TravelAir is reassessing the catering at both the [City and City] facilities this month and I will ensure your feedback is included in the review.

I am sorry if you were upset by the manner in which you were treated by one of our staff at the [City facility]. At TravelAir, we are committed to providing a high standard of service in every interaction we have with our customers. We have an expectation that all of our customers, especially our loyal TravelAir ClubOne and Frequent Flyer members, will be treated by our staff with the utmost courtesy and respect at all times.

It is disappointing that you did not find this to be the case at [City] and I have forwarded your feedback on this issue to the Regional General Manager [State] for his information.

Mrs [Name], thank you for taking the time to contact us. I hope the information provided has clarified your concerns. If you have any further inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact the TravelAir ClubOne and Frequent Flyer Service Centre on 12 34 56 or visit our web site at www.travelair.com

Figure 3.4 Moves, acts and realisations in custom letter 603
Arguably, Move F appears as an act of sorts, embedded within the primary purpose of Move D. Move F is still a purposeful move in itself, however, and its realisation is similar to that of a Move F standard paragraph commonly in use at the time:

In order to ensure the automatic crediting of points, it is necessary to quote your name, exactly as it appears on your membership card, together with your membership number when making your reservation, and further to present your membership card at check-in. It is advisable, however, to retain all travel documentation until the points are detailed on your activity statement (e.g. letters 65, 115, 164, 230).

3.9.1 *LoyaltyOne* complaints and communicative purpose

Chapter 1, section 1.3.2 provides an introduction to the notion of communicative purpose and some problematic issues that have arisen in its use. Askehave and Swales argue that ‘purposes, goals, or public outcomes are more evasive, multiple, layered, and complex than originally envisaged’ (2001: 197). Determining such purposes based on textual analysis alone would therefore seem problematic, and in section 2.8.3, an explanation of the purposes of the *LoyaltyOne* business correspondence is given, based on research carried out with the writers and management of *TravelAir* and PSP.

At the same time readers do not always have access to the complex negotiations that result in the production of a finished text. Arguably, therefore, a genre can be recognised at different levels, and the knowledge a writer brings to the framing and composition of a specific example of a generic text is quite different from the contextual awareness a reader needs to decode its meaning.

The work of Lewin et al. (2001), which is cited as an example in 1.3.2, raises the possibility of two levels of communicative purpose. The social, taken-for-granted level is the genre itself, which is described by its label (Social Science Research texts). This macro level is identified by Lewin et al. ‘because it
encapsulates most of the structures we have come to expect from that genre’ (2001: 37). Such a level may easily be identified by readers and writers.

Given this assumed definition of the genre, the moves and acts within it are then defined by communicative purpose, based on the textual content of the academic journals used as source material. In much the same way, business letters can easily be identified by their adherence to traditional elements (Dear, Yours sincerely), by paratextual elements (business letterhead) and by their basic semantic participants. Business letters are commonly from a business to a customer and they tend to feature an expected register and style, based on the field of business and the type of relationship the business has with its customers. Given such a definition as a starting point, it should be possible to derive the communicative purposes of the genre from a corpus of letters, and then to construct appropriate moves and acts.

This method may well be able to show the public goals of the text and the means by which those purposes have been accomplished. What it cannot do, however, is shed light on the situational context in which the writer works, and in which the public goals may be debated, filtered, altered, and challenged. It is a contention of this thesis that the realisations of the public purposes are written the way they are in part due to other situational purposes. These communicative purposes are seldom visible in the text but they nevertheless play a vital role in defining its final realisation – and therefore authentic versions of such letters cannot be reproduced unless the writer is a practicing member of the community which generates these purposes.

For example, amongst senior writers in LoyaltyOne there is a certain amount of what may be described as jaded cynicism. These writers spend their working hours writing answers to complaints, week after week. They deal with a lot of anger, a lot of abuse, and a lot of requests for compensation. Some of these requests are justified, however many cases are little more than threatening and blatant attempts to get something for nothing. Many are caused by misunderstanding or ignorance of the terms and conditions of the LoyaltyOne or ClubOne programs. In most cases, the complaint plays on how much the member has been inconvenienced and how badly they were treated, ending with a request for compensation and a threat that the member will move their
custom to a different company and tell all their friends and colleagues to do the same.

While it can be assumed that the complainant expects an apology and compensation, and believes this approach to be a reasonable means of attaining that goal, the reaction of the LoyaltyOne writers is far from compliant. The writers in turn get angry with the abusive tone and threatening demands of the letter, and in retaliation their response, though diplomatic, is often calculated to be very formal, legalistic and obtuse.

In such cases, the covert purpose of the response is to answer the complaint in such a way that the member has no comeback; to answer everything in as detailed and complete a manner as possible, often using obscure technical explanations – particularly when the writer does not have a readily valid justification of the situation. As such, it is possible to add to the primary, official, socially acceptable communicative purposes another underlying purpose, which is at odds to the primary purpose of customer loyalty retention. LoyaltyOne writers would probably sum up this purpose as ‘getting rid of the troublemaker.’ In other words, whining and threatening letters, particularly those without a justified complaint, are often answered in a way consciously intended to ‘put the recipient in his or her place,’ and for this reason, the writers rely on their authority and on deliberately verbose, long-winded prose. To paraphrase my own response to some of these letters, I felt that my reply was diplomatic (maintaining the pretence of service): yet without actually being rude or condescending, I could sum up my letters as politely telling the recipient to ‘get lost.’

This kind of response to a complaint sought to end the dialogue and, to the community, the most obvious demonstration of this intent was the deliberate absence of Move II, invite future contact, a move which, under most circumstances, is an obligatory part of LoyaltyOne replies.
3.10 Tying the textual to the social

3.10.1 Beyond bodytext: Genre, media and paratext

…it is important to be able to format letters correctly on the page and to use salutations and complimentary closes correctly. […] educated readers often judge writers on the basis of their knowledge of forms and layout (McKeown, 1987: 74).

Many of the elements comprising LoyaltyOne business correspondence provide vital background information. These basic elements are shared by many business letters, and are often taken-for-granted but purposeful requirements that contribute towards a general perception of business letters that goes beyond any one COP or business institution. The notion of paratext (Genette, 1997) is an uncomfortable one in genre studies. The elements that constitute paratext do not constitute the text itself and so they are simply ignored in most discussions of genre, and particularly in textual analyses. Yet, as noted by Genette (and see 1.5 above), paratexts mediate between the text and the reader – they surround the text, frame it and present it. As such, they are capable of playing a role in the communicative purposes of a genre that extend or complement the purposes presented in the text itself. It is also the case that paratext mediates between the practices of the writing community and practices of other communities affected by the use of various media. In this way, paratextual elements can occur as boundary elements between different practices.

For example, LoyaltyOne standard letters are machine folded and enveloped by a contracted company. The envelopes used have a clear window at bottom left, in which the address written on the letter must be displayed. The letters are then sorted for distribution by the postal service using automatic scanning devices that read elements of the address. This use of technology demands fixed parameters in the LoyaltyOne business letter layout. The width of the left margin, the position of the address, its lack of punctuation, as well as the number of lines it may take, are all defined by the built in capabilities of the
automatic devices used. To an extent, font size and style are also restricted by the pre-design of envelopes and the use of A4 size paper.

These restrictions are encoded in the correspondence department style guidelines. Whether the writers know the reason for them or not, they form part of the writers’ local genre knowledge and are required, even though custom-written letters are folded and enveloped manually by the writers.

Other paratextual elements provided by the writer include a date and a reference number, both required as part of the legal and storage requirements of the company.

Pre-printed paratextual elements can be equally important to the nature of a genre. For example, the TravelAir creative brief upon which the advertising/marketing agency based their style and tone re-write makes it quite clear that:

The objective of the standard letters is to acknowledge and respond to the problem or query raised by the member, and to promote additional aspects, products or services of the TravelAir ClubOne or LoyaltyOne programs.

The marketing agency’s response to the need for ‘onselling other membership benefits’ reflected both the primary communicative purpose of the service centre and the importance of paratextual elements:

…we certainly don’t want to annoy your customers by overtly selling to them when all they require is a simple response. We’ve achieved this by creating the […] panel down the right hand side of the letters.

That is, in order to fulfil TravelAir’s requirements for the LoyaltyOne correspondence communicative purposes, the agency revised both the text and the surrounding paratext.

The notion of paratext blurs the edges of what a genre is perceived to be in some interesting ways. For example, if you receive an envelope with a company logo on it and open it to find an A4 piece of paper containing a logo, you expect a letter; you expect to see certain formalities and a certain
formatting style. Deviating very far from those expectations becomes a violation of custom. The reader is already conditioned to expect certain things. Opening a letter to find a page of this thesis on the paper, for example, simply would not make sense. Opening the letter to find the right content printed in landscape format (i.e. turning the writing on this page by 90 degrees) would also violate expectations. Both the content and context, or framing, make the letter what it is. In considering a change to their letters, the TravelAir executives considered the whole letter, not just the text.

From the perspective of the reader and the owner of a genre, then, it would seem that a genre can feasibly be more than the body text. At the same time, a writer does not need to be at all creative in this area. Once formatting is decided upon, it tends to stabilise for some time. In this case, as an example, the formatting of paragraphs and the general layout of the letter (date, address and so on) did not change. The changes made to what was printed on the headed paper also had little effect on the writers. When it comes to writing, to creatively putting answers to queries and complaints in a textual form, formatting is secondary.

It cannot be ignored however, and issues surrounding the different media can highlight this problematic area. Excepting a few differences in formatting, the writers did not treat facsimiles differently from letters sent by post. When letters were first sent by email they were hardly different from those posted; the formatting was almost the same (even to reference numbers and dates in the body of the email message, a redundancy that shows an initial adherence to recognised form). Emails were not seen to be as formal or legally authoritative as letters and faxes however, primarily because there was no signature and no apparent means of establishing either their authenticity or whether they had actually been received. As with faxes, emails contained a legal disclaimer, which was automatically added on sending, beneath Move IV.

There was a gradual increase in the use of email as a medium, and then recognition of its value by the company, followed by a sudden explosion in volume, as advertising, competitions and internet sites were used to promote the medium and the speed of response. Most noticeable to the writers was the difference in the content and style of the letters they received in this medium. The body text displayed virtually no formatting, as the necessary information
was included in the memo design of email software, which provides lines for
to, from, cc, bcc and subject, as well as displaying the date sent and received.

Perhaps because of the perceived speed of email (which seems to differ from
the perceived speed of the fax machine), or because of the context in which an
email is written, most emails were short and informal. Whether the speed of
e-mail makes it more likely to mirror speech patterns, or whether the
convenience allows people to simply dash off a quick question and hit send,
then move on to something else, it was clear that the questions asked through
this medium were simpler. There were fewer questions asked per email, but a
marked increase in pointless queries; the kind that could have been answered
by the members themselves if they had taken a few minutes to check the FAQ
(Frequently Asked Questions) sheet on the website, or even just read their
brochure or the site a bit more closely.

3.10.2 Standard versus custom letter writing: Blurring the
categories

For descriptive purposes standard letters and custom letters have been
separated into two categories, the former defined as a letter created to answer a
common question asked by many, the latter created by an individual writer in
response to a more clearly individual query. There are a number of social,
technical, and textual parameters in modern letter writing that present problems
for such a simple categorisation.

At LoyaltyOne, incoming correspondence is read by the Coding team (see
2.3.2), who batch it by media and by a number of fairly simple categories to
avoid too much repeat handling of queries. In this way, many of the more
common issues are caught before they get to the letter writers, and a standard is
issued, thus cutting down on the writers’ workload. At the time of this
research, the volume of emails being received per week was growing steadily
and there was no automated means of issuing standards using this medium.

As such, it was possible for members of the writing teams, and particularly the
Email team, to receive correspondence that could be answered using a
standard. Individual writers could then choose to ‘close a sequence’
(LoyaltyOne jargon) by requesting an automatic standard, in the same way that the Coding team would. They could also ‘cut and paste’ (word-processing phrase) the contents of a standard into an email with their own name at the bottom, and send it out in the same manner as a custom letter. As previously discussed, writers also had access to pre-written paragraphs that ranged from a single sentence to most of the body of a letter. In the course of writing about the same issues week by week, all writers had developed, to a greater or lesser extent, a personal repertoire of phrases, sentences and paragraphs that they would use time and again. Such repetition brings into question the aptness of the custom letter category. The individuality of a custom response can be further questioned on the basis that many paragraphs had become common property and had been revised on numerous occasions by different writers, and that individuals would often borrow each other’s work, photocopy it and file it for reference if they liked the particular way a certain query had been dealt with.

In contrast, the standard letter, as a category, is perceived to be a very impersonal form of communication. The general assumption is that a standard letter contains a set, generalised text that can be sent to many people. While this can indeed be the case and, to a large extent, provides an accurate description of LoyaltyOne standard letters, current technology renders this understanding of the category as a whole quite obsolete.

Direct Mail companies have the capacity to send out millions of letters to households on behalf of client companies. With the advent of computer technology and the digital storage of complex databases, standard letters have the capacity to be more personal than an individually written letter, and yet be printed and sent using an entirely automated system. For example, a bank statement contains a high degree of individual, personal information, unique to an individual, and yet bank statements are sent out in print runs numbering thousands. As another example, Mann and Thompson (1992) edited a book in which a fund-raising text was analysed. This text conforms to the popular notion of a standard letter in that it was sent out to a large number of people and there are no personal markers at all (even the salutation line would have been the same for each recipient: ‘Dear Friend of ZPG’). Modern fund-raising texts, however, can be tailored in a number of ways. As the text of the letter is
created digitally, various versions of each paragraph can be created to relate to specific demographic information contained in a company’s database. The use of ‘fields’ allows certain parameters to be established within the text that, when printed, contain the information specified in a given field in the database. So, for example, a standard letter can contain the name of the recipient, and paragraph two of the letter can be altered if the recipient has given previously, and further altered depending on the amount s/he has given. Even the pamphlets sent with a letter can be tailored in the same way, so that each leaflet is only sent if certain criteria are met. In such circumstances, ensuring a thorough analysis of a standard letter would be possible only if the different paragraphs and their corresponding database demographics were considered.

At the LoyaltyOne service centre, however, the custom letter label refers to the responsibility of the individual writer whose name and signature appear below the letter they have written, whether the text was typed or pasted, borrowed, re-created or copied.

### 3.11 Summary: A lexically stable genre

Whatever the social construction of the genre may indicate (see Chapter 2), the textual content and style of the LoyaltyOne business letter-of-reply is highly stable. The structure, format and lexis of the letters are built on an intertextual foundation of hundreds of thousands of previous letters. The nature of the genre – primarily single page letters covering issues related to one aspect of a large travel company – is shown in the high repetition of key words and phrases, many of which have become standard wording, institutionalised by repetition.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a textual analysis of the original LoyaltyOne correspondence using the genre analysis methodology described by Swales (1990) and modified by Lewin et al. (2001). A number of issues have been raised:
1. The work of Dias et al. (1999) suggests that genre studies does not require a genre-specific method of textual analysis. They argue that writing is situated, and a consideration of social action is therefore the most appropriate means of determining the nature of a genre. As such, it would appear that any form of textual analysis may be suitable.

2. Lewin et al. (2001) attempt to clarify specific criteria by which realisations of moves and acts may be recognised, thus providing a more rigorous methodology. However, their use of communicative purpose to determine the nature and extent of moves and acts, and to label them, appears to be subjective, does not follow a given method, and is based on their corpus alone.

3. There appears to be no definitive method of determining communicative purpose, and the notion of communicative purpose tends to favour the provision of information. As such, registerial issues seem to be implicit in many genre studies. This study uses social methodology to define communicative purposes. From Chapter 2, the primary communicative purposes of LoyaltyOne correspondence are the provision of service and loyalty retention. These purposes have a high relational component not usually considered in the naming of moves and acts. The genre analysis presented here attempts to include relational issues in its consideration of moves and acts.

4. Paratextual genre elements are problematic, as they appear to sit outside most genre analyses, including this one, and yet they play a role in the framing and recognition of a genre, and they do appear to be part of genre knowledge. This suggests that genre analyses privilege authorial role and the teaching of body text creation over the genre knowledge of readers and owners, for whom the wider context beyond the body text may make an important contribution to genre perception.

Chapter 5 uses the genre analysis provided in this chapter to compare and contrast the letters produced by the LoyaltyOne writers after the style change was introduced. Chapter 4 considers the change from a social perspective, following on from the practices and community described in Chapter 2.
Part 2

Language change and community response:

Genre theory and the practice of change
4 Negotiating change: Practice and perspectives

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the ramifications of intentional linguistic change as it affected the constellation of practice comprising the social structure of the LoyaltyOne Service Centre. Specifically, the areas considered here include the ways in which the managers and employees of the Service Centre perceived the change, and the strategies used to manage it. Wenger’s (1998) framework of Communities of Practice (COP) is the primary theoretical position by which learning and identity, as they were affected by the change, are considered.

This chapter also raises issues surrounding the direct and crucial participation of the researcher, as an experienced member of the COP, in facilitating the textual changes of outgoing LoyaltyOne correspondence, while at the same time observing and reporting for this research. The nature of the linguistic changes as perceived by the COP, the owners and authors of those changes, and the issues arising from a consideration of the mechanisms of change are also discussed below. A comparative analysis of the textual changes will be presented in Chapter 5.
4.2 Methodology, observation and participation

To date, very little work on genre in rhetorical studies has been informed by actual case research with *insiders*. Instead, there has long been a tendency among genre scholars to reify genres, to see them as linguistic abstractions, and to understate their “changeable, flexible and plastic” nature (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 2, citing Bakhtin, 1986: 80).

To the extent that genre studies is concerned with the social use of language, text and theories centred on text or discourse tend to take centre stage. For example, the ‘procedural goals and questions’ raised by Dias et al. in researching writing in academic and workplace contexts ‘addressed a number of key issues’ that revolved quite explicitly around the production and use of writing:

…the kinds of writing produced; how writing tasks originate; how writing is generated and proceeds; the place writing occupies in that setting […]; the relationship between written and spoken transactions; constraints on writing; the place and effect of deadlines and document guidelines; […] how writing is responded to and evaluated… (1999: 11)

Dias et al. make use of various ethnographic research methods (1999: 13), however the authority of their observations is taken for granted, as is the objective presentation of their material, which potentially may hide the subjective evaluations and authorial worldview of the researchers themselves. This, of course, is not uncommon in research literature, where generally the thoughts and ideological opinions and judgements of the authors are minimised through the impersonal generic style of academic reporting (see e.g. Gilbert and Mulkay 1984, in Swales, 1990: 123). In sociolinguistics, the subject matter is often specifically discourse and text analysis, rather than the ‘study of people in naturally occurring settings…’ (Brewer, 2000: 6), to the extent that some textbooks find it convenient to split the discipline into macro and micro, social
and linguistic perspectives (Coulmas, 1997: 2, Fasold, 1990: F51). This thesis too shows the same kind of distinction, presenting social perspectives in this chapter and Chapter 2, and textual analyses in chapters 3 and 5. The distinction is convenient, but genre studies is potentially narrowed by a failure to consider the social perspective except through a textual or discoursal lens, and this is one reason that Wenger’s COP is preferred over the particular, text-based notion of discourse community.

Another reason was my position as an employee and full member of the LoyaltyOne service centre correspondence department. With reference to the quotation from Berkenkotter and Huckin above, I can claim to have done research from the perspective of, and myself been in the position of, a ‘native’ or ‘insider’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 5). While this position provided a source of insight and understanding into the practices and ideologies of the community, the use of autoethnographic method and voice require some definition and critical consideration.

Ethnographic research methods have been in use in anthropological observations since the early 19th century. More recently, ethnographic methods have been used in a variety of fields, including cultural studies, literary theory, folklore, women’s studies, sociology, cultural geography, and social psychology (Tedlock, 2003: 166). In their editorial introduction to ‘Strategies of qualitative enquiry,’ Denzin and Lincoln argue that ‘There have never been so many paradigms, strategies of inquiry, or methods of analysis for researchers to draw upon and utilize’ (2003: 29).

The primary social perspective of this research is that of Wenger’s (1998) Communities of Practice (COP). As discussed in section 1.4.2, COP is primarily about ‘what groups of people do’ (Dias et al., 1999: 29, King, 2005). As such, COP takes a wider perspective than the notion of discourse communities, and provides a framework in which to discuss the ways a business community produces and experiences its activities and ideologies. COP’s roots are in the psychological field of situated learning, however Wenger argues that his notion of learning is constituted by four interconnected elements – meaning, practice, community and identity – and that, including learning, these five elements are mutually defining (1998: 5). The conceptual framework thus outlined appears to have a broader reach than Wenger’s
presentation of it as primarily a social theory of *learning* (see also: Stehlik and Carden, 2005, Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003, Wenger et al., 2002).

Wenger’s example COP is a claims processing office with many similarities to the *LoyaltyOne* service centre. Wenger only rarely touches upon his fieldwork, as his main concern is to explicate a theoretical position. However, his use of ethnographic methodology provides a useful point of departure from which to discuss the relationship of COP to qualitative research and the issues raised by the methodology of the current study.

Denzin and Lincoln note that a variety of terms, concepts and assumptions are associated with the idea of qualitative research, including ‘traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives and/or methods, connected to cultural and interpretive studies...’ (2003: 3). The framework and foundational philosophy of the theoretical positions underlying this study, including COP, structuration theory, activity theory and genre theory overlap in certain fundamental ways. For example, the clear rejection of numerous traditional dichotomies is apparent: acting and knowing, manual and mental, concrete and abstract, text and context, individual and society, subject and object. In place of dichotomy, the notion of duality is introduced, as

> ...a single conceptual unit that is formed by two inseparable and mutually constitutive elements whose inherent tension and complementarity give the concept richness and dynamism (Wenger, 1998: 66).

The concept of duality has the potential to transcend the particular problems caused by viewing notions such as observer and participant, or objective and subjective research, as opposites, as mutually exclusive, or as the use of one dispensing with the need for the other. Instead, they are viewed as interactive elements that cannot be discussed separately, but rather have the potential to provide meaning through a consideration of their interaction (Wenger, 1998: 67). In much the same way, Giddens’ notion of the duality of structure argues that structure both ‘enters into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and exists in the generating moments of this constitution.’ (1979: 5 and see
1.4.3). Murray glosses the perspective of symbolic interactionism in similar terms:

…the social world is composed of individuals continuously creating and recreating meaning through interaction. Social structure, social organisations, and indeed social stratification, are all structures-in-process upheld through interaction (2003: 380).

Structures make sense of social situations and allow a community of practice such as the LoyaltyOne service centre to exist from day to day as an organisation with recognised goals and expectations. Yet, as both Giddens and Murray suggest, structure is both imposed on and created by individuals as they seek meaning through interaction with others.

Following Blumer (1969), Murray goes on to state that:

To ‘discover’ how social life is possible within any given… organisation… the sociologist must become a part of that complex web of social interactions. Through systematic observation and careful analytic reflection, the sociologist – as both objective social scientist and subjective participant – is able to re-present the social world under study (2003: 380).

The controversies present in discussions on qualitative research have centred on the rejection of positivist notions of objective reality, which has led to numerous views both on how to observe social interactions and on how to represent the various worldviews of the researchers and the objects of their research (see e.g. Reed-Danahay, 1997, Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004, Emerson et al., 2001, Brewer, 2000). Two key questions on field work raised by Murray asked: ‘(1) How did I negotiate my multiple identities in the field, and [after Goffman (1959)] (2) What am I really, ‘a spy, a shill, a go-between’ or a sociologist?’ (2003: 377). Murray’s second question follows Goffman and uses colloquial terms to represent ways in which she may be perceived by the people she studies, ways which will
inevitably affect what they are willing to tell her and the way in which they do so.

These questions, then, require researchers to consider their own and others’ perceptions of their role in employment and in research. Indeed, such perceptions and a consideration of roles and social ‘power’ were a primary subject of the ethics application necessary for this study. For example, my own position as an employee in the correspondence department meant that the conditions of my own employment would be affected by the changes to be introduced in letter-writing. My perceptions were bound to be coloured by the emotional reactions of my colleagues. My position was then further complicated when I was asked by management to oversee the style-change project, which put me in a position of authority, and required me, as a new condition of my employment, to ensure that the project was successful. As I intended to observe and research the project, I found a certain conflict of interest with my employment, which required me actively to work towards a successful outcome in a way which undoubtedly changed the events I wished to observe.

Reed-Danahay comments on the complexity of authenticity and representation, remarking on ‘the multiple, shifting identities which characterize our lives’ and suggesting that ‘Double identity and insider/outsider are constructs too simplistic for an adequate understanding of the processes of representation and power’ (1997: 4). Motzafi-Haller goes further, wishing to ‘challenge the canonized genre of “objective” depictions of social reality [by] collapsing the categories of native and non-native, subject and object, researcher and subject of study…’ (1997: 219). By recognising the complexity of relationships and the impossible task of separating researcher and subject, I was able to view my own position as a remarkable opportunity to consider change and theories of social interaction, as well as viewing the dynamic context within which a genre was created and recreated time after time.

Questions of authenticity and representation can usefully be considered in COP terms, as Wenger provides a number of contexts within which the complexities of identity and participation can be considered. One area of discussion is that of the researcher’s status within the COPs he or she seeks to study. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), which
Wenger (1998) has incorporated in his extended treatment of COP, offers a means to resolve the simplistic dualism of insider/outsider.

Is the researcher a legitimate, accepted part of the community under consideration? While a researcher may be able to talk to insiders about their work, or perhaps move among them as an observer in some manner, she or he may not be in a position to become an insider, to understand the job requirements, stresses and achievements of the study site from the perspective of being an experienced, full member of the COP. At best, it may be that a researcher can be an ‘unconventional’ participant in the community he or she observes (Wenger, 1998: xv).

An interesting question raised by the notion of a researcher participating as an outsider of sorts in a COP, is what does it mean to be legitimate, within the framework of COP? Lave and Wenger prefer to maintain a certain looseness within their definition. They argue that ‘there may very well be no such thing as an “illegitimate peripheral participant”’ (1991: 35), and go on to state that ‘legitimate peripherality is a complex notion, implicated in social structures involving relations of power’, and:

The ambiguous potentialities of legitimate peripherality reflect the concept’s pivotal role in providing access to a nexus of relations otherwise not perceived as connected (1991: 36).

Thus a researcher, a manager or staff members whose work overlaps with that of a particular COP will be given access to that COP at various levels. Their legitimacy may stem from their parallel employment within the business, from previous membership of the COP, because the COP recognises their authority over aspects of their practice, or even because of a perception that they are harmless – unable adversely to affect the core practice of full participants.

Their presence will be woven into the fabric of the community in ways often beyond their control, as the members of the community find ways to understand their presence and incorporate it as needed into their everyday practice. Such legitimacy does not necessarily imply positive acceptance of course. Managers, for example, may receive a cold, unfriendly reception, as
staff cooperate in a way that quite clearly indicates they are doing so because they must.

The notion of LPP is a valuable means by which to consider interaction and membership in a COP, however it stems from research into situated learning as engagement in practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and does not, on its own, provide a means to discuss peripheral participants who are not there to learn the practice of a COP, or who are there to understand it, but not to take part in it. To engage with the relations of COP members to those who are not intending to fully participate in their practice, but are nevertheless on the periphery of their community, Wenger provides a further concept, boundary. He comments briefly on his own experience:

I was allowed to enter the community of practice of claims processors with an openness that at times felt like full participation, but every so often elements of boundary would creep in to remind me that I was an outsider: an expression I could not understand, a mistrusting look from the supervisor, a reference to a past event, someone’s panicking concern about production quotas (to which I was not subjected), or even a claims processor’s sigh of relief at five o’clock when I knew that I still had to go to my office and type up my notes (1998: 120).

Wenger’s comments are as much tied in with his identity, and therefore his personal perception of boundary, as with any intent on the part of the claims processors themselves. As such, both the notion of boundary and that of legitimate peripheral participation appear to offer a framework within which to discuss issues of participation and the current autoethnographic concern with voice and representation.

The notions of identity, boundary and participation, and the concept of duality as discussed above, appear to provide a depth of insight not available using the simplistic insider/outside dichotomy. It can perhaps also be said to move beyond the inadequate dualism observer/participant, and the subjective/objective dichotomy. This area, as it relates to the researcher’s identity and participation in this research, will be further discussed in 4.3 below.
4.2.1 Autoethnography and communities of practice

...autoethnographers “possess the qualities of often permanent self-identification with a group and full internal membership, as recognized both by themselves and the people of whom they are a part” (Hayano 1979: 100, in Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Concerned as it is with identity and meaning, as much as with the processes of learning, COP as a framework can provide insight into the nature of belonging and experiencing. Further, its strength lies in its rejection of the dichotomy of individual and society, as the primary unit of analysis is the COP itself, a group of people gathered together to take part in various activities. As such, an individual and his or her identity and experience of meaning is situated within the dynamics of a group, however the COP framework is able to recognise that individuals are members of many different COPs, and their identities and individuality are related to the complexity of their current and historic participation within these many and diverse groups.

Critical theoretical discussion of autoethnography is also concerned primarily with identity and meaning, with particular emphasis on the self-conscious researcher. The nature of the voice and authenticity of the researcher (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 3) also brings into focus, in common with much current critical thinking in qualitative research, the moral and ethical dilemmas surrounding the making of observations from a position of trust and acceptance with the intention of reporting those observations to an external audience (Murray, 2003).

Although only implicit in Wenger’s work, the notion of a community as a unit of analysis lends itself to the postpositivist recognition that the researcher cannot be entirely objective, and therefore should provide some indication of his or her background, worldview, and position in relation to those he or she studies. This translates, in COP terms, to a need for the researcher to consider the nature of his or her own participation, legitimate, peripheral or full, and of the boundaries, practices and identity he or she assumed, both within the community and as part of the research undertaken.
4.3 Participation and research: Personal perspectives

There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 31).

What was my identity during that time? When did I see myself as an objective researcher, and when as a fellow employee? How objective can my view be, given that, as a fully legitimate participant, a colleague in the workplace before I ever thought of being a researcher, my position of reference was directly linked to my identity as a writer/employee within the community? The benefit is obvious – I had an insider’s view, a grasp of the working conditions and skills, the knowledge, the likes and dislikes of the community that are far more complete, rich and complex than short-term peripheral researchers could ever hope to achieve for themselves. I had over four years experience as an employee, two of those full time. Equally, however, the difficulties are obvious. I internalised a great deal of the knowledge and skills needed – they were no longer easily available to me in any objective sense. My view of the workplace was so entrenched within my identity as an employee in a particular department that my impartiality may be impaired in ways of which I am not entirely aware. I have to acknowledge that my views and my understanding were just as affected by my insider status as an ‘outsider’ must be affected by his or her primary identity as a researcher.

That said, I was a member of other COPs, large and small, and my identity was not tied up entirely with my employment. I found that I could immerse myself in my role, my identity as an employee, Goffman’s ‘front stage’ performance, when I was doing my job. I could also be reflexive, moving to the ‘back stage’ performance of taking a metaphorical step back and considering what I was doing and how I was doing it, analysing it or writing about it. Once I made the decision to take on another identity – that of researcher – that identity required me to move into that ‘backstage’ reflexivity in a way perhaps more defined and formal than would otherwise have been the case. For example, it was quite common for co-workers to reflect on many aspects of their job as those aspects became consciously apparent. The decision by TravelAir management to
change the writing style is an obvious case in point for it made writers conscious of the texts they used and wrote in ways many of them would not usually have considered. Just as the changing situation focussed the employees’ attention on otherwise tacit, operationalised practices, my identity as a researcher required me to observe what went on around me in a manner entirely different from that of my identity as an employee.

This also raises the issue of my voice and identity as it is presented within this thesis. My use of third person in much of my writing, my attempt to step back and present an ‘objective’ view to unknown experts in my field, the necessity of presenting a first-hand, subjective experience in textual form, which requires me to choose what I will relate and what I won’t, what is relevant and what is not… all these things suggest that in the process of creating this work I have called on life experiences, knowledge and identities unique to me, to my temperament and understanding.

As Murray expresses it, following Stacey and Thorne (1985), ‘Paying close (and systematic) attention to the researcher’s own social location is […] an essential component of the ethnographic process’ (2003: 380). By ‘social location’ Murray means a consideration of race, class, sexuality and gender. And these issues are likely to have an impact. So, briefly, I am a white (English) male in my early thirties with a university education. The Australian workplace included first generation immigrants like myself, both European and Asian. There were other generations, including a large number of Italians and Greeks, many of whom were bilingual, there were more women than men, and ages ranged from early twenties to late fifties, though the average seemed to be mid twenties to early thirties.

My previous workplace experience is perhaps unusually varied and includes a structural engineering firm (around 15 people), a small architectural company (2 to 4 people), and a home for 19 learning disabled adults from 18 years to over 70 years of age, which was shift-work. I’ve driven heavy trucks around London as an agency driver, worked for a removal company with ex-convicts, and a catering company ‘airside’ at an airport. Such a background is going to affect my view of the LoyaltyOne workplace, which is an ‘office job’ entirely unlike anything else I’ve experienced.
CHAPTER FOUR

In COP, learning, meaning and identity intertwine and affect each other in complex ways. While this brief personal example may seem, at first sight, a tangent having little to do with a change in writing style, it is relevant for illuminating the reactions to that change of the LoyaltyOne community, as knowledge of what is and what is not an issue within the community can provide an insight into the nature of the community and the social pressures and cultures that inform, and are informed by, its social structures. My biographical details also serve as a context wherein I can be placed as a researcher and participant observer, at least to the extent that I am able to describe my own involvement in the writing style change, and to suggest the unique perspectives from which I made my observations.

4.3.1 A brief personal history of my work at LoyaltyOne

I received my BA (Hons) in English Language and Linguistics in 1998, from Roehampton Institute London. In early 1999 I immigrated to Australia, where my initial status as a temporary resident on a nine month visa made finding full time employment quite a challenge. With no immediate means of pursuing my academic interests available, I accepted a position in the correspondence department of the LoyaltyOne service centre. I became a legitimate peripheral participant (LPP) in the eighth floor constellation of practice, and specifically in the correspondence department’s COP.

I worked in team A for several months, learning the job and gradually becoming an ‘old hand,’ an experienced, full participant in the practice of the team A COP, and a recognised, legitimate member of the wider eighth floor community of correspondence teams. The team leader of team C then invited me to apply for a position in that team, and I moved to the fifth floor, broadening my knowledge of the LoyaltyOne program and the different software and writing requirements in team C. During this time I also did relief work in team D, dealing with sensitive and complicated complaints.
CHAPTER FOUR

Figure 4.1 Boundaries and legitimate peripherality, team A

The diagram in Figure 4.1 gives a simple, pictorial view of my experience of community while working in team A. In COP terms, I was accepted into the particular community of team A because my legitimacy stemmed from my position as a new employee. I was a peripheral participant because of my initial ignorance of the LoyaltyOne program and the practices of the community. My LPP position in team A afforded me the same status in the larger community or constellation of practices, of which there were several. The writing teams on the eighth floor made up one identifiable group, consisting of three separate but closely related COPs. Another group included everyone who worked on the eighth floor, as the differing practices of the administration teams still came under the umbrella of the correspondence department. The departmental umbrella also included team C on the fifth floor, although the physical separation did have the effect of diffusing the team C writers’ affinities with their eighth floor colleagues.

My primary label in the correspondence department constellation was that of a writer in team A. As such, my writing ability reflected well on that team. In this case at least, the notion of movement from the periphery to the centre, to full participation in team A’s practice, is appropriate. As Wenger has noted, boundaries between COPs do not always align with the business boundaries defined by names such as ‘team’ (Wenger et al., 2002: 41). In terms of knowledge of the LoyaltyOne program, and associated practice, each team
dealt with a different level of LoyaltyOne membership, and so the team boundaries were well defined. In terms of the practice of writing, however, and the overlap of general program knowledge shared by all the writing staff, the community of writers on the eighth floor could more properly be considered a single COP. Within this group too, I moved from the peripheral, accepted position of a new employee to that of a respected, skilled writer. As such, the diagram above shows me (PW) within the limits of the team A COP, however the arrows to teams B and D indicate the growing relationships and recognition taking place beyond that COP’s boundaries. In practice, I was both beginning to find writers in the other teams whom I respected and to whom I could go when I had queries and questions that could not be answered by colleagues in team A. At the same time, I was beginning to find that some writers within teams B and D as well as in team A were approaching me to discuss writing issues, such as style and grammar, or how best to tell a member bad news. This movement between team COPs was also dictated in part by personality, as there were some people in teams B and D who were simply friendlier and easier for me to approach than some in my own team A.

Of course, I must also recognise here that my movement from the periphery towards full participation included my learning to participate in, and accept, the practice of the community. I remember being surprised by the formality of the writing style, which I rather disliked. It was weeks before I could write fifteen letters in a day, partly because every letter seemed to have a different query, the answer to which I did not know, and partly because I did not know how to phrase my reply ‘correctly’ – within the company style. By participating in the COP practice I learned to accept the writing style expected of me, to the extent that I began to think in it while writing at work, and to write quickly and well.

Through my relationship with members of team D, I came to the notice of team C’s team leader, who made it quite clear that he wanted me to move to team C. This happened some six months into my employment with PSP. I had settled into a routine by then: I was a full participant in team A and the eighth floor COPs, I knew what was expected of me and could achieve it, and I was familiar with the people around me, their attitudes towards me and towards their work. Moving to team C on the fifth floor meant that once again I found myself on the periphery of a COP, as a new member of the team. My
legitimacy this time stemmed from my status as a skilled employee and, as such, my experience of peripheral participation was quite different from the experience of a new employee.

It can here be shown that the notion of LPP is far from being a one way movement from novice to expert, as suggested by Engeström (see also 1.4.2):

The theory of legitimate peripheral participation depicts learning and development primarily as a one-way movement from the periphery, occupied by novices, to the centre, inhabited by experienced masters of the given practice. What seems to be missing is movement outward and in unexpected directions… (Engeström et al., 1999: 12).

In this instance, LPP is a useful tool with which to draw out the problematic notion of the ‘experienced master’, and the differences between what may be termed the ‘social practice’ of people working alongside each other and the ‘employment practice’ of the work people have gathered together to do. The correspondence department writing teams could be considered a single COP, rather than a constellation, as the latter would have to include the administration teams. In all cases, members of the writing teams had significant areas of practice in common, including the computer software they used, their general knowledge of the LoyaltyOne program and of the business letter style and company administration procedures.

As noted above however, each writing team was responsible for different areas of the LoyaltyOne program and, in the case of team C, a different medium (email). The social groupings created by the company use of ‘teams,’ with the team members’ physical proximity and the leadership in each (excepting team D) of a team leader, created a practice within each team of significant enough difference that it can be argued that each ‘team’ was a COP in its own right (see 2.7). It was this difference – partly social, partly work practice – that made my experience of LPP when I moved teams quite different from that of my initial employment within the company.

A rather different example of this same issue can be provided from my view of another member of team A. This employee had been with the company for
some time and had worked in the call centre before joining team A. Her knowledge of the *LoyaltyOne* program was considerable, she was able to use all the software and other tools provided to employees. She was also popular socially within the company. She appeared to me to be a full participant until the team A team leader went on holiday and asked me to check this employee’s letters before they were sent out. I was a relative newcomer in comparison, however my skill in the general writing role of proofreader/grammariam (the only role requiring little local content knowledge, see 2.6) was already widely in demand. I discovered that although she knew what to tell correspondents, she seemed unable to phrase her answers within the style required by the company, or with an appropriate sentence structure. That is, in all other areas of the team A COP practice, this employee was an ‘experienced master,’ and yet her apparent failure to learn the necessary writing skills through participation in the COP practice over many months meant that she was still treated as a novice – in the writing role of supervised author – in an important area of her employment.

The point here is that LPP and COP do not assume homogeneity within a community and its practices. Rather, LPP can be a tool by which to consider subtle levels of legitimacy and of participation as much as the movement across boundaries, which can involve rather more than the over-simplified assumption that ‘peripheral’ necessarily denotes ‘outsider’ in some way.

Thus, my move to team C was the move of an experienced, knowledgeable employee to another part of what was effectively the same COP. My primary job description did not change, I had not moved to a different role (such as team leader), or to a different department (such as administration or finance). I had an added software program to master, and questions on aspects of the *LoyaltyOne* program to which I had not been exposed before. The minimum daily requirement of 15 files changed to 21 due to the nature of the email medium, which tended toward simpler queries, and did not include the invoices common to letters and faxes.

I had to work alongside a team of people most of whom were new to me, at a different desk on a different floor. There were many adjustments to make on a social level, however I already had the knowledge – the jargon, the stories, tools, and genres, the perspectives and views (Wenger, 1998: 186) – that
identified me as a member of the larger departmental COP, resulting in a quite different negotiation of identities and meanings compared with my initial participation within team A.

4.3.2 Coach and researcher: A fully legitimate, ‘peripheral’ role

I convinced management that the style change would necessitate a coach (see sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3). I was also given permission to carry out academic research. Subsequently, I was moved from my position in team C to a newly created role outside the team structure, overseeing the style change and related issues such as the movement to new word-processing software and partial automation of some writing practices using macros (a form of programming).

The notion of LPP does not precisely capture the nature of this move. Wenger notes that he and Jean Lave, in their book on LPP (Lave and Wenger, 1991), use the term ‘to characterize the process by which newcomers become included in a community of practice’ (1998: 100). In my work for teams A, C and D, I experienced various levels of legitimacy and peripherality. In each case, my goal was to become a full member of each community, with a master’s knowledge of the practice and full participation in it. As a coach (Beaufort, 2000 and see 2.6) and researcher, I was no longer part of the core practice of any of the correspondence department COPs. My practice and my interactions within the community changed significantly.

I was nominally a member of team D and I shared the same senior status as the three other members of that team. That is, I had the same program authority levels as a team leader (e.g. the computer database would allow a team member to backdate a membership by 30 days but no more, nor could they backdate transactions very far. I had almost unlimited discretion in these areas). However, the majority of my role was new and, as such, I was not part of the common practice of any team.

I was also not considered to be part of management, so I lacked legitimacy and access to most management practices and knowledge. I experienced a marked peripherality here that made some aspects of my new role difficult to achieve.
and created a certain amount of tension, particularly when I needed to make decisions for which I did not officially have authority.

As far as the writers were concerned, my legitimacy as a coach stemmed from my previous roles as a writer in three of the five correspondence teams, and the relationships I had fostered with members in all five teams during that time. I was accepted as an ambassador of the new style primarily because I was an insider. I had done the same job as the writers, my colleagues: made the same mistakes, complained about the same issues. I shared their perspective. No one could suggest that I did not know the job, the pressures and demands of the writers’ day to day work. In some cases, I was also accepted because of my perceived expertise, my approach to my role and, I gather, although this is much harder for me to verify in any objective sense, because of my personality.

In terms of LPP, my acceptance stemmed from my previous positions as a fully legitimate practitioner within the community. I moved to a role that was, in one sense, peripheral to the core practices of the COP, in that I was no longer regularly investigating customer queries and writing letters of reply. At the same time, my new role directly and significantly affected the core practice of the community – I was to introduce changes to the words and phrases the writers customarily used in their letters. As such, community acceptance of my role was highly significant, as it implied acceptance of the style change itself.

This acceptance can also be discussed through the COP terms of identification and negotiability, and Wenger’s three ‘modes of belonging’ – engagement, imagination and alignment (1998: 173-213). As acceptance was crucial to the success of the style change, this area will be further discussed in sections 4.4.3 and 4.4.5 below.
4.4 Changing style, changing perspective: Authority, acceptance and alignment

4.4.1 Placing the style change into perspective: One change among many

The changes in the LoyaltyOne business letter writing style, and the reaction of the affected communities, form the focus of this research. The style change did not happen in an otherwise stable, settled social environment however, and the reactions of individuals, teams and communities may better be understood when placed within the context of other events and changes that took place before, during and after the particular events of interest here.

What follows is a brief diary of change and rumours of change, which helped shape concerns and attitudes amongst the correspondence department community from almost a year before the style change to six months after. The diary is based primarily on global company- and personal emails received by the researcher. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to place the particular changes that are of interest in this research into the wider perspective available to the LoyaltyOne community.

The intention of this diary is to provide the reader with an appreciation of that wider perspective, as both the timing of the events narrated below and the events themselves had a significant impact on the manner in which the LoyaltyOne community perceived, and reacted to, the change in writing style.

April

Three advertising/marketing agencies had tendered for the work of re-writing the LoyaltyOne standard letters and the successful company had produced letters based on their interpretation of the TravelAir creative brief. Prior to this point, most writers had not seen the new letters, which were being discussed at
management and team leader level, however the majority were aware that a change was to be forthcoming. Meetings were held for the writers during this month by a manager of the advertising agency, who presented examples of the new style alongside the original letters. This was the first time the rumours of a change in writing style were formally acknowledged, and the writers informed that they would be asked to write in the new style. It was not until April the following year, however, that the change finally took place.

July

Following an advertising promotion encouraging LoyaltyOne members to provide their email addresses, the first TravelAir Email Direct Marketing (EDM) communication was sent out to 500,000 members worldwide. Many members of team C felt that such communication was similar to spam (unsolicited email), and that the service centre would receive many complaints and requests to be taken off the mailing list. The amount of incoming emails in the week immediately following the EDM email numbered over 5,000 and resulted in a great deal of consternation, primarily within team C, over how to handle an increase in volume of approximately 500%.

August

Very high backlogs in email responses led to an increase in overtime for all correspondence staff. Changes were being made to the DOS-based database to cover legal issues around EDM communications (see 2.10.1) as TravelAir intended to send such communications as often as once a month, to members in different demographic areas. As EDM communications included special offers of various descriptions, staff had to be aware of new sets of terms and conditions, and deadlines, on an increasingly regular basis.

October

I changed roles from team C consultant to being responsible for ensuring a smooth transition to the new style and tone.
November

Meetings were held regarding the style changes and the presentation of a new system incorporating standard paragraphs and letter formatting within Microsoft’s *Word* word-processing software, which would run on the new computer system rumoured to be in the pipeline. This rumour had been ongoing for some months and the date for the installation of the new systems was constantly being put back. This in turn extended the timeline for the introduction of the new style, and it was decided at this point that the new style would have to be introduced in the old (but then current) Lotus AmiPro word-processing format, then running on Microsoft Windows 3.11.

December

PSP’s General Manager held ‘staff talks re-enforcing [PSP’s] commitment to retaining staff in our changing environment’ (PSP global staff email). These talks also heralded senior management’s intent to change the management structure and the company name. There was concern among PSP employees in general due to an ignorance of what these management changes might mean for them.

January

The correspondence department manager of four years resigned, which surprised and upset many staff.

February

The acting team leader for team B (a member of team D) sent this email out to all correspondence teams:

I was under the impression that all correspondence was now written in first person, and thought this directive had been communicated to everyone. However, it has come to my attention that you mainly still write in third person.

All [team D] letters have been written in First person for a couple of years and the 'new style' is in First person, so I thought that those of you who want to make your letters a little more personal, if not warm & fuzzy, might like to consider changing, particularly for emails.
Obviously you will need to be careful to alter any macros [standard paragraphs] you use, but as you are going to have to change anyway, you may as well start practising now.

*TravelAir* introduced a new *LoyaltyOne* website with its own, separate address (URL). All standard letters and paragraphs had to be updated to reflect the new address. The *LoyaltyOne* program was due to be relaunched in March and the changes to the program meant some significant changes to the commands and pages of the *LoyaltyOne* membership database. This caused severe problems during February as the database tended to become unavailable, making much of the work of the correspondence and phones departments impossible, as members’ details could not be retrieved.

*March*

*TravelAir* relaunched the *LoyaltyOne* program with significant changes to the program terms and conditions. Relaunch training sessions were held for all staff. PSP officially changed its name at the end of the month. Computer system crashes were becoming increasingly regular, causing issues around staff productivity, particularly in team C, where extra software was required to handle email correspondence, which placed a severe strain on the out-of-date Windows 3.11 networked system.

*April*

PSP’s General Manager held staff talks outlining the organisational restructure, which was to involve the dissolution of the correspondence and phones departments as separate entities in order to create new departments catering to specific levels of *LoyaltyOne* program members, based on the program relaunch.

*The writing style change took place*, with staff attending workshops, after which they were expected to write in the new style. Comprehensive standard paragraphs were provided, based on the re-written standard letters.

*May*
The consistent rise in email correspondence necessitated changes to the workflow procedures of the administration teams and team C. At this time staff in team C were experiencing 15 or more system crashes (requiring them to switch their computers off and re-boot) every day.

August

New computer systems utilising Windows 2000 and new hardware were finally introduced, and staff were trained on the new word processing software (Microsoft Word 97). At the same time, the new departments were physically created, with staff moving to different floors to take up positions in newly created teams.

As the above is intended to show, the staff employed in the LoyaltyOne Service Centre, and particularly in the correspondence department, had to cope with an unprecedented amount of change in their working environment, much of which either took place or was discussed with them over a period of just two months (March and April). While changes in the LoyaltyOne program had taken place previously, the relaunch made sweeping reforms, rendering obsolete the staff ‘local’ knowledge about many of the primary conditions of the program and, in many cases, the typed commands they used to access their primary database. The relaunch went public in March, however many of the major changes were not due to come into force until September, in order to give the public six months notice. During that time, service centre staff had to be aware of both the old and the new rules. PSP introduced other initiatives during this time which also had a marked impact on staff, such as workplace training for Certificates I - IV of call centre communications, and new procedures designed to allow PSP to meet ISO 9001 requirements for quality control. An Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) was also negotiated during this time, and other regular events such as staff appraisals were also being redesigned.

In this context the style change was just another change event amongst other, equally important and affective events. Much of the work required of the staff in order for them to identify with the changes and incorporate them into their practice occurred over time and with very little direct coaching or official attempts at justification. This was at least in part caused by a dilution of the
perceived impact of the change due to the events and changes listed above. Staff perceptions and *alignment* with the required textual changes are further discussed in section 4.4.5 below.

### 4.4.2 Management perspectives

I should state here that I was an employee of PSP and not myself a member of the management team. As such, the view I present here is my understanding of the management perspective, based on my observations, informal interviews, field notes and various in-house documents.

The new style came about primarily due to the vision of one man who had recently joined *TravelAir’s* Relationship Marketing Department as ‘Manager Membership Services.’ This title meant that John (all names are pseudonyms), who was in his early thirties, was responsible for *TravelAir’s* relationship with PSP, the contractor managing the *LoyaltyOne* service centre (see 2.3). John had gained an MBA and worked in a related travel industry area before joining *TravelAir*. Under his management the *LoyaltyOne* program was considerably restructured and ‘relaunched’ to the public, and the new letter writing style was developed. The background for the style change, in the words of John’s ‘Creative Brief’ was his feeling that:

> The general correspondence style adopted to date has been formal, with a leaning toward verbosity. Additionally, little consideration as to the communication and promotion of the TravelAir masterbrand and the ClubOne and LoyaltyOne sub brands has been given.

The changes would affect two significant areas for John. The first involved ‘the personality and tone of the communication,’ which was to match *TravelAir’s* ‘master brand image, encapsulated by the following ideas: genuine, natural, engaging, confident, resourceful, and youthful.’ The second area was concerned with marketing: the ‘onselling of other membership benefits/services’ such as the internet websites and *ClubOne* membership.
The *TravelAir* master brand image had already been developed by a marketing company. The objective of the ‘Masterbrand blueprint’ was to create ‘a consistent brand around the world.’ This consistency included the use of a single logo and ‘tag line’ (see 5.2.6.2), one at least of which appears on all *TravelAir* merchandise, in advertising campaigns, on billboards, through sponsorship deals and on the letterhead at the *LoyaltyOne* service centre. The brand ‘positioning statement’ captured the primary marketing themes the image was meant to convey: ‘Only *TravelAir* offers world class service and products in the global travel market with a distinctive and contemporary style […]’. There were also words and phrases meant to capture the ‘emotional benefits’ the customer should receive from their ‘experience of the brand’ and ‘brand values’ such as ‘safe, reliable, service orientated and professional.’ These various adjectives and images, goals and priorities, were to be considered by the marketing company chosen to rewrite the *LoyaltyOne* standard letters and paragraphs.

At the same time, *LoyaltyOne* service centre letters were seen as a vehicle for promoting other areas of the same loyalty program. That is, the ‘Manager Membership Services’ recognised that the primary purposes of the *LoyaltyOne* letters were, in his words:

- Addressing of the issue of inquiry/complaint
- Recognition of the member and their custom

He also felt, however, that ‘a focus on using the letter as not only a response piece but also a communication and sales tool must be developed.’ This was specifically intended ‘to promote additional aspects, products or services of the *TravelAir ClubOne* or *LoyaltyOne* programs.’ While it would be inappropriate to advertise other, entirely separate, *TravelAir* services and merchandise in *LoyaltyOne* response letters, promoting areas of the loyalty programs themselves to members who may otherwise have remained ignorant of them was considered a valuable objective. This was particularly relevant at the time of the style change, as global internet and email usage was rising rapidly, and the *LoyaltyOne* website presented an opportunity for alternate means of 24 hour automated service provision, along with the possibility of cutting down
the costs associated with service centre contact, regular paper statements, and so on.

The initial assumption of John and PSPs General Manager, Steve, was that the correspondence department writers would be able to adapt to the new style without any issues. This confidence had two sources: the correspondence manager spoke very highly of her department and the quality and ability of the writers, and; the managers seldom visited ‘the front-line’ and understood the writing job only in the broadest terms. The managers believed that the writers could write and therefore did not need to learn any new skills, so therefore training that involved writing skills was unnecessary. Training was perceived, accurately enough, to be time-consuming and therefore expensive.

The young correspondence manager, Sara, and her team leaders were concerned. Their initial reaction to the proposed change was strongly negative. They immediately disliked the new style and tone. Of course, the advertising agency had re-written standard letters without understanding much of the content, so there were some contextual mistakes, which allowed for some ridicule. Nevertheless, it was clear that the new style would be accepted, and the department leaders felt that some kind of training would be required. Their major difficulty was that they were unable to voice exactly why training was required, or what it would involve. Suggesting to John and Steve that the writers would have problems adapting to the new style was problematic because it appeared to question the writers’ ability, and Sara could think of no viable way to dissociate skill level from training needs.

As an employee and writer myself, I was aware of the proposed change to the writing style. I had heard the complaints that ‘this isn’t a business letter’ and my interest was piqued. I considered the project worth investigating and I approached Sara with my request to carry out research.
4.4.3 Genre and identification, contestation and alignment

…the very process [shared practice] that pulls the community together also creates an economy of meaning by generating something to negotiate; the focus of identification becomes the very object whose meaning is contested (Wenger, 1998: 209).

In the quotation above, Wenger suggests that the very thing which brings a group together in a practice is often the source of most contention because it is the primary object of identification, and its meaning is continually negotiated.

This appears to be the case with the business letter genre in the LoyaltyOne COP. Within the correspondence department, which already, by its name, suggests an area of identity and alignment, as well as practice, the business letter is the core focus of the employees. As such, the department COP must negotiate its meaning of the genre, must identify with it, and must have ownership of that meaning. Practice and reification revolve around the negotiation of meaning in this context, cause it and are caused by it.

Part of the issue surrounding the negotiation of meaning and the ownership of a local business letter genre can be defined using Wenger’s notion of the dual nature of power (1998: 207). For Wenger, power ‘has a dual structure that reflects the interplay between identification and negotiability.’ Wenger’s example is simple:

Among claims processors, being a “nice” person is a point of identification, but who can define what being nice means in specific circumstances? To say “You are not being very nice today” is a matter of appropriating the notion of niceness, and using identification with that notion in order to convince someone to change behavior (1998: 208).

One primary focus of identification in the LoyaltyOne correspondence department is the business letter genre, but who defines the meaning of the label ‘business letter,’ and who is in a position to say ‘that letter is not very
good’? On what criteria might such a statement be based? The answer is revealing.

Within the COP, all the writers at times take on this role. They are all capable of ‘appropriating the notion’ of the LoyaltyOne business letter, and when they do so the outcome usually involves negotiation and a possible learning experience. This kind of identification and ownership is closely related to the community’s often tacit recognition of text hierarchies and writing roles (Beaufort, 2000). The more important a text is seen to be by members of the COP, the greater the perceived difficulty of the rhetorical task, even if, to an outsider, the text seems no different from other similar LoyaltyOne letters.

To an extent, then, the content and style of the LoyaltyOne business letter is constantly being re-negotiated amongst the writers. Quite to what extent it may be possible to argue that the genre is fixed, however, is difficult to define. Content and style are always under contention as part of the practice and reification within the community. These areas are often remarkably tacit: many writers would not be able to define the elements of a good business letter other than in broad generalisations. Commonly, contention is concerned with detail – the wording of a given paragraph, for example. And this contention is necessarily based within a pre-existing framework provided by the huge volume of previous letters, by experienced writers and by the various generalisations that can inevitably be made from the consistently similar queries and perceived social actions required on a daily basis over many years.

There is potential for inertia to take hold in a large company or among a large community group. The weight of a certain style and method, a given practice, gains momentum and becomes ‘the way it is done.’ It is not necessarily seen as ‘the best way’ or ‘the only way,’ but simply as ‘the way’ – ‘this is how we do things here, it works for us, don’t disturb our rhythm.’ To a degree, this comfortable inertia can confound newcomers and leave them no space from which to suggest change. In many cases, LoyaltyOne writers would placidly agree that there were elements of their business letters which were overly verbose and formal, wordy, technical or obtuse. But that agreement would generally only be amongst those on the edges of the community who were trusted or those who directly participated in the practice, and would come with a shrug. ‘It’s not our responsibility. We do it the way we have to.’ Many
writers, used to handling complaints day in, day out, took a cynical pleasure in the likely reaction of the recipient of their convoluted prose.

The complacency and inertia surrounding the business letter style and the practice of the community is far from being the whole picture, of course. The more experienced writers would tinker with their standard paragraphs and create revisions, or noticeably different wording. The writers with less ability would regularly misuse paragraphs, place them in letters out of context or in such a way as to render them ambiguous and incomplete. The twin work requirements of quality and quantity also form a duality of sorts. They are constantly in tension and the requirements of achieving both in practice leave little room for reflection and innovation during the process.

The mostly-stable complacency produced through constant negotiation within a local community over time may be contrasted with the reaction of the community when an outside source sought to make changes.

Ownership of meaning is both diffuse and concentrated. The label ‘business letter’ certainly encompasses a wider generic type, as it is associated with correspondence produced by thousands of companies, world-wide. The writers at LoyaltyOne know they are part of the wider travel and loyalty industries and they can imagine other offices where similar practices occur. They encounter business letters from other fields in their lives outside work. The writers can also potentially use some general aspects of their local knowledge in external situations. One of my colleagues claimed she was very good at writing successful complaint letters, and she attributed this to her experience handling complaints at LoyaltyOne.

Wenger’s use of imagination and alignment are relevant here. Wenger suggests that ‘the economy of meaning of a community of practice is primarily based on engagement’ (1998: 202). The daily negotiation of meaning, practice and reification at LoyaltyOne seems to bear this out, and it is this engagement that keeps a local genre flexible and dynamic within apparently rigid parameters.

The nature of the changes to the business letter introduced by TravelAir went beyond engagement, as the meaning of the language change was not locally defined. That is, the change was not in content, which was highly localised knowledge and very much a focus of engagement. Rather, the change affected
‘style and tone,’ and to make sense of the meaning of the change, to appropriate that meaning in a way that allowed them to take ownership, the writers initially relied on negotiation through imagination and alignment (Wenger, 1998: 203-206). This negotiation involved all parties appropriating various meanings of ‘business letter’ based on knowledge and experience gained both inside and outside the LoyaltyOne constellation of practice.

As such, the daily practice of the writers was entirely unaffected by the announcement of change – engagement and negotiation at the level of regular practice continued as usual. However, the writers began to reflect on the meaning of ‘business letter’ in a way that was usually unnecessary in their daily practice. There were arguments over levels of formality and respect, the nature of the business relationship, professionalism, the difference between a student on holiday and a business traveller in higher management. Imagination, previous experience and schooling, and current alignments clashed as writers and managers argued their position.

The style change served as a vehicle for TravelAir and its chosen advertising agency to appropriate the ownership of the COP’s business letter. That is, in terms of economy of meaning, the meanings of ‘style’ and ‘business letter’ came into focus as another community (the advertising/marketing company asked to re-write the letters), with a different meaning for these terms, encroached on the correspondence COP’s long-term ownership and focus.

TravelAir had the authority to enforce alignment, but the importance to the COP of the object they wished to modify, as a source of identification, raised the possibility of fierce conflict. Whatever the means by which the changes were to be made, negotiation of meaning would be inevitable. The writers, to retain their jobs, would have to comply, and in so doing, would re-create their ownership through their continuing practice. While the COP would not necessarily be required to adopt the meanings the advertising agency assigned to the business letter genre, the meanings they created would be vital for their ability to understand what they were doing, so to incorporate the changes into their practice.

By understanding here, I do not refer to issues of grammar so much as to an ownership of the meaning intended by the style of the text (as opposed to its
content). And it was this sort of meaning that was initially contested when writers appropriated the term ‘business letter’ and identified with it in order to attempt to negotiate their position. Specifically, there was a chorus of ‘this isn’t a business letter!’ from aggrieved writers and this appropriation of meaning required explanations (and thus, negotiation). Even if the new style itself was not changed as a result of this attempt at negotiation, it allowed the writers to enter into ownership by relating to the understanding with which they were presented as a result of their concern. This then allowed writers to align themselves with the new position, which many did with a display of reluctance: ‘I don’t like it or agree with it, but I see what is required and why, and it’s what I’m paid to do, isn’t it?’

The power structure of identification and negotiation was not initially acknowledged by management, and it took a demonstration of possible consequences for them to be made aware of it and to actively plan around it. I was not aware of the role I was playing at the time in these terms, of course. I simply presented a document to PSP management outlining what they were asking writers to do, what I thought it entailed, and what would happen if writers were not provided with a set of tools to replace the ones they were about to lose. My primary concern had more to do with practice, reification and intertextuality. I suggested that the writers would no longer have catalogues of earlier letters and paragraphs to draw on, both in terms of paper and computer filed documents, and in terms of their memories, and the communal knowledge they drew on in their everyday practice and associations with each other. My argument for the consequences of this lack, however, was concerned precisely with the question of negotiation and identity. I argued that writers would be uncertain of the appropriate words to use and would constantly be asking each other, in essence seeking to form some sort of consensus and forge a new sense of ownership and practice within the COP. Such a process would, I suggested, result in a significant drop in the productivity of the correspondence department, and management concern about KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) led to my assignment as project coordinator, charged with ensuring that the style change went smoothly, with little or no drop in performance.
4.4.4 Change and writing role

In terms of writing role, the style change suggested that Beaufort’s separation of genre and rhetorical knowledge is somewhat arbitrary, and difficult to maintain in a practical situation. Changing the style of *LoyaltyOne* correspondence impacted upon three areas of the context-specific knowledge necessary for writers to complete the requirements of their employment, as shown by the areas marked in bold in Figure 4.2 below (and see 2.6). Discourse community knowledge refers to an insider’s understanding of the functions of a genre (Beaufort, 2000: 205).

![Figure 4.2 Context-specific knowledge affected by the style change](image)
In this case, the re-appropriation of ownership of the correspondence genre by TravelAir and the changes made by an external advertising company put the writers in the position of no longer having expert insider knowledge of community expectations of the genre. In particular, I am using ‘discourse community knowledge’ to refer to the expertise and ownership held by a group. Group knowledge is maintained in numerous ways, including shared cognition and a history of previous practice, here most notably established and reified through intertextuality and repetition – the literally thousands of letters written by the community over time.

The style change specifically impacted upon rhetorical knowledge and for the writers, this was conflated with their understanding of genre. Knowledge of a genre includes knowing what to say, how to say it, and, arguably, why it is said that way. The writers knew their subject, so ‘what to say’ was not an issue, in terms of knowledge. However, when the writers learnt what to say, as new employees, they learnt how they were expected to say it at the same time, such that ‘what’ and ‘how’ were inseparable. The style change potentially would reduce writers to the novice role of supervised author, as this role did not assume local rhetorical knowledge. The major issue lay in the fact that all writers, from recent employees who could author simple text to those who could coach and invent, would find themselves in the same position – no longer knowing how to express what they wanted to say – and with no expert to guide them.

I should point out here that many writers were skilled and innovative and, given their related local knowledge, would have been able to coach themselves in the style change, given some time and access to examples, which were provided in the form of the rewritten standard letters and paragraphs. Indeed, this was the path I took, and I became proficient in the new style by the simple expedient of writing in it. I did so as author/inventor and decision-maker: using a slightly different style was no more difficult than writing new text about new subject matter. As I suggested in Chapter 2, however, most writers had operationalised much of their writing (see 2.9), and generally, only those who wrote higher status text had the time or the need to invent. Some of these writers too were concerned. One had had no previous writing experience before being employed at LoyaltyOne and she had worked hard to attain her
position in team D. She had been writing in the same style for about 5 years, and her ability to invent as an author was based on her knowledge of previous texts and a supply of locally common words and phrases, which she was able to manipulate with some skill. With the abrupt disappearance of many of these formal phrases, she was concerned that she would have nothing with which to replace them, and so would be unable to write an acceptable high status text. This writer can be compared to another member of team D who had also been with the company for some time, and was one of the original inventors of the phrases used by the writer above. His general writing knowledge and skill was much higher, as was his confidence, and he had no qualms about adapting to the new style (regardless of what he personally thought of it).

I suggested in 2.6 that, at LoyaltyOne at least, the nature of the writing task required rhetorical and genre knowledge in order for writers successfully to take on the roles of editor and proofreader. I conflated the role of proofreader and grammarian because the responsibility for content was communal practice. That is, while the role of grammarian requires no context-specific knowledge, no writer at LoyaltyOne would undertake that role without also proofreading at the very least, and probably also editing. Requests for such roles to be undertaken only came when writers were unsure of their text, and that almost always meant that a writer had struggled with issues of content and of writing original material where he or she had little previous text on which to rely. These roles, therefore, would potentially be just as affected by the style change as those of author and inventor, and perhaps more so.

Again, I should say that these comments are not intended to undermine the general ability or skill of the LoyaltyOne writers. Rather, they highlight how repetitive practice and local knowledge can be effective constraints, providing for stability and a confidence that is linked to accepted practice. Perception is a key here, and the perceptions of a COP are related to identity and meaning, to confidence and common, comfortable local knowledge.
4.4.5 Facilitating change

In terms of writing role then, the community needed a coach. Necessarily, as suggested by the notion of writing role, the coach needed to be an insider, or oldtimer. He or she needed to share the community and subject knowledge of the rest of the correspondence COP and be fully aware of the processes involved in producing the text. To be successful, the coach needed to be an authority acceptable to the writers: a recognised decision-maker, author and inventor.

In terms of practice and reification, the community needed a replacement ‘history.’ That is, they needed a catalogue of text to replace the huge repository of previous correspondence that would no longer be available to them. In terms of identity, negotiation and modes of belonging, particularly alignment and imagination, the COP needed to identify with and regain ownership of the business letter, as the primary focus of their practice. These issues are further considered below.

As a coach, responsible for the successful introduction of the style change, my initial role involved encouraging alignment. Wenger argues that:

Alignment requires the ability to coordinate perspectives and actions in order to direct energies to a common purpose. The challenge of alignment is to connect local efforts to broader styles and discourses in ways that allow learners to invest their energy in them. […]

[A]lignment requires the ability to communicate purpose, needs, methods and criteria (1998: 186).

A significant benefit of my position as an insider and full participant was that my insider knowledge had already earned me the authority and respect a peripheral participant may have had difficulty obtaining. That is, in Wenger’s terms, I had a form of multimembership, and to an extent acted as a broker (1998: 109, 255). I was perceived to be in a management position (despite my own quite different perception, as noted in 4.3.2) and I had a relevant academic
background. I was able to ‘straddle boundaries and do the work of translation,’

enabling me to encourage participation rather than simply demand compliance
(1998: 187). In contrast, the advertising agency senior employee who initially

introduced the style-change had a peripheral legitimacy granted him by his role

and the authority of LoyaltyOne management. He had no membership or

experience within the community. As such, and given the strong initial

negative reaction of the COP to the proposed changes, his role was very much

one of a messenger bearing bad news as far as the writers were concerned.

That said, Wenger also insists that ‘no community can fully design its own

learning’ (1998: 234). TravelAir management deliberately asked a separate

COP (the advertising agency) to rewrite the LoyaltyOne letters. The

correspondence department manager and some senior writers felt that the

rewrite could have been done in-house, however in my opinion, this would not

have been successful. While the local COP needed to be involved in the

development of the changes, the COP’s ‘inherently limited scope of […]

engagement’ (Wenger, 1998: 234), repetitive practice and the letter as a focal

point of practice and negotiation would have impacted on the ability of any

local writer to make the kind of changes TravelAir desired. That is, a local

writer would not have access to a more global view due to his focus on local

practice, and he would also have lacked the authority to justify such changes to

his community. In this sense, the involvement of an unrelated community

responsible for designing the change was as essential as was the involvement

of the COP affected by the change.

Wenger also states that ‘In terms of reification, alignment requires sharable

artefacts – boundary objects able to create fixed points around which to

coordinate activities’ (1998: 187). This relates back to the need for a

replacement textual history. I could introduce the writers to the purpose of the

style-change, to TravelAir’s company vision and, more broadly, to perceived

social changes in business relations and communication, but for them to

engage and participate in the required changes to their local practice, practical

artefacts were a necessity.
4.4.5.1 Implicit alignment, changed perception

I have suggested above, after Wenger (1998), that in order for acceptance and learning to take place, attitude and perceptions need to change, through a process of identification and alignment. That is, while the official style-change occurred during the week the writers took part in workshops designed to introduce the changes, it would be incorrect to suggest that the processes necessary for a successful change took place in one week, or as the result of one person’s work. Instead, it seems more appropriate to argue that the success of the workshops was due to unofficial, often implicit social negotiation within the COP over several months.

By ‘unofficial,’ I refer to the kind of negotiation that happened outside staff meetings, workshops and, in this case, conversations between me (in my official capacity as coach) and teams or individuals. By ‘implicit,’ I refer to a lengthy process of reflection and imagination that led to changes in attitude and opinion slowly enough that one often could not pinpoint when the change occurred.

Most of the writers were strongly against the style-change when it was first officially introduced to them (in a meeting with a senior employee of the advertising agency responsible for the changes). There was a delay of nearly twelve months between that meeting and the change actually taking place. During that time, opinions gradually moved towards acceptance and even enthusiasm. As such, no one individual can be credited with ‘coordinating perspectives and actions’ and producing alignment (Wenger, 1998: 186). Rather, the writers themselves, as a community, responded to the need to ready themselves for the change by gradually shifting their perceptions and including the parameters of the new style within their identity as a COP.

That this alignment was predicated on the assumption of an authoritarian imposition should not obscure the largely positive communal response to the (unofficial) negotiation process. The writers knew they would have to live with the change, like it or not – as employees they were aware that they had little choice but to abide by the company’s wishes. There was also a rather cynical acknowledgement that the company did not have to explain or negotiate such decisions with its employees (a somewhat unfair view, as both TravelAir and
PSP management did generally try to maintain good relationships with staff, and this did include explanations and negotiation in many areas). While such perceptions were certainly a catalyst for alignment, the implicit desire for a comfortable workplace environment, and the many other changes that took place at the time (see 4.4.1), formed a social context within which acceptance could be viewed as a positive shift in perception. Some writers did justify their alignment negatively – ‘I don’t like it but it’s my job’ – but often these protestations were half-hearted, becoming more diplomatic as the changes became more definite (as opposed to rumour) and more of the community shifted to a show of support and enthusiasm.

4.4.5.2 A replacement history

The advertising agency responsible for the style-change re-wrote the then-current standard letters and a series of ‘standard’ paragraphs, as requested by TravelAir management. From an insider coaching perspective, these new letters and paragraphs were not particularly useful for the writers who had to change their practice. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, few writers used the standard letters. Most could not have found the folder they were in on the company server (networked computer hard-drives). The coding/sequencing team (2.4.1) were responsible for separating letters that could receive a standard response and so this correspondence did not form a regular part of the writers’ practice. Secondly, in a related issue, the standard letters were by nature quite general so their content often did not relate to the issues the writers dealt with. As such, the letters could provide a guide but not actual wording.

The standard paragraphs were problematic for different reasons. Firstly, they were recorded as macros using the Lotus Amipro word processing software. A macro in this kind of software is user-programming, usually used to automate certain functions. They often require some knowledge of programming language (in MS Word, a standard language is used: Visual Basic for Applications). Thus, standard paragraphs recorded as a macro could not simply be read on screen. The writer had to know the filename under which a specific paragraph was saved. On requesting that file to ‘play’ in Amipro, the paragraph would then automatically be pasted into the open document. While perhaps thirty paragraphs were official (and available as hardcopy for ease of reference),
writers who understood the system had added others, many of which were personalised (such as letter outlines that included names). As personal macros were also saved on the networked server they appeared with the official macros, and this made the system unwieldy and confusing for most.

At the time, no one had responsibility for the official paragraphs and many were very out of date, either because program terms and conditions had changed or because some wording had gone out of fashion. Many of the writers considered the paragraphs to be overly verbose or old-fashioned, even within the original style. Added to these internal issues, the rewritten paragraphs tended to have contextual mistakes, fuelled by the advertising agency’s ignorance of the LoyaltyOne program.

In the months prior to the change, most writers were using only a few of the official paragraphs. They tended to use folders containing many previous letters to find wording, when they could not use the phrases and paragraphs they had memorised through constant use. Therefore, I decided to update the official paragraphs and replace writers’ individual files with a comprehensive, approved set in the new style. Management saw this as a benefit, as the writers would all be using the same wording and, theoretically, would be able to write letters more quickly once they could simply paste paragraphs into them. As such, these paragraphs would be maintained and updated on a regular basis, by a single person, so that they would not fall out of use.

The number of paragraphs available went from thirty to over two hundred, set out in a single document in a logical fashion following subject headings that were easy to recognise. Of the writers who responded to questionnaire 2 (see 2.2.2), nearly all found the standard paragraph document useful and had only rarely asked for assistance with wording in the three months following the change-over.

I also authored a style guide, which was partly a requirement linked to PSP’s (successful) attempt to attain ISO9001 quality assurance certification. It contained a preface that provided reasons for the style change as well as sections detailing the expectations of the style, with examples. As a learning tool this guide was little used. It was primarily available as an authoritative reference for company requirements such as formatting and font sizes, and as a
general introduction to the writing style for newcomers. I provided explanations concerning the style in the workshops that took place over the week of the official change – before the workshops letters were written in the original style; afterwards, in the new (see 4.4.5.3 below). After that point, most writers did not require explanations, nor did they have time for them. Their engagement and learning processes were primarily in hands-on, direct practice. They wrote their letters using the new standard paragraphs, either pasting them directly or as example material, rather than having an explanatory guide open in front of them. In this way, they learnt as they had when they joined the COP, the new paragraphs providing a comprehensive enough resource to replace the textual history they had abruptly lost.

4.4.5.3 Introducing a new history through workshopping

The style-change was officially launched in a series of two-hour workshops presented over a week in April (see 4.4.1).

The workshop environment enabled me to articulate quite explicitly what, until then, had mostly been work of imagination and alignment carried out within the community. That is, as I argued above, the writers knew they would have to accept the change in writing style and so they chose to incorporate it into their understanding of the mandates of the job well before it was officially required of them. For some writers, then, my explanations of the reasons for the change were a vindication of their stance, an authoritative stamp of approval for their understanding and orientation. For a few, my explanations came across as an excuse or rationalisation for the change, but even in these cases there was a recognition that this was the ‘company line.’ Once they were required to start using the new style, the writers found their own meanings through interaction with each other and through engagement, regaining their ownership of the focal point of their practice.

My presentation on reasons why the style change was being introduced was therefore a useful introduction to the workshop. However, much of the work of imagination and alignment had already been done. The primary focus of the workshop was engagement (Wenger, 1998: 73, 174). The writers were more interested in how to apply the new style to their everyday practice, not in why
the change was occurring. Their concerns centred on issues of authority. The perceived informality of the new style did not appear to lend itself to situations where writers had to answer complaints and refuse a customer’s request. They were used to the relational distance of a formal tenor and were uncertain how to respond negatively in the new style. Concerns such as these formed the focus of the workshop and I had put significant effort into providing standard paragraphs covering the most common complaints and negative responses the writers dealt with. In all cases, I answered concerns with practical examples.

I also spent some time explaining the grammatical nature of the changes, such as the use of first person, contractions and a greater use of active voice. While this was of interest to a few, I think it had little impact on practice. Most writers preferred concrete examples to abstract explanations, and did not consider their writing in such terms.

4.4.5.4 A smooth transition

My primary initial concern – that productivity would drop considerably and both quality and quantity would suffer – did not eventuate. Through dispute and clarification, argument and resolution, enthusiasm, reluctance and necessity, the writers had already come to terms with the change before it took place. They had begun the process of regaining ownership of the focal point of their practice, and they needed only the opportunity to engage and participate in reifying the new style.

When they came to write in the new style, they were presented with a comprehensive textual ‘history’ enabling them to learn much as they had done when they were newcomers. The difference was that they were old-timers who already knew what they could say – they were already masters of the other aspects of their practice and needed only to know how they should respond.

Team leaders and the more experienced, senior team D took the workshop earlier than the other writers. They assisted me in refining the content of the workshop and were also available to the writers in the role of coach when it was required. The common queries and complaints were covered by standard paragraphs. The unusual and difficult correspondence generally went to the
more experienced and capable writers anyway, and this continued. Given the high number of letters answered each week by each writer, it did not take long for new words, phrases and paragraphs to replace their old counterparts in the writers’ memories.

There was some quiet resistance amongst one or two older writers, particularly in cases where the issues involved areas outside the LoyaltyOne program, for which I had not provided alternative wording (for an example see 5.4.2). Initially, also, there were letters that contained mixtures of the old and new styles, again where writers had to modify the standard paragraphs and did so based on their knowledge of the old style (see 5.4). In general, however, the style change took place with a minimum of disruption and little overt contestation, and learning through practice and engagement was swift and generally successful.

4.5 Summary

My own participation in the style change was quite significant. I was moved from a writing role and made officially responsible for the success of the change. I provided a comprehensive replacement history and introductory workshops, and I was available on the boundary between management and the writers’ communities, to answer questions and concerns, to negotiate, persuade and inspire (Wenger, 1998: 205), providing a focus for the writers to adjust their perceptions through imagination and alignment. This, and other factors such as the long delay between the announcement of the change and its adoption, had a pronounced impact on the events described herein.

The success of the style change required learning to take place in two specific areas. The abrupt nature of the change, and its imposition from outside, required the writers to re-take ownership of the business letter genre. This they achieved through negotiation within the modes of belonging of imagination and alignment. The nature of a business letter and the writers’ relationship with customers had to be reconsidered in the light of the style change (see 6.2 and
6.3.1 for a further discussion of perception and worldview). Negotiation took place through questions concerning why letters were written in a certain style – questions usually only the province of newcomers, and generally only tacit, hidden in answers to do with what could and could not be written (content related).

The second area covered engagement and practice. The writers required a means of answering questions concerning what may be written, and more importantly, how. The nature of the content (what) had not changed, however with the advent of the style change, the question of how the same content should now be written was highly significant. Engagement and practice took place within a rich intertextual history, and the writers achieved their daily practice in cognisance of that history. What they wrote was based on their access to previous phrases, paragraphs and letters, and what they could remember from long repetition. The writers were used to relying on previous text where they were unable to use their own knowledge or memory and so provision of a replacement textual history enabled them to learn much as they had when they joined the department. With possession of a comprehensive set of phrases and paragraphs, the writers were able to alter their practice to accommodate the new style with a minimum of disruption of loss of quality.

Chapter 5 considers the language changes made to the LoyaltyOne letter-of-reply, based on the moves and acts presented in chapter 3.
5 Analysing textual change in a genre

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a genre analysis based on the original style standard letters and a corpus of over 2,000 authentic custom letters (see 3.3.1). The analysis is based on the communicative purposes discussed in Chapter 2, and the moves and acts that form the structure of the LoyaltyOne business letter genre are presented and explicated (see 3.7). Building on the textual analysis presented in Chapter 3, this chapter considers the nature of the changes made to language use within the LoyaltyOne business letter genre.

The most notable initial, non-textual difference between the standard and custom letters of the new style, when compared to those of the original style, lies in the authorship of the standards. As discussed in Chapter 2, the old standards were created and altered over several years, and were authored by a few individual employees of PSP, who were themselves custom letter writers and experienced members of the correspondence department COP. In contrast, the new standards were created simultaneously and over a brief time-period by five employees of an advertising agency contracted for the specific purpose of providing a ‘style and tone re-write’ (TravelAir unpublished creative brief 1999).

Chapter 4 provides an account of the social context of the writing style change using ethnographic methodology and based primarily on the Communities of Practice (COP) theoretical framework. Section 4.4.2 comments upon the motivation of TravelAir management, the concepts that led to the change, and the intended effects of the changes on customer perceptions. As well as extending the genre analysis in Chapter 3, this chapter relates the textual changes made in the new style letters to the social contexts and community purposes and reactions discussed in chapters 2 and 4.
This chapter takes as its primary material a corpus of over 3,000 custom letters written after the style change. Details of the corpora used and a comparative analysis of the moves and acts established in 3.7 are provided in 5.2. Section 5.3 considers the problematic issue of sentences or phrases which appear to contain more than one purpose, and so potentially satisfy more than one move or act, and cases where the realisation of an act is embedded within the realisation of another act. Section 5.4 looks at mixed-style letters and discusses various reasons for the phenomenon, referring back to relevant social issues discussed in Chapter 4.

5.2 Comparative textual analysis

In order to compare and contrast the original letters with the new, it is useful to bear in mind some important, defining commonalities. Firstly, all of over five thousand custom letters examined here are from the same company and have been written by members of the same teams (in most cases, the same people). All the letters are authentic – written by paid employees in response to actual customer queries and sent out on headed paper or facsimile sheets based on the TravelAir logo and LoyaltyOne program trade names, or emailed from the TravelAir domain name. The subject matter in every case has to do in some way with the LoyaltyOne or ClubOne programs. Indeed, it can be argued that the content of the letters in each corpus is in fact the same, at least in terms of authorship and subject matter.

Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 present the basic statistics of the corpora collected for this research. Following and extending upon the information given in section 3.3, the tables provide a comparison between the letters collected two months prior to the official introduction of the style change and those collected approximately three months after the change. The creation of the concordances for the two corpora follows the same criteria discussed in Chapter 3 (see 3.3.1). Contractions are counted as a separate, single word in the concordances.
Table 5.1 Comparative statistics of the LoyaltyOne standard letter corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LoyaltyOne standard letters</th>
<th>Original corpus</th>
<th>New corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custom letters</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count (tokens)</td>
<td>23,975</td>
<td>22,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words (types)</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td>1,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type/token ratio</td>
<td>0.0493</td>
<td>0.0461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>1,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/sentence</td>
<td>16.6493</td>
<td>14,3314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean average words per letter</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Comparative statistics of the LoyaltyOne custom letter corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LoyaltyOne custom letters</th>
<th>Original corpus</th>
<th>New corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custom letters</td>
<td>2,021</td>
<td>3,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count (tokens)</td>
<td>359,300</td>
<td>585,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words (types)</td>
<td>4,821</td>
<td>5,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word count using stop list</td>
<td>356,781</td>
<td>581,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words using stop list</td>
<td>3,727</td>
<td>4,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type/token ratio</td>
<td>0.0103</td>
<td>0.0073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
<td>21,329</td>
<td>36,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/sentence</td>
<td>16.8456</td>
<td>15,8101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean average words per letter</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was an attempt to consolidate and simplify the standard letters, resulting in 22% fewer letters. Interestingly, the average number of words per letter increased and there were considerably more sentences, however there were slightly fewer words per sentence. This is not unexpected given the move towards a more speech-related style, where more common, shorter words are used, along with contractions, and more are needed to get the same message across.

The new custom corpus contains 56% more letters than the original. The custom corpus also shows that the new style has resulted in slightly shorter sentences and more words per letter, on average. As noted in 3.3.1, the type/token ratio is very low, due to the repetitive nature of the subject matter.
This is particularly the case when the majority of proper nouns are removed (using a stop list), as many of the words that raise the size of the word count are the names of the letter recipients and worldwide airports and cities, hotels and resorts.

### 5.2.1 A comparative lexical overview

The differences between the corpora are primarily stylistic and lexical in nature, as opposed to subject and content. As noted in 4.4.2, the new style was intended to seem more like speech and to foster a friendly, semi-formal relationship. The most obvious and significant changes introduced with the new style included contractions and the use of first person. Table 5.3 indicates the frequency of contractions with personal pronouns and negative statements using *auxiliary* + *not* in the new style custom corpus.

**Table 5.3 Frequency of contractions in the new style custom corpus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New style custom corpus: 3,159 letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd Person + Aux</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’ve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’ll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was also an intention to use a somewhat less formal vocabulary, without using jargon or colloquialisms. For example, ‘keep’ would be used instead of ‘retain,’ ‘tell’ instead of ‘advise,’ ‘use’ instead of ‘utilise,’ and so on. It was hoped that this style would be less ‘verbose’ and would result in shorter, more direct letters (TravelAir unpublished creative brief 1999). The averages
presented in Table 5.2 above suggest that the letters are, if anything, slightly longer.

The following analysis takes as its starting point the moves and acts presented and discussed in Chapter 3 (3.7) using the original style corpora.

5.2.2 The introductory paragraph

I’m writing to let you know that we received your request for your Personal Identification Number (PIN). (N2)

I’m writing to let you know that we received your request regarding the above TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership account. (N5)

The above sentences satisfy the obligatory requirements of Move 1, Act B: Acknowledge receipt of correspondence, and Optional Act A: Summarise received correspondence. In common with the introductions considered in 3.7.1, these sentences are entirely redundant: a statement of the obvious. As such, even though ‘thank you’ is not used, the effect is much the same: it is courteous both for its acknowledgement of contact and for its reminder to the recipient of the content of his or her letter. The gratitude and customer appreciation implied in ‘thank you’ structures is not so apparent here, although ‘I’m writing to let you know’ does contain a certain sense that the customer is valuable enough to receive an apparently personal response.

The emphatic redundancy of ‘I’m writing to let you know’ upset many writers, who felt that it detracted considerably from what was considered to be ‘good business writing.’ The fact that the recipient had received and was reading the letter made ‘I’m writing’ in particular rather spurious in the opinion of many of the writers, who were rather offended by it. Arguably, this phrase does echo a common speech pattern, for example in telephone calls from businesses to customers, ‘I’m just calling to let you know’ is regularly employed. It was phrases such as this, however, that resulted in the argument that the LoyaltyOne letter was no longer a good business letter.

The prominent use of ‘I’ and ‘we’ in these sentences also arguably detracts somewhat from the customer focus of ‘Thank you for your,’ as both the
company and the individual writer are directly present as subjects in the
sentence. This is offset by the presence of the writer in the first person, which
has the potential to persuade the recipient that they have received the courtesy
of a personal response from an individual rather than the corporate or
institutional ‘we.’ Interestingly, 31 letters in the new style custom corpus open
with the phrase ‘We are writing,’ which, with the use of the corporate ‘we’ and
no contraction, appears to be a rendering of a new style phrase in the old style.
This issue is further considered in section 5.4 below.

The use of variations of the above introductory sentences feature in 60% of the
re-written standard letters and in 929 (29.4%) of the 3,159 letters in the new
style custom corpus. Variations of the more traditional ‘Thank you for your
correspondence’ were used in most of the other letters. The percentages
suggest that the traditional ‘Thank you’ opening for a letter of reply was
generally preferred by the letter writers. Of the seven introductions available to
writers as part of the official Standard Paragraphs document, only one used
‘I’m writing.’ There were 278 ‘standard paragraphs’ written in the new style.
Of these, 198 included an introductory paragraph. The traditional ‘Thank you’
format was used in 132 of them, or 66.7%.

Versions of ‘I’m writing to let you know that we received your request’ form
the only real grammatical and lexical changes to take place in the introductory
paragraph between the original and new correspondence styles. As such, only
obligatory act B of Move 1 received any change in the form of its realisation.
The change is quite significant, as it moves from an acknowledgement of
correspondence – of media and contact – to the nature or reason for that
contact. Act B has become the acknowledgement of a request. By introducing
an individual writer and removing the rather formal, legalistic admission that
written material was sent or received on a given date, the tone and the semantic
subject of the reply changes quite considerably. An individual rather than the
company assumes responsibility for the reply and, by referring to the
correspondent’s request, sets the stage for a description of service provision –
the commodity in which a service centre trades.

‘I’m writing to let you know’ also has about it a conversational redundancy
better associated with speech, and two of the standard letters (NL109, NL111)
go further: ‘I’m just writing to let you know.’ This use of ‘just’ seems entirely
more appropriate to speech and is also commonly used in telephone replies – ‘Oh, I’m just phoning about…’ – where its use suggests brevity, as in ‘I won’t take up too much of your time, I’m just…’ None of the letters in the custom corpus use ‘just’ in this manner.

This phrase has as its semantic subject the proffering of information, a redundancy that previously prefaced the middle part of the letter: relating the news, specifically Moves A, B and C, which tended to begin with a variation of the phrase ‘We advise that…’. Thus, the primary purpose of a letter of reply – that of answering the original request for action or information – is recognised one step earlier, in the reply’s introduction. Some Standard Letters went further:

I’m writing to let you know that we received your request for TravelAir LoyaltyOne points and we’ve now credited all valid points to your account. (NL11)

I’m writing to let you know that we received your request for TravelAir LoyaltyOne points and your claim has been processed. (NL22)

In these instances, the primary purpose of providing information in response to a request has been addressed in the introductory paragraph, combining Move 1, obligatory act B and optional act A with Move A’s obligatory act in the same sentence. These two moves still follow in the same logical sequence however, and in each case the paragraph that follows is a realisation of Move A, optional Act B.

One of the complaints about the new style made by LoyaltyOne writers was that it did not ‘fit’ with their notion of a business letter (see 4.4.3 and 6.3.1). Intertextually, it may be suggested that the use of ‘I’m writing to let you know’ places the LoyaltyOne letter of reply in association with marketing and advertising material rather than with business material. As noted in 3.10.2, direct mail marketing commonly makes use of complex demographic databases to produce individually named and tailored advertising material. Such letters, whether from a bank or a retail company, tend to use a friendly, informal speech-related style marked primarily by contractions, typically ‘we’ve’ or
‘you’re.’ That said, the preference for first person seems to be more appropriate to solicited contact rather than unsolicited company advertising. Further phrases that caused some concern were introduced as part of the moves forming the exit paragraphs, and this issue is considered in greater detail in 5.2.6 below.

### 5.2.3 Relating good news

I'm pleased to tell you that the points for your [transaction] have been credited to your account and will appear on an activity statement, which you’ll receive through the mail. (N27)

In general, the factual content related by the obligatory act of Move A, *Inform of action taken*, has remained the same, lexically and grammatically. As can be seen from the above sentence, the primary information (that the points for your [transaction] have been credited to your account) is phrased passively using the same semantic participants as the original style. This is to be expected, as the subject matter discussed in *LoyaltyOne* correspondence has not changed.

The lexis of optional act A, *Introduce subject/anticipate likely emotional response of recipient*, has changed. It is still a redundant fragment, in terms of information provision, and its role is identical to that of the original style, framing the writer’s response in a way that anticipates the reader’s likely emotional reaction, as well as placing the passive construction of the obligatory act into an active sentence. In this case, the tone is clearly less formal, the tenor more personal, than the original style. Instead of ‘We are pleased to advise,’ the combination of first person, a contraction and the more informal, conversational ‘tell you’ instead of ‘advise’ moves the reader towards the familiar informality of speech and suggests a more personal contact in lieu of the large, uninterested corporation. Further examples of acceptable lexical changes in Move A, optional act A include:

*I'd like to tell you that* the information regarding your travel on [flight details] has been referred to [Partner Airline] for their confirmation. (N15)
I'm happy to tell you that, as a Partner Contractor, you are entitled to join the TravelAir ClubOne at the Partner corporate rates. (N28)

Once again, the obligatory act of Move A, the factual element relating to the terms and conditions of TravelAir’s programs, has not changed. The style and tone shift is accomplished in optional act A, the redundant fragment prefacing the requested information.

That said, the introduction of contractions in the new style potentially marks instances where a contraction is not used. That is, the common use of contractions can allow more emphasis to be placed on certain phrases where a contraction is absent. This is arguably the case in the quotation from N28 above where, in comparison to ‘you’re,’ ‘you are’ strengthens the certainty of the entitlement to which the recipient’s attention is being drawn.

Both letters N17 and N15 use a passive structure to remove the service centre, as the responsible party, from the action which has been taken. As noted with the original style, good news centres on what has been done rather than on who has done it. Occasionally, it is possible to find a more direct presentation of good news:

I'm pleased to tell you that we've credited your account with points for the eligible flights associated with your claim… (N104)

I’m writing to let you know that we received your request for TravelAir LoyaltyOne points and we’ve now credited all valid points to your account. (NL11)

In the first quotation above, the obligatory act of Move A is realised with an active construction and using a contraction (we’ve), thus altering its realisation in line with the new style. The second quote is from a standard letter, and combines Move A with the introductory Move 1. The active construction is quite rare in examples of good news however, based on the new style custom
corpus, where there are approximately 150 (4.7%) instances of ‘we’ve’ demonstrating an active construction in the obligatory act of Move A.

Optional act B of Move A, *Inform results of action taken*, also shows similar changes in its realisation. That is, the primary semantic subjects, realised by noun phrases and subject specific verbs, remain the same, while the changes tend to be the use of contractions:

…and will appear on an activity statement, which you’ll receive through the mail. (N17)

In this case, the verb ‘appear’ and noun ‘Activity Statement’ are elements common to both styles, as they are related directly to the subject of the TravelAir LoyaltyOne program. Indeed, ‘Activity Statement’ should be (and is usually) capitalised, as it is a named element of the LoyaltyOne program.

Below is a direct comparison between the original and new style realisations of Move A’s obligatory act and optional acts A and B, as used to respond to a LoyaltyOne customer with good news. Both cases are taken from specific letters in the custom corpora, however they are representative of commonly used phrases, and both were available to writers as standard paragraphs.

*We are pleased to advise that your accounts have now been credited with points for your [transactions]. A summary of these points will appear on a forthcoming statement.* (6, and Macro ‘pts4’)

*I’m pleased to tell you that the points for your [transactions] have been credited to your account and will appear on an activity statement, which you’ll receive through the mail.* (N47)

The similarities are obvious. The business specific labelling nouns have not changed, nor have the major, program-related verbs (‘credited,’ ‘appear,’ and, to an extent, ‘pleased’). ‘Advise’ and ‘forthcoming’ have both been replaced, in the latter case by a clause rather than replacement noun phrase. In the new
style, ‘your account’ has moved from grammatical subject to object, which has moved the transaction from object to subject. This works quite well where ‘transaction’ is replaced with a generic noun phrase such as ‘your recent flights’ or ‘your hotel accommodation.’ In many cases, however, the transaction can be a long series of prepositional phrases, linked by coordinators: ‘your TravelAir flight from origin to destination on date, and your Acme Airlines flights from origin to destination on date, and from origin to destination on date.’

Placing such a lengthy noun phrase in the subject position creates a very long sentence; even more so as optional act B, which is a separate sentence in the original style, now follows on after a coordinator, relating back to the long subject. This particular construction, while not verbose in the sense of being ‘wordy’ and deliberately using long and sometimes obscure words, does appear to threaten readability to an extent.

It is also interesting to note that the two sentences in the old style are of a much simpler construction, as the single sentence in the new style requires several phrases in order to accommodate the same information. Complex sentence structures generally do not aid comprehension and it could be argued that the goals of clarity and simplicity are not compatible where mimicking speech patterns in writing produces this phenomenon.

### 5.2.4 Relating bad news

In my initial consideration of *LoyaltyOne* letters, relating good news or bad news appeared to fall under the category of providing details about requested action or information, unless a specific complaint was received. In Move A, *Positive response to request for action*, Move B, *Negative response to request for action*, and Move C, *Respond to request for information*, the primary purpose is much the same – to relate news in a way that maintains a relationship with the customer. As such, good news and bad news were originally placed under the same move. However the news is likely to be received, the basic layout of information is similar:
I'm pleased to tell you that the points for TravelAir flights [flight numbers] have been credited to your account and will appear on an activity statement, which you’ll receive through the mail. (N17)

I regret to advise that your travel on [flight details] is ineligible for points as Acme Airlines is not an affiliated partner of our program. (N27)

Unfortunately, I can't credit you with points for your remaining TravelAir flights taken in March, as members with a current postal address in the United Kingdom or Ireland can't earn points for flights booked in discount Economy class. (N10)

In all three letters, optional act A introduces and frames the primary obligatory act of Move A (N17) and Move B (N27, N10). The difference between good news and bad news tends to be reflected in what follows the primary obligatory act. Good news nearly always involves the completion of a requested action, which is then immediately followed by optional act B, *Inform results of action taken*. In the case of bad news, which is usually that action has not been taken, the obligatory act is followed by another obligatory act, Act B, *Provide explanation or justification for action not taken*. This act is optional in Move A but required in Move B.

5.2.4.1 ‘Unfortunately’

The use of ‘unfortunately’ was perhaps the single most unpopular change to be introduced by the new style. It takes the place of Move B, optional act A phrases such as ‘We regret to advise that,’ ‘Regrettably,’ or ‘Please note that.’

Unfortunately, I can’t credit you with points for your hotel accommodation and car rental. (NL36)

Unfortunately, I can't credit you with points for your remaining TravelAir flights taken in March, as members with a current postal
address in the United Kingdom or Ireland can't earn points for flights booked in discount Economy class. (N10)

The writers generally felt that ‘unfortunately’ was a negative word, with negative connotations that would detract from the tone and relational aspects of the letters. Although ‘regret’ is admittedly also a negative word, it is associated with the subject ‘I’ or ‘We,’ and, in much the same way as ‘pleased,’ establishes an emotional understanding or empathy with the likely feelings of the recipient. The use of the comment adverb ‘unfortunately’ recognises the negative nature of bad news, however it does not read quite so sympathetically as ‘I regret.’ The sense seems rather to be ‘Unfortunately for you,’ or ‘I know you’re not going to like this,’ without indicating any apology or empathetic understanding from the writer. The use of ‘regrettably’ sends much the same signal, however its use was far less common, appearing only 90 times in the original custom corpus and 50 times in the new.

From a total of 136 standard letters there were 68 containing ‘bad news’ and 42 requesting information from the recipient. In total, 76 standard letters included ‘unfortunately’ as a realisation of Move B, optional act A. ‘Regret’ appears 11 times only. Out of 278 Standard Paragraphs, 104 included ‘unfortunately.’ In the new style custom corpus, ‘unfortunately’ appears 1,193 times, or in approximately 37.8% of custom written letters. This compares to its use 77 times, or in 3.8% of letters in the original style.

5.2.4.2 ‘Can’t’

The use of the contraction ‘can’t’ generally provided a much simpler alternative to first person negative statements. ‘I can’t’ became a previously unavailable alternative to ‘We are not able to,’ ‘We are not in a position to’ and ‘We are unable to.’ The forthright ‘We cannot’ was considered too forceful and formal a negative for the relational nature of loyalty program correspondence (see 3.7.4.1) and only appears in 14 letters in the original custom corpus, compared to 703 variations of ‘We are unable to’ and 146 variations of ‘We are not able to.’
The more informal, speech-based ‘can’t’ was thought by the writers to be a positive change, as it is considerably more direct than the construction ‘are not able’ or ‘are unable.’ There is certainly a greater clarity in the direct use of a negative, and yet it comes across as both informal and softer than ‘cannot.’ Interestingly, almost all of the 706 examples of ‘can’t’ found in the new style custom corpus are used in the construction ‘Unfortunately, I can’t.’ Seen in this speech-related context, the rather ambiguous emotive sense of ‘unfortunately’ may be somewhat softened. This is perhaps an instance where different readers may receive a different impression of the tone of a letter, dependant upon their own background and experience as much as upon the word choice of the writer.

The use of ‘unable’ dropped somewhat, from 36.5% (737) to 21.2% (669) in the new custom corpus. Its use was no longer primarily as a realisation of Move B obligatory act A, but rather as Move B obligatory act B, Provide explanation or justification for action not taken, as in: ‘As we’re unable to access the flight records of.’ Where ‘unable’ was used as part of the realisation of Move B obligatory act A, Inform of action not taken, it mirrored its use in the original style, in variations of ‘We regret that we are unable to.’

In the original style corpus the use of ‘not’ in realisations of Move B obligatory act A were fairly rare. ‘We are not able to’ appears only 124 times. Generally, its use was more common in Move B obligatory act B:

…as this particular carrier is not affiliated with…
…as program conditions do not allow for this.
…as [transactions] do not attract LoyaltyOne points.
…our records do not confirm your travel…

In the new style corpus ‘We are not able to’ appears just 4 times and again, ‘not,’ which appears 2,616 times, is primarily used in Move B obligatory act B, except where it appears in a rewritten exit phrase, detailed in section 5.2.6 below.
5.2.5 Responding to content: Change and relational phrases

‘I’m writing to let you know’ is, as noted in 5.2.2 above, an entirely redundant phrase. Its use highlights the social requirement to preface in a courteous manner what would otherwise be a bald statement of fact. So called ‘redundant phrases’ are amongst the most obvious candidates for lexical change in altering the business letter style at LoyaltyOne.

As pointed out in sections 5.2.3 and 5.2.4, the primary information requested of a letter, and usually the obligatory act of a move, involves the detailing of membership accounts and issues surrounding loyalty points. In general the keywords and method of presenting this information remain the same, lexically and structurally, as the information itself has also not changed. That is, while contractions do appear, key nouns and verbs remain the same. However, the initial phrases used as a framing device for presenting the factual information do not themselves provide that information, and therefore serve other purposes. It is here that some common verbs have changed.

The more common of these fragments are recorded in Table 5.4 below, and they represent relational aspects of letter writing. They include formal politeness, expressions of courtesy and empathy, and requests for consideration and understanding.

As shown in the table, there were a number of common phrases and each of these also had several variants (not included in the figures), such as ‘We are also pleased to advise,’ ‘I am happy to be able to confirm,’ ‘I sincerely regret,’ and so on. There are enough variants that most phrases only appear in a low percentage of the letters of each corpus.
### Table 5.4 Initial phrases used to frame the presentation of factual material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Old style</th>
<th>% of letters</th>
<th>New style</th>
<th>% of letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original style preferred phrases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wish to advise</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We advise</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May we advise</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are pleased to advise</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please be advised</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are pleased to confirm</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We confirm</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can confirm</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We wish to confirm</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regret to advise</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regret</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regrettably</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New style preferred phrases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m pleased to tell you</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m happy to tell you</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can confirm</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m happy to confirm</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m pleased to confirm</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to confirm</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to assure you</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfortunately</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I regret</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed phrases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please note</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish to advise</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I advise</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish to confirm</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m pleased to advise</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total %</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>138%</td>
<td>120%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In many cases the fragments do not show empathy and are not explicitly introducing good or bad news. Both ‘confirm’ and ‘advise’ are used in this way. As noted in 5.2.3, ‘advise’ is primarily used in the original corpus and was not common in the new custom corpus. The use of ‘confirm’ was approximately the same in each corpus, increasing slightly from 23.8% to 28.5%. ‘Please note’ was a common neutral marker of information to be provided, and the only fragment regularly used in both corpora.

Perhaps the two most distinctly old-fashioned words in the original corpus were ‘kindly,’ which is discussed briefly in section 5.4.2 below, and ‘wish,’ which appears in 20% of letters in the original corpus, compared to just 7.5% in the new. Many of the writers preferred not to use phrases such as ‘We wish to advise,’ before the changes were made, even though they were acceptable in the original style. The more modern ‘like’ was introduced as the preferred alternative and, along with its use in exit paragraphs such as ‘If you’d like to know more,’ ‘like’ appears to be the most significant change of a single word, increasing from 6.7% (136) in the original custom corpus to 114% (3626) in the new (a percentage number higher than 100 indicates that a word or phrase occurs more than once in some letters).

With the exception of ‘Please note,’ Table 5.4 above presents four *mixed phrases*, which appear in each corpus and which contain elements of both styles. The use of ‘I’ was not part of the original style and was generally only used by team D, which regularly dealt with escalated issues. However, as noted in Chapter 4, the correspondence department COP had been aware of the changes for some time, and some team leaders did suggest that team members start using first person before the changes came into effect officially (see 4.4.1). There are very few examples of contractions in the original corpus and the few new-style changes that did appear earlier tended to be variations without the contraction, such as ‘I am happy to confirm’ or ‘I would like to assure you.’

So first person was relatively rare in the original style and its appearance in the original corpus was due in part to the collection date, which was well within the time the writers were aware of change. The use of ‘wish’ and ‘advise’ in the new corpus may partly be due to the short period of time between the official change and the date of collection (3 months), however it is likely that
some writers will continue to use certain key verbs and phrases from the original style, for reasons further discussed in section 5.4 below.

5.2.6 Exiting: Leaving the door open while offering alternatives

There are two primary communicative purposes of the *LoyaltyOne* letter of reply. One is to provide the requested news and information. The other is to maintain and strengthen a relationship. The former has to do with the provision of factual information: what can be done and what cannot; what terms and conditions there are; in this case, the material framework of the *LoyaltyOne* program. The latter recognises that a letter of reply is one instance of communication on one side of a dialogue between business and customer.

These primary purposes dictate the format and framework of the letter. The layout of Moves and Acts is provided and discussed in 3.8. In many ways the introduction and middle portions of a letter are tied to the particular purposes of the genre and so are very hard to change without changing the nature of the letter itself. That is, the purpose of the introduction of a letter of reply must include acknowledging in some way that the correspondence is solicited – a response to some form of stimulus, in this case, also correspondence. The purposes and requirements of the middle portion of the letter include providing that solicited information, and doing it in a way that *TravelAir* and PSP management deem culturally polite, courteous and effective. The introduction and middle portions of *LoyaltyOne* letters of reply must address the salient issues raised by the customer. Therefore, for example, advertising and marketing are not the aim of *LoyaltyOne* letters, unless specifically solicited by the customer, and it would be manifestly impolite to introduce a sales pitch at the expense of the requested information.

As discussed in 4.4.2 and above, the new style introduced a purpose which previously had been quite peripheral to *LoyaltyOne* letters of reply. Advertising and ‘onselling’ of membership benefits had not been part of the focus of the service centre.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move II</th>
<th>Obl. Act, embedded Opt. Act A</th>
<th>If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us at the TravelAir LoyaltyOne Service Centre on 12 34 56, and speak to one of our consultants.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move I</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>Thank you for your support and patronage of TravelAir and our program partners. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us again at the TravelAir LoyaltyOne Service Centre,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opt. Act B</td>
<td>quoting your membership number. (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move I</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>Thank you for your support of the TravelAir LoyaltyOne program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act, embedded Opt. Act A</td>
<td>Please feel free to contact our Service Centre on 12 34 56 if you have further queries. (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us again at the TravelAir LoyaltyOne Service Centre,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>For a prompt response, you can e-mail us at <a href="mailto:loyaltyone@travelair.com">loyaltyone@travelair.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Opt. Act A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move III</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>You may be interested to know that you can access your account (security protected) on-line through the TravelAir website at <a href="http://www.travelair.com">www.travelair.com</a> (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5 Exit moves and acts in the original LoyaltyOne custom corpus
Of course, where such information was directly solicited, such as people asking about the benefits of the ClubOne program, or where a writer felt that the request they had received warranted the provision of such information as a means of providing service, a form of ‘sales pitch’ was included. A focus on advertising developed somewhat prior to the style change, originally with the introduction of the TravelAir company website and, sometime afterward, the more specific LoyaltyOne program website.

The most obvious place for this new ‘product’ to be advertised was in the closing, or exit paragraphs of the letter. It is here that relational and style aspects of the change can perhaps most clearly be seen. Table 5.5 above shows the moves and acts of some common closing paragraphs in the original style.

The phrase ‘If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us’ appears in nearly 75% of the original custom corpus. This is borne out by the words ‘require’ (1,567 occurrences), ‘assistance’ (1,571 occurrences) and ‘hesitate’ (1,514 occurrences). The standard letter corpus contains a slight variation, preferring ‘If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.’ With minor variations, these are the most common realisations of the obligatory act of Move II and they are both formal and contain what is arguably business letter jargon. That is, ‘do not hesitate’ seems to be rather old-fashioned terminology, and is notably negative in its method of persuading the recipient that they are welcome to make further contact.

As can be seen from the table, Moves I and II appear with each other in any order. However, Move III, where it appears in the original corpus, was usually placed after Moves I and II, and prior to the formal close (Move IV). The phrase ‘You may be interested to know’ suggests both tentativeness on the part of the writer, as if the customer might not be interested, and the impression that the information has been added in almost as an afterthought. In the case of the standard letters featuring this realisation of Move III, the latter assessment is entirely accurate, as this sentence was simply added to previously written text in response to TravelAir management’s request to advertise the existence of the company website.
The realisations of the obligatory acts of Moves II and III, and the peripheral status of Move III in the original style, formed part of TravelAir management’s argument for change. Having been developed over time and by several different writers, it was felt that the standard letters as a group featured inconsistent style and tone. This may have been due to different realisations of the same moves and acts, as well as realisations that were perceived to be inappropriate representations of the TravelAir image. The need to advertise the company’s internet presence also led to the decision to consolidate and regularise the presentation of information in LoyaltyOne correspondence. The re-written standard letters featured quite different realisations of Moves I, II and III. Table 5.6 below presents common closing paragraphs, based on standard letters and paragraphs (boilerplate) that were regularly used in custom correspondence.

The common use of ‘do not hesitate’ in the original style appears only 243 times in the new style custom corpus, dropping to just 7.7% of letters. In 74 cases, the phrase has been updated somewhat through the use of a contraction: ‘don’t hesitate.’ This mixing of old and new styles is considered further in 5.4 below. The use of ‘assistance’ dropped from 77.7% of letters to just 6.2%, while ‘require’ dropped to 10.5%, suggesting that the majority of writers were using the preferred alternatives presented with the new style. Variants of ‘if there’s anything else you’d like to know’ replaced ‘if you require any further assistance,’ part of the reason for the significant rise in the use of ‘like’ discussed in section 5.2.5 above, and also for ‘know,’ which increased from 15.7% to 121.6%.
Table 5.6 Exit moves and acts in the new style custom corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Obl. Act</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Opt. Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move I</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>Thank you for taking the time to write to us.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move III</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>If you'd like to know more, just visit our website at travelair.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opt. Act</td>
<td>Here you'll find full details of our Terms and Conditions, along with all your membership benefits and account details.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>Of course, if you're not on the internet, you can just pick up the phone and speak with a consultant at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre. They'll be happy to help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move I</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>Thank you for [tagline]. (N1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move III</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>If you'd like to know more about your membership, you can visit our website at travelair.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act, embedded Opt. Act A</td>
<td>Alternatively, if you're not on the internet just call 12 34 56 and speak with a consultant at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre. They'll be happy to help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move I</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>Thank you for your support and patronage of TravelAir. (N17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move III</td>
<td>Obl. Act</td>
<td>In the meantime, if there's anything else you'd like to know, just visit our website at travelair.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move II</td>
<td>Obl. Act, embedded Opt. Act A</td>
<td>Or, if you'd like to speak to one of the consultants at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre, pick up the phone and dial 12 34 56. They'll be happy to help. (N19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.6.1 Move III: A significant change

The most obvious and significant change made to the exit moves can be seen in the realisation of Move III and its partial merging with, or even subordination of, Move II. Move III appears no longer to be an entirely separate move, at least in the more common structures as presented here. It was created based on a specific management purpose – to advertise and ‘on-sell’ the internet site and membership benefits (see 4.4.2). Therefore it was created as a stand-alone move: *Promote other company products/services*. However, the realisation of Move III as presented in Table 5.6 above now appears immediately before Move II (where it used to come after), and includes variations of:

If you'd like to know more, just visit our website at travelair.com

The opening phrase ‘If you’d like to know more’ would seem more appropriate as the first half of the obligatory act of Move II: *Invite future contact*. It is an obvious means of drawing the letter to a close, as it is communicating to the reader that no further solicited information is to be provided. As such, the above sentence appears to conflate moves II and III and, to an extent, to flout expectations. That is, rather than offering a means of direct communication, a courteous continuation of a relationship as intended by Move II, the reader is
told of an alternative, dynamic but impersonal means of gathering information and one to which some readers will not have access.

That this is an advertising ploy becomes more apparent in letters N1 and N25 (see Table 5.6), where the sentence following the one discussed above fulfils the optional act of Move III: *Explain the benefits of the product*:

Here you'll find full details of our Terms and Conditions, along with all your membership benefits and account details.

This is quite explicitly promotional, marketing a service and doing so in favour of providing an opportunity for direct contact.

The direct realisation of Move II then follows on, signalled by: ‘Or, if you'd like to speak to one of the consultants’ (N19) or ‘Alternatively, if you're not on the internet just call’ (N17). In both cases, Move II is offered as an alternative or secondary option, foregrounding the purpose of Move III. This is quite different from the original style, where the primary purpose of the exit paragraph was relational, and where Moves I or II were always present as an obligatory part of the structure of *LoyaltyOne* correspondence. It is fair to say, in contrast, that the primary purpose of the exit paragraph in the new style is promotional, and Move III has become far more integral to the structure of the genre than it was previously.

Exit paragraphs in letters and faxes also began to be used to promote email as an alternative medium of contact, as shown in N25 above. This realisation of Move II does provide a means of contact, but in a position more commonly associated with the telephone. Generally, telephone contact is quicker, cheaper and more personal, and so a management-preferred method. Call centre contact details were provided on headed paper and fax headers, along with email and internet addresses. Using the exit paragraph to highlight email is a textual outcome of a general trend at the *LoyaltyOne* service centre, where email had become preferable to the other textual contact media, because it was generally considered faster and more convenient than mail and facsimile.
5.2.6.2 Move I and the use of a tagline

Move I: Recognise value of relationship/communication, retained some of its original style realisations: ‘Thank you for your support and patronage of TravelAir’ and ‘Thank you for taking the time to write to us.’ The latter was generally used where a complaint had been made, and so variations of it only appear 109 times in the original custom corpus despite its common use at the time. In the new style it appeared as part of a standard exit paragraph (see N1 in Table 5.5 above) and this has encouraged its use on a more regular basis, so that there are over 800 variations of the phrase in the new custom corpus. Variations, which are far less common, include ‘I appreciate the time you have taken to write to us’ and ‘Mr. Name, thank you for taking the time and trouble to write to us.’

Words such as ‘patronage’ were considered over-formal, and the use of this particular word dropped from 40.6% to 11.6% in the new style custom corpus. In place of this phrase, a tagline was introduced. A tagline is a phrase or sentence intended to sum up a company or its product. They are used across all media, including radio and television advertisements, and are intended to be as well known as the company name and logo. Examples would be Nike’s tagline ‘Just do it,’ and Heineken’s tagline ‘Probably the best lager in the world.’ The TravelAir tagline appears in 15 letters of the standard letter corpus and 322 (10.2%) of the custom corpus letters.

Whereas paratextual items such as logos provide a link to the wider company image, and serve as recognition markers, taglines serve a similar purpose within the body text of a letter, in addition to the use of company and product names. Such a direct summary of a company image is associated with marketing and advertising techniques and, arguably, the use of a tagline in a realisation of Move I complicates the original purpose the move was intended to serve. The issue of problematic purposes will be further considered in section 5.3.
5.2.6.3 ‘Just pick up the phone and dial’

As discussed in 5.2.4.1, the introduction of ‘unfortunately’ was somewhat unpopular amongst the writers. It would also be fair to say that variations of ‘just pick up the phone and dial’ also ranked high on their list of dislikes. Phrases such as this and ‘if there’s anything else you’d like to know’ appear to explain the rise in the average word count per letter in the new style corpora. In much the same way as ‘I’m writing’ (5.2.2) was considered superfluous, the writers questioned why they were telling the customer how to use a telephone.

The change to a speech-like style of writing also does not account for ‘just pick up the phone and dial,’ as it is hard to imagine a situation in everyday speech where such a phrase might be used. Some of the writers felt that this phrase sounded rather condescending. That the phrase seemed inappropriate appears to suggest that it represents the crossing of a genre-specific boundary.

The company that won the contract to rewrite the LoyaltyOne standard letters was an advertising company. Its writers specialised in writing advertising and marketing copy. Arguably, the somewhat over-familiar tone, the speech-like informality and the level of instruction belong in the specialised area of advertising. In its own way, a phrase like ‘just pick up the phone’ is a form of jargon, widely recognised and accepted as appropriate in some places, marked and considered unfavourably in others.

Interestingly, for all its unpopularity, this phrase (with minor variations) appears in 1,505 (47.6%) letters of the new custom corpus. Such a consistent usage highlights the significance of the standard paragraphs document, both as a time-saver for the writers and as a means of ensuring consistent style and wording across the correspondence department.

5.2.6.4 Move II and ‘They’ll be happy to help’

There are 1,543 instances of the contraction ‘they’ll’ in the new custom corpus, of which all but seven are part of the phrase ‘They’ll be happy to help.’ In the original custom corpus there were only 181 uses of ‘they,’ and this reflected the nature of the correspondence. By far the most common personal pronouns
were ‘we,’ representing the writer and the company, and ‘you’ and ‘your,’ representing the customer and their ownership of various items related to the LoyaltyOne program. Where ‘they’ appeared, it was usually in reference to a previous grammatical subject or object, for example, ‘your points have been credited. They will appear on your statement…’ Other than the addition of ‘I,’ the same can generally be said for the new custom corpus, with the exception of the above phrase.

The use of ‘they’ in this phrase distances the correspondence writer from the ‘consultant’ to which ‘they’ refers. This usage appears to reflect the original, external authorship of the rewritten standard letters. It also suggests a division between the writers and the ‘consultants’ at the service centre who take calls. This division was accurate at the time as the call centre and correspondence departments were separate. As a customer-focused, service-oriented extension of the obligatory act of Move II, Invite future contact, it would seem perhaps more appropriate to alter the phrase to ‘We’ll be happy to help.’ After all, to the customer, the LoyaltyOne service centre is a single entity, whichever media is used to make contact.

The phrase is not a direct realisation of Move II, as the obligatory act ‘offers future dialogue’ (3.7.11 and see Table 5.7). Rather, this phrase makes explicit what has previously been implicit in statements such as ‘If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.’ It is a direct realisation of the primary purpose of a service centre – to offer service. It is also directly subordinate to Move II, suggesting that a further optional act is required. A revised version of Move II appears in Table 5.7.
Table 5.7 Component acts of Move II, Invite future contact

MOVE II – INVITE FUTURE CONTACT

Obligatory:
Offer future dialogue, e.g.:
(act of courtesy/value)
If you’d like to know more about your membership… just… speak with a consultant at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre. (N17)
…if you’d like to speak to one of the consultants at the LoyaltyOne Service Centre, pick up the phone… (N19)
You can also e-mail us… (N25)

Optional:
  a. Offer methods of future contact, e.g.:
     (act of courtesy)
     …on 12 34 56… (1)
     …at loyaltyone@travelair.com… (N25)
  b. Advise regarding required information, e.g.:
     (act of courtesy)
     …quoting your membership number. (N57)
  c. Express desire to assist, e.g.:
     (act of courtesy/value/service)
     They’ll be happy to help. (N1)

5.3 Problematic purposes

Creating moves and acts requires a certain amount of subjective selectivity. Each move is based on the communicative purposes of the LoyaltyOne letters, both as they can be viewed from an analysis of the text and from the points of view of TravelAir management and the LoyaltyOne writers who produce them. Defining and distinguishing moves and acts becomes potentially problematic when a single item of information appears to satisfy several communicative purposes. A good example of this difficulty can be provided through a discussion of the following line, introduced in the new style:
Or, if you’re on the Internet, you can check your points online at travelair.com (N47)

This information first appears as part of a standard letter. Placing it in context provides an initial means of identifying its intended purpose:

I'm writing to let you know that we received your request for TravelAir LoyaltyOne points and we've now credited all valid points to your account.

A summary of these points will be listed on an activity statement, which we'll send through the mail. Or, if you're on the internet, you can check your points online at travelair.com (NL11)

Similar realisations are found in several of the standard letters:

Firstly, I am pleased to let you know that all flight points have now been confirmed and credited to your account. They will appear on your next activity statement, which you'll receive through the mail shortly. If you're on the internet, you can check your points online at travelair.com (NL15)

I am pleased to tell you that all flight points have now been confirmed and credited to your account. Some of these points have already appeared on an activity statement. The remainder will appear on your next statement, which you'll receive through the mail shortly.

If you're on the internet, you can check your points along with anything else you need to know by visiting our website at travelair.com (NL22)

From the text provided, NL11 and NL15 both show that this information follows, and is related to, information provided as part of Move A optional act
B, *Inform results of action taken.* That is, the information relates to the presence of a statement showing a summary of the new points and an account balance. From this perspective, the additional line simply provides a further medium in which results can be seen. This move is reader-centred and is an extension of the good news the reader wants to hear.

However, as Askehave and Swales note, research that begins with the ‘traditional text-first’ approach should consider the social context on which the text is based (2001: 207). On that basis, and from the writers’ point of view, this line of text is in fact an indication of a major and intentional change in *TravelAir’s* method of doing business with its members and customers.

One of the specific requirements of the new style, as discussed in 4.4.2, was the ‘onselling of other membership benefits/services,’ *(unpublished *TravelAir* creative brief, 1999)* with a particular emphasis on *TravelAir’s* internet site, which had developed exponentially during the time-frame of this research. To an extent, therefore, this line can be considered a marketing ploy, and a purpose that was quite explicitly required of the writers, thus placing the realisation of this information under the primary purpose of Move III, *Promote other company products/services.*

Textually, the addition of the line in NL11 and NL15 suggests an implicit, embedded realisation of Move III, and it seems more appropriate to retain the initial Move A categorisation. However, in NL22, the provision of this information in a separate paragraph – after the primary information of Move A has been given – removes it from a direct link with Move A. It is no longer information that has been solicited by the customer, and the subject matter is the internet, making the line in NL22 an explicit realisation of Move III. That this is part of an exit sequence can be made clearer by quoting the text which follows it in a separate paragraph, and which is a realisation of Move II, *Invite future contact:*

> Alternatively, if you're not on the internet, just pick up the phone and speak to one of the consultants at the LoyaltyOne Service centre. They'll be happy to help. (NL22)
NL22 also suggests a further purpose inherent in this text, which is a realisation of Move F, *Advise recipient to take action*. That is, encouraging the recipient to use the website is a way of asking them to do something that does not directly involve the service centre, and may well lead to the recipient using the website instead of contacting the service centre in future. For example, many people phone the service centre to enquire about their points balance, or to update their address or other personal details. These things can now be done by the member, online. This also was a specific requirement for the new style, and this kind of advertising and marketing has as its primary goal that of lowering the number of contacts the service centre receives, thus reducing costs in the long term.

The point here is one of context and local knowledge. Without an awareness of the purposes made explicit by the owners of the *LoyaltyOne* business letter genre, the importance of the intent of the statement in NL22 would not be obvious just from a reading of the text. In practice, the embedded nature of the promotional material makes classification as part of a system of moves and acts particularly difficult.

### 5.3.1 Embedded moves and acts

The primary purposes of the *LoyaltyOne* letters can also be combined in ways that appear to complicate any simple or definitive delineation of moves and acts, while being very straightforward for a writer to produce in practice.

**Response to travel agent – 1 member**

I’d like to advise that we have credited <name>’s account with points for all eligible transactions related to this query. As we have not contacted the member directly, you may wish to advise <name> that these points will appear on <his/her> next statement. Alternatively, <s/he> can view this information online at travelair.com

The above standard paragraph is basically a revised version of the common form of good news: optional act A of Move A, then the obligatory act followed by optional act B and then the obligatory act of Move III (made explicit here...
by the use of ‘alternatively,’ though the final line could equally be considered an extension of optional act B), as shown in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8 Common realisation of Move A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>I’d like to advise that</td>
<td>we have credited your account with points for all eligible transactions related to this query</td>
<td>and these points will appear on your next statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Alternatively, you can view this information online at travelair.com</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, in this case the original request has been sent in by someone else (usually a travel agent) on behalf of the member. In these cases, the request has been made by the agent, and so the writer replies to the agent unless specifically requested otherwise. This changes the nature of the realisations, adding additional moves and acts, as detailed in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 Embedded moves and acts in standard response to travel agent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>I’d like to advise that</td>
<td>we have credited &lt;name&gt;’s account with points for all eligible transactions related to this query.</td>
<td>As we have not contacted the member directly, you may wish to advise &lt;name&gt; that these points will appear on &lt;his/her&gt; next statement.</td>
<td>Alternatively, &lt;s/he&gt; can view this information online at travelair.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of the letter has only changed to the extent that the writer is advising a third party. However, as the moves and acts were based on the more common practice of responding directly to the customer, defining this reply in such terms proves somewhat more complex. The first sentence follows the standard format of Move A, optional act A and obligatory act, with a name inserted in place of ‘your.’ The following two sentences contain exactly the same information as optional act B and Move III, however the information is embedded within Move F, Advise recipient to take action, obligatory acts A and B.

5.4 Mixing up the styles: Incompetence, identity and choice

I regret to advise that your travel on [flight details] is ineligible for points as Acme Airlines is not an affiliated partner of our program.

(N27)

The quotation above, taken from letter N27, shows that the original and new styles could be quite similar, and that the presence or absence of just a few words could place the text into one or the other style. In this instance, replacing ‘I’ with ‘we’ would place the quote firmly into the original style. This is an example of the conflation of the two styles that occurred in custom letters after the changeover. The use of ‘advise’ is a return to the original style: the use of a previously key verb. In the original custom corpus ‘advise’ appears 1,379 times, or in approximately 68% of letters, whereas it only appears 367 times in the new custom corpus, a drop to only 11.6% of letters. Conversely, ‘tell’ appears just 20 (0.9%) times in the original corpus, and 1,002 (31.7%) times in the new.

Taking the quotation from N27 out of context, it would therefore appear that a more appropriate realisation of optional act A would be a variation of this phrasing:
Unfortunately, I can't credit you with points for your remaining TravelAir flights taken in March… (N10)

or at least the use of ‘tell you’ in place of ‘advise.’ In this case, however, the writer has three paragraphs of information forming the body, or middle, of the letter. Two paragraphs contain an instance of Move A, and there is one paragraph of Move B, each of which uses optional act A, thus narrowing the writer’s choices for alternate realisations of optional act A, as shown in Table 5.10.

### Table 5.10 Moves and acts in custom letter N27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Move A</th>
<th>Move B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>optional Act A</td>
<td>optional Act A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>obligatory Act</td>
<td>obligatory Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>optional Act B</td>
<td>optional Act B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm pleased to tell you that</td>
<td>I regret to advise that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the points for your flight [details] has [sic] now been credited to your account</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and will appear on an activity statement, which you’ll receive through the mail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move A</td>
<td>I wish to confirm that</td>
<td>Your current balance is 57,450 LoyaltyOne points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the points for your flight [details] was [sic] credited to your account on [date].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Because we’ve had to override our automatic system to make this adjustment,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the credits will appear on your [date] statement with the explanation ‘Points Adjustment’, rather than the full flight details.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move A</td>
<td>If you're on the internet, you'll find these points in your account under 'non-flight activity.'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move B</td>
<td>optional Act B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your travel on [flight details] is ineligible for points as Acme Airlines is not an affiliated partner of our program.

This flight taken is known as a Codeshare. In order to maximise flight frequency, TravelAir, on some occasions, shares aircraft capacity with other airlines. These codeshare flights carry two flight numbers, one from TravelAir (TA), one from the other carrier. In these instances, LoyaltyOne points can only be earned on flights where a TravelAir flight number – or one from any of our program partner airlines - is entered on the ticket.

Each paragraph starts with a redundant fragment realising optional act A. The fragment is not necessary each time, and at the very least should have been removed from the second paragraph/Move A. It is likely that this overuse of an optional element best used at the beginning of a letter has led the author to use ‘I regret to advise,’ simply because ‘I wish to’ and ‘tell you’ have already been used within the same letter. This issue tends to arise out of an overuse of ‘boilerplate’ (standard paragraphs) and a tendency not to re-read and edit letters. It was not uncommon for a letter like this to feature three standard paragraphs, each of which used the same realisation of optional act A so that the recipient reads ‘I’d like to tell you that’ three times in three paragraphs – and each highlighted by a line break between paragraphs. Even when this fragment is varied, as in the above letter, the effect certainly suggests that the writer has used boilerplate – an effect which, if noticed by the reader, entirely erases the intended effect of an individual, personalised reply.

The basis of this letter appears to be three standard paragraphs, which are reproduced in their entirety below:

**TravelAir flights credited**

Thank you for your enquiry about points for your TravelAir flight/s.

I am pleased to tell you that the points have been credited to your account and will appear on an activity statement, which you’ll receive
through the mail. Or, if you’re on the internet, you can check your points online at travelair.com

Your current balance is *** LoyaltyOne points.

All flights credited as one-liner

Thank you for your inquiry about points for your recent flight/s with <airlines/s>.

I’m happy to confirm that the points for ***** have now been credited to your account. Because we’ve had to override our automatic system to make this adjustment, the credits will appear on your statement with the explanation ‘Points Adjustment’, rather than the full flight details.

Your current balance is *** LoyaltyOne points.

Codeshare explanation

The travel in question is known as codeshare. In order to maximise flight frequency, TravelAir, on some occasions, shares aircraft capacity with other airlines. These codeshare flights carry two flight numbers, one from TravelAir (TA), one from the other carrier. In these instances, LoyaltyOne points can only be earned on flights where a TravelAir flight number – or one from any of our program partner airlines - is entered on the ticket.

In general, each standard paragraph is designed to cover one issue. They were written on the assumption that the issue is the primary one to be answered and so, where possible, a tailored introductory paragraph (Move 1) is also included, as in the first two standards above. This design has two main benefits. Firstly, the paragraph includes an appropriate Move 1, obviating the need for the writer to paste a separate and more general introduction into their letter. Secondly, where more than one issue is involved and the writer chooses to use a second standard paragraph, the presence of too much information requires the writer to delete the unnecessary elements of the paragraph, thus theoretically ensuring text is not repeated.

In the first two realisations of Move A in letter N27 the writer appears to have altered the obligatory acts to provide specific detail about flights, and the date
the second flight was credited. In both cases, as noted above, grammatical errors have been made. Where the codeshare explanation has been used the first sentence has also been altered in a manner that is confusing grammatically. The second realisation of optional act A has been altered from ‘I’m happy’ to ‘I wish,’ probably because ‘pleased’ has already been used. As intended, the writer has deleted both realisations of Move 1 and one of Move A, optional act B (Your current balance…), and has shown some awareness of the need to alter optional act A.

5.4.1 A question of competence?

Various members of the LoyaltyOne writing teams have, at times, raised concerns regarding the competence of some writers. Some of the more common issues can be found in the above example. The same grammatical error is repeated twice in the obligatory acts of Move A. That is, the auxiliary verb in each case is singular (‘the points… has’ and ‘the points… was’), probably because of the singular noun in the prepositional phrase inserted between the subject and the verb. Ironically, this ‘mistake’ is consistent with speech patterns, where non-adjacent verbs will often match the number of the last noun used. The fact that the writer has not written the entire sentence but rather filled in the blanks provided by a standard paragraph may also suggest that such mistakes are easily made, as the construction of the sentence is perhaps not so immediately in the mind of the writer.

The use of boilerplate has often been a cause for concern at the service centre precisely because its use appears to require very little creativity from the writer, leading to situations where standard paragraphs are used with little or no revision. The repetitive nature of the subject matter lends itself to the use of standard text and leads to a constant, dynamic and often judgemental argument centred on the twin requirements of quantity and quality.

In some cases grammar mistakes and the use of unrevised boilerplate did appear to be caused by ignorance of some rules of written English grammar, an issue that was highlighted when writers in this position were confronted by a customer enquiry or complaint for which they had no stock response.
The common use of previously written material also raised the possibility of a surprising mix of new and old realisations, despite the comprehensive update to the officially available standard paragraphs. Letter N325 in Table 5.11 below provides a good example.

Table 5.11 New style corpus custom letter N325

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding your TravelAir LoyaltyOne membership account. I apologise for the delay in my response.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfortunately, we can’t give you points for your accommodation on [date], as the [partner] ceased affiliation with the TravelAir LoyaltyOne program on [date].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid this kind of disappointment in the future, I recommend that you check the Your Guide to the Benefits of Membership booklet before booking accommodation. It contains a listing of all our partner hotels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatively, you can always visit our website at loyaltyone.com Here you’ll find full details of our partner airlines and hotels, along with all your membership benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to e-mail us at <a href="mailto:loyaltyone@travelair.com">loyaltyone@travelair.com</a> You may be interested to know that you can access your account (security protected) on-line through the TravelAir website at loyaltyone.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final paragraph of letter N325 is taken straight from a standard paragraph commonly used in the original style, and not one officially considered to be acceptable in the new style. That the final paragraph was probably copied and pasted from previous material without much thought can be seen from the duplication of information concerning the TravelAir website.
5.4.2 Style and identity

The issue of identity is social and it is not generally possible to observe contention and the negotiation of identity solely from the text of LoyaltyOne letters except by extrapolation. That is, where letters in the new custom corpus appear to be written primarily using realisations from the original style, there may be several plausible causes, as examined above. One cause that should not be neglected here is that of genre ownership and what it means for a writer to identify with a written style. As discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.4), the LoyaltyOne business letter genre is the primary object of identification in the correspondence department COP. As such, it is a source of contestation and negotiation of meaning, and it is to be expected that some texts are written primarily in the original style by the deliberate preference of the writer, despite company-preferred style and policy. Consider letter N1291 in Table 5.12:

Table 5.12 New style corpus custom letter N1291

| We are writing in reference to your recent request to credit your [credit card] account with Reward Points earned through charging [transactions] to your card. |
| Thank you for forwarding copies of the tickets and credit card receipts. Before we are able to further investigate your claim for Bonus Reward Points, we ask that you kindly submit a clear copy of the relevant credit card statements. At TravelAir we do not have access to the confidential records of the bank so we are unable to obtain copies on your behalf. We ask that you send these, together with a copy of this letter, to the address printed above. Upon receipt we will be pleased to arrange for Bonus Points, where eligible, to be credited to your [credit card] account. We regret any inconvenience that this request may cause. |
| If you wish to confirm your current Reward points balance at any time, please contact the [credit card] Reward Centre directly on 1234 567 890. |
| Thank you for your support and patronage of TravelAir. |
The subject of this letter was dealt with by members of a specific team. It concerns a sister loyalty program for which the LoyaltyOne service centre was not responsible, but for which certain procedures were carried out. Requests of this nature were therefore not part of the primary service function provided by PSP. As such, this reply was not commonly seen, and was not rewritten as part of the standard paragraphs document. Several similar responses were found in the corpus (e.g. N505, N516, N1290), suggesting that this was an informal ‘standard’ in use several months after the style change.

First person pronouns are conspicuously absent, as is the lack of contractions. The rather old-fashioned, formulaic use of ‘kindly,’ which occasionally appeared in the original style, is at odds with the current informality of the new style, as is the very correct use of ‘upon,’ as well as ‘if you wish’ and ‘patronage.’ This letter would seem more appropriately part of the original custom corpus than the new, and it is highly likely that the writer would have been aware of this.

Though admittedly only informed speculation, it is quite likely that the writer responsible for this text disliked the new style and identified closely with the original style. Several of the older writers were harshly critical of the changes. There are several instances of this particular subject area being treated in first person in the original custom corpus (e.g. 495, 733, 734, 748, 1440), which suggests a quite deliberate decision not to do so in this case.

This letter, written approximately three months after the introduction of the new style, does seem to reflect the significance of identification with a core genre and practice within a COP, and to indicate the strength of tacit individual resistance to intentional change. The resistance is tacit in the sense that it is not openly or regularly voiced, which suggests at least an implicit, diplomatic acceptance of what, after all, is an officially required change. Letters written by experienced employees are not regularly reviewed and it is likely that such occasional 'statements' would go unnoticed. It is also probable, based on the corpus of over 3,000 letters examined, that if issues of identity in terms of a contestation of the new style were still ongoing, they were occasional, and most writers did appear to be using the standard paragraphs and basing their own creativity, where it was necessary, on the officially provided corpus.
5.4.3 Style and choice

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the phrases associated with the old style can be found in the new corpus. Phrases such as ‘if you require any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact us again’ are found in their entirety, despite their absence from the official standard paragraphs. There are instances where the old phrase, having been retained, has been updated: ‘please don’t hesitate’ appears in several letters (e.g. N68, N737, N747, N921).

In a department where letters are at least partially custom written, no style change can ever be absolute. TravelAir and PSP management did not attempt explicitly to ban any given word or phrase. Rather, there was an expectation that writers would write in the new style and, like many other forms of language categorisation, ‘style’ seems to have fuzzy boundaries. That is, the context of the LoyaltyOne genre, the limited and repetitive content and the similarity of information provided already dictates a fairly small set of available words. This is demonstrated by the small number of types in comparison to tokens in the custom corpora, and by the limited number of changes to key nouns and verbs. Indeed, as has already been noted, many of the changes involved text that framed the key content, particularly initial fragments (section 5.2.5) and exit paragraphs (section 5.2.6), rather than changes to the key content itself.

Some words were considered to be out-dated or overly formal and their use was discouraged through the provision of comprehensive standard paragraphs, which covered a high percentage of the commonly received questions, requests and complaints. Words such as pertaining, kindly, wish, forthwith, notwithstanding, patronage, aforementioned, relinquished, forthcoming, furthermore, and ascertain were generally considered to give letters an outdated, verbose or pompous air that did not suit the tone and image TravelAir wished to convey.

Other words, particularly verbs such as ‘advise’ and phrases like ‘I’m pleased to advise’ remained in use with no change other than the use of first person and contractions to indicate a more informal relational style. As the writers became more confident and understood the changes in terms of style rather than of
specific words or phrases, they felt more able to modify their responses where they felt it necessary.

For example, where a response to the first query from a customer would probably be primarily boilerplate, more creativity and customisation would be required if a second response was necessary. Most writers, as well as giving a more in-depth explanation, would be careful not to repeat exactly the same phrases from the first letter. Where a writer felt a complaint required somewhat more formal language, this could still be achieved in a more conversational style.

Arguably, the writers were constrained in their choices by their ability and their understanding of company expectations. As stated above, competence and identity were possible factors. As noted in 4.4.5.2, the writers all received copies of the rewritten standard paragraphs and attended a workshop where they could ask questions and where the nature and reasons for the style change were presented. Company constraints were embedded in the social activity of the COP, in a practice where writing was a primary, but far from the only, activity.

In fact, rather than seeing the change in the negative sense of disallowing certain words and phrases, most writers saw it as a relaxation of strict parameters. In other words, the change was seen positively, as enabling a greater choice of lexical items.
5.5 Summary: The nature of language change in the *LoyaltyOne* genre

The diagram in Figure 5.1 is a pictorial representation of the nature of the intentional changes made in the genre of *LoyaltyOne* business letters. Contractions and a shift towards a simpler lexis were introduced to more closely resemble spoken communication. While the media of written communication remained the same (printed letter, fax, email), the changes require a focus on the interaction between media as a channel of communication and genre (see 1.5.1), and between media as spoken or written communication.

The use of speech-related terms in writing can also be linked to relational issues and suggest a shift in how the *TravelAir* business relationship with customers and members of the *LoyaltyOne* program was perceived (see 6.3.1). The notion of formality can also be linked to the written medium and particularly to aspects of how a given genre may be perceived by writers and recipients. Formality is also a function of the relational aspects of a genre, both reflecting the nature of a relationship and reinforcing or refocussing it.

Media and relational aspects of a genre can both be considered an outcome of communicative purposes and social action, of which a genre is a dialogic result. That is, a genre is part of a communicative process informed by social purpose rather than a descriptive term for an end result. Purpose is also used
necessarily as a means of defining content and here, significantly, change included an explicit focus on marketing and advertising, both more closely associated with sales than with service.

As the diagram in Figure 5.1 is intended to convey, the areas of change are closely interrelated and form a rich and complex interaction variously mediated by perception, paratext and content. The role of genre analysis and communities of practice, as theoretical means by which language change in written communication may be identified and considered, will be discussed further in Chapter 6.
6 Conclusions: Change and the perception of a genre

6.1 Revisiting research questions

Chapter 6, as the final chapter, brings together the various questions and arguments offered throughout the previous chapters. As such, it seems appropriate to expand upon the summary provided in the introduction to this thesis (p. xi), and begin with a review of the research questions considered. I will also map out where discussions intersect, thus providing a guide to the considerations and conclusions presented in the following pages.

Within six months of accepting a full-time position (4.3.1) with PSP, in the correspondence department of the TravelAir LoyaltyOne service centre (2.3), I heard about a proposed change to the style in which correspondence was written (4.4.2). My interest was aroused primarily by the negative reaction of the correspondence department community and the insistence of many senior staff that the style changes were inappropriate (4.4.3). My initial research question therefore centred on perception: I wanted to know why the changes were so disliked (4.4). Thus my attention was focussed on the social parameters of the situation, and this was reinforced by concerns amongst senior staff as to how the new style would be implemented, leading to questions about methods of learning in a business environment (4.4.5). I was introduced to the notion of Communities of Practice (1.4.2), which presented a unit of analysis by which I might consider perception and learning and which, given the highly local community context of the change, appeared to better capture the social aspect of my research (2.3, 2.4) than the more specifically text-oriented notion of discourse communities (1.4.1, 1.4.2).

At the same time, the negative response of senior staff was being voiced in terms that related to genre labelling: ‘this is not a business letter’ (4.4.3). This led me to query the local perception of text and the linguistic nature of the changes themselves. I was already aware of Swales’ (1990) genre analysis and
the style change seemed to be an ideal opportunity to discover whether this method could account for the linguistic changes (Chapters 3 and 5). On reading into the literature, I was presented with a considerably more complex view of genre theory, from a variety of disciplines (Chapter 1). Swales referred to genre as ‘a fuzzy concept’ in 1990. It still seems to be a concept that cannot simply be pinned down. The popular understanding of a genre as a category of some kind, linking types by similarities or organising a variety of texts into groups, glosses the use of the term quite accurately. The problems (and hence the interest) seem to lie in the negotiation of borders and boundaries, and in the definition and use of genre as a unit of analysis in both a social and textual context.

I was also confronted by ethnographic issues surrounding my own direct participation within the correspondence department community (4.2). While part of my research involved an investigation into learning processes and community response to the style change, my conditions of employment required that I ensure the successful implementation of the change (4.3). Thus my enquiry into perceptions, reactions, practice and learning was directly affected by my own contributions as the primary party responsible for the success of the project (4.4.5).

To this point, I have separated this thesis in two ways, in consideration of the nature of the material researched and here presented. In looking at the style change of a business letter genre, it seemed appropriate to divide the presentation into two parts. The first part describes the text and context before the change, the second part describes the change itself, both at a textual level and in terms of community perception and learning strategies.

In seeking to illustrate the text and its context, I chose to provide both a textual and a social analysis. As such, Chapter 2 of part one introduced the then-fairly-stable social aspects and practice of the LoyaltyOne service centre writing community, following Dias et al. (1999), and taking as its primary unit of analysis Wenger’s (1998) notion of Communities of Practice (COP), along with Beaufort’s (1997) writing roles. Chapter 3 followed this with a textual analysis, primarily following Swales (1990) and aspects of Lewin et al. (2001), and taking into consideration the communicative purposes described in Chapter 2 (Askehave and Swales, 2001). In part two, Chapter 4 provided a view of the
correspondence department community as it responded to the change, particularly from the COP perspectives of practice, negotiation and identity. The way in which the writers perceived the change was discussed, as well as the strategies by which learning and ownership were achieved. Chapter 5 took the textual analysis of Chapter 3 as its starting point and provided a comparative and contrastive view of the language changes made to the LoyaltyOne business letter genre.

The second of my methods of separation, dividing textual analysis and social analysis, reflects the different emphases to be found in the literature. As I remarked at the beginning of Chapter 1 (1.2.1), the notion of genre as a means of organising text seems to require a consideration of four characteristics, often presented as two sets of opposites: conventional features and textual regularity, reflecting and constituting context and social action; and recognition through fixed and unchanging elements and boundaries, set against dynamic individualism, fluidity and evolution.

I have suggested that the fixed or fluid nature of genres should not be viewed as in opposition to each other but as part of a duality, with both aspects always present and always in tension, producing a single rich and complex conceptual unit (2.11). However, at this juncture, and in an attempt to begin summarising and discussing my research and conclusions, I find I must step back a pace and turn to a question I have left largely implicit until now: what is genre?

### 6.2 What is genre? Accounting for textual change

When the LoyaltyOne correspondence department writers first understood that the LoyaltyOne business letter was going to be changed, many writers complained that the new style was not that of a business letter (4.4.3). I was not aware of previous research into such an abrupt, intentional style change within the context of a business COP, and the question that intrigued me at the beginning of this research had to do with how people perceive a genre. That is, I wanted to know what it was that was represented by the genre label ‘business
letter’ in this instance, and why the proposed changes to the *LoyaltyOne* letter made that label suspect in the view of many members of the COP which owned that genre.

On reading into the literature, that question resolved into several. What is a genre? By what parameters is a given genre defined, by whom and on what basis? What would need to change for a genre to have changed? What is the difference between a changed genre with a new label and a known, labelled genre with new parameters?

To attempt to answer these questions, I must start with the first, but not in terms of organisation or categorisation. Rather, it seems the first boundary that requires consideration has to do with the theoretical use of genre as a unit of analysis. Dias et al. (1999: 18) remark that genre studies ‘is not just an account of genres but is also, more generally, a situated account of writing per se.’ They maintain that genre studies ‘ties the textual to the social, sees texts as action and texts as in dialogue with each other’, however, ‘none of these strengths relate specifically to explaining genres.’ What then is genre? What parameters do relate to explaining genres? Dias et al. continue, ‘genre in this view has two aspects: social action and textual regularity’ (1999: 18, and see 1.2.1). There is no explicit definition of where the boundaries of genre are, or how they might tie in with other units of analysis.

Swales is much more explicit. His working definition of genre can be summarised briefly:

1. a genre is a class of communicative events;
2. its principle criterial feature is a shared set of communicative purposes;
3. instances of a genre vary in their prototypicality;
4. the rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning and form; and
5. genre names are valuable ethnographically but typically need further validation (1990: 45-58).
In this case, the primary unit of analysis lying outside the scope of the notion of genre is that of the discourse community, and a consideration of genre requires a recognition of, and some reflection on, the community owning the genre; its goals, and the communicative purposes for which it uses its genres.

Frow is equally explicit, however his terminology is quite different. He distinguishes ‘between the following forms of organisation of texts […]:

- the *semiotic medium* in which a text is inscribed and presented (speech or writing, colour and line, three-dimensional mass, the tone and pitch of the human voice or of other sounds, recorded and projected light …);
- the ‘*radical of presentation*’ through which the text is presented to its receiver (first- or third-person narration, dramatic narration, non-narrative address, song, and so on);
- *mode* in the adjectival sense as a thematic and tonal qualification or ‘colouring’ of genre;
- *genre* or kind, a more specific organisation of texts with thematic, rhetorical and formal dimensions; and
- *sub-genre*, the further specification of genre by a particular thematic content (2005: 67).

Frow then makes the point that ‘apart from the relation between genre and sub-genre, these forms of textual organisation should not be thought to be hierarchically ordered between themselves (2005: 67).

I relate these differences here because they directly impact upon how I may clarify the results of my research, specifically, how I may relate the nature of the style change and the perception of the community it impacted. Frow follows Jauss (1982) and Todorov (1990) in seeing genre as ‘a historically changing system rather than as a logical order’ and as ‘actual and contingent [but not arbitrary] forms rather than necessary and essential forms’ (2005: 71). He therefore sees ‘the ‘internal’ organisation of genre’ as ‘understood in terms of particular historical codifications of discursive properties’ (2005: 71). Frow goes on to consider these structural features in more detail, however the social
institutions and ownerships that construct (and are in turn influenced by) the properties of a genre and other means of textual organisation are largely left implicit and general.

On the other hand, Swales offers a direct means of linking social action to its textual realisation by using the concept of the discourse community. I considered some of the issues raised by communicative purpose and discourse community in my Chapter 1 literature review (see 1.3.2, 1.4.1 and 1.4.2). For this research, I chose to replace discourse community with communities of practice (1.4.2). As with any unit of analysis, there are boundaries and definitions to COP which make it both meaningful and useful, and narrow its sphere of influence. As such, I do not contend that all genres may usefully be considered in the light of a distinct and quite localised interactive group. COP was useful in this instance as a means of highlighting the genre ownership and perception of a distinct community and to discuss the appropriation of ownership by other COPs and the negotiation and changes of perception required to regain ownership once changes had been made (an area considered in 4.4.3 and 4.4.5).

In order to discuss the nature of the language changes themselves, as presented in Chapter 5, some remarks about the boundaries of textual organisation and genre as a unit of analysis are necessary, and highlight the somewhat problematic nature of conceptualising change. Swales’ development of genre analysis (and the extension of Lewin et al., 2001) is particularly problematic in this regard. The privileged position accorded the notion of communicative purpose necessarily implies a generic recognition of the relationship between writer and intended reader. That is, the purpose a writer has in mind cannot be separated from her social position and that of her intended recipient. Indeed, many purposes are created by social position.

As I have demonstrated through chapters 3 and 5, the relational implication is not carried through in a genre analysis using moves and acts. Discussions of communicative purpose to date concentrate on content, on what is being said and possibly why. The description of moves and acts therefore indicates the communicative content the writer appears to trying to achieve. No mention is made of the perceived relationship implied in the formality or otherwise of the language used, or how something is said. Indeed, Swales’ position does not
easily allow for the kind of change considered here, as he notes that ‘the nature of genres is that they coalesce what is sayable with when and how it is sayable’ (1990: 88), which implies that knowing what can be said must also include how it is said – and that therefore changing how something is said changes what is said.

Effectively, then, in order for my textual analysis to recognise that any change had occurred, I attempted firstly to introduce relational purposes to my definitions of the LoyaltyOne business letter moves and acts, a modification to the method of textual genre analysis that does not appear to have been suggested elsewhere. Thus, Chapter 3 anticipates this requirement (3.5) and points out the relational nature of the LoyaltyOne correspondence. Where necessary, the moves and acts later defined (3.7) include relational notions such as empathy, respect, and courtesy. Even so, the lexical changes discussed in Chapter 5 are not, for the most part, accounted for by changes in moves and acts, and it is necessary to look at an organisational level other than that provided by the textual genre analysis of Swales’ or Lewin et al. (2001) for an explanation. As such, I must concede that, while my genre analysis provided insight into the structure of the LoyaltyOne genre, it did not really account for the changes I set out to consider.

Of course, Askehave and Swales (2001), in suggesting that communicative purposes be considered through an analysis of social setting, do allow for a description of the relationship between writer and reader to be undertaken prior to, or complementing, the textual analysis of genre. Such a description favours the stabilised-for-now context within which many genres are analysed, however it would also separate genre from the notion of register, or Hallidayan tenor. I would suggest, then, that the textual analysis itself is not adequate for accounting for the changes described herein, and as an extension of that, its account of lexical choice would also seem, potentially, to be rather assumed knowledge, and perhaps therefore misconstrued as transparent or normative.

Alternatively, it is also possible to suggest that no change has in fact occurred in the relationship between writer and reader, business and customer. Rather, the change is a matter of changing the perception a reader obtains of the TravelAir company through the style and tone of its rhetoric.
In clarifying his notion of the structural dimensions of genre, Frow includes the term *rhetorical structure* and suggests that it ‘has to do with the way textual relations between the senders and receivers of messages are organised in a structured situation of address’ (2005: 74). He goes on to argue that ‘Credibility, authority, and emotional tone are effects of these rhetorical relations and of their formal expression in the syntactic and intonational nuances of discourse’ and ‘The degree of formality of an utterance (its decorum) is another of the ways in which both a relationship between speaker and hearer and a set of implications about what kind of world is being projected from it are conveyed’ (2005: 75).

It is exactly these issues with which the writers of the *LoyaltyOne* correspondence department were confronted. The *formal organisation* and *thematic content* that form Frow’s other generic elements (2005: 74-76) did not change, though the expanded use of the email medium and the intense repetition of thematic content played significant roles in the overall reaction of the COP to the style change.

In this case, then, the structure of genre is quite explicitly linked to the nature of the relationship between writer and reader, which in other terminologies has been called tenor, or register, and which to an extent overlaps with Frow’s organisational concept of *mode*. Frow, however, much like Dias et al. (1999, and see 3.2) makes no attempt to codify his concept of genre into a specific form of textual analysis.

The relationship between writer and reader, company and customer, may also be considered from the perspective of Miller’s *social motive*. In her seminal article, which lays much of the theoretical groundwork for genre studies (Dias et al. 1999: 20), Miller (1994) argues that genres are ‘typified rhetorical responses to situations that are socially interpreted or constructed as recurrent or similar; genres are thus social actions.’ Social action and social motive provide a context for rhetorical choices, for what it is socially acceptable to say in a given situation. And social context must include issues of register: how something that needs to be said may actually be said, whether formal or informal, intimate, friendly, distant, and so on.
In genre studies to date there tends to be a conflation of genre and register: what is said and how it is said are inextricably linked. Nor would I dispute that this is often the case, that social action and acceptable behaviour limits both what can be said and how it can be said in equal measure. Where registerial changes in a single genre are noted, they tend to be in diachronic studies, such as Bazerman’s (1988) consideration of changes in the presentation of experimental argument.

In Chapter one, I paraphrased Giddens (1984: 237):

We make instances of genres in cognisance of the genres that surround us. We have the ability to appropriate a genre for our own uses, even as our understanding of social responsibilities may be shaped by the genres we use. Coming to know the social actions contained in a genre is not only an inherent aspect of genre itself, but also allows us to transform that genre (1.4.3).

If genre is an outcome of social action and social motive, appropriating a genre potentially allows us to transform our understanding of the nature of social motives and actions. To express this as a question, what actually occurs when content or information is not changed, but the style or register in which it is presented is changed?

My answer, based on this study, is that the perception of the nature of the social action changes (not necessarily the action itself), which in this case called into question the identity of the genre (see also 6.3). Thus, ‘this is not a business letter’ because the tone, the formality expressed in lexical choice, has changed. It was uncomfortable for the writers in the correspondence department because the content of the letters was linked, through context and learning, to the register in which that content was written, and as far as they were concerned, the context had not changed.

Social motive, rather than social action, could be considered the driving force of change in this study. TravelAir were providing the same service, thus there is no change in social action. Rather, the company was seeking to change perceptions. In a business context, the reasons behind how and why a given
action is carried out change in line with market forces and social pressure (by which I mean what appears to be successful business activity at a given point in time, and what does not). At one time, a letter written in a formal style was preferred because it indicated authority and engendered respect. Now such formality is seen to be pompous and arrogant, and too distant. A friendly, less formal style is preferred, to give an impression of a caring company with a strong service focus, involved in the life of the wider community.

Perhaps fortunately, the notion of duality, of structure and activity mutually defining each other, renders unnecessary questions such as whether the public perception of business practices causes change, or whether changes in business practice influence public perception.

Concerning the nature of genre theory and the question of what a genre actually is, it would seem that the difficulty lies primarily in the practical application of theory, the definition of terms (particularly genre and register, in this instance) and the scope of potential units of analysis.

6.2.1 The nature of moves and acts: Content and generic levels

The decision to make one thing a move and another an act, so placing a boundary between one move and the next, and to see them as somehow rhetorically discrete bytes of information or purpose, seems to me to allow a highly subjective, arbitrary selection of steps, depending on the researcher’s sensitivity to the genre. I am sure that my view of LoyaltyOne business letters is at least in part a product of my time both as an employee actually writing them, and as a researcher with academic knowledge of genres and genre studies. An outsider to the COP or a more seasoned researcher may well have suggested alternative moves and acts (see Chapter 4).

On the other hand, the social factors, particularly the emphasis on communication, provide a quite different view of generic description to that of the kind of quantitative studies Swales refers to as producing ‘discrete-item surface feature assemblies of data’ (1990: 3). There would therefore seem to be some benefit in teaching such moves as a means of raising awareness of basic
purposes amongst students, even if it can be argued that genre production and description should be considerably more complex.

It also seems unlikely to me that writers think in terms of such discrete moves when in the process of composing a letter. That said, there is often a marked difference between the levels at which certain moves are operationalised that seems likely to be directly linked to the difference between wider generic expectations and community-specific, dynamic content. That is, business letters, and for that matter letters in general, have generic norms that are recognised by a far wider audience than any one community. For example, move 1 – respond to initiated dialogue (see 3.7.1) contains formats of response that are common both to the letter genre in general and to many letters-of-reply: ‘Dear X, Thank you for…’ I remember writing at an early age letters that began something like: ‘Dear Gran, Thank you very much for the gift voucher you sent me for my birthday.’ Move 1 obligatory acts a and b, and optional act a are all represented here. It should not be forgotten either that generic knowledge includes paratextual items that frame and partially define the letter genre (and media format, by which they are also partially defined), such as the date and an address, or a fax header.

Such items are not wholly owned by any one discourse community or more localised COP. They are used far more widely and have become normative and transparent within our society. Their purpose is a generic social requirement beyond any easily-definable social group. Despite this broad, standard usage, even move 1 requires some context specific thought from a writer. For example, style or register may differ from context to context, as will the content required to fulfil move 1 optional act a – summarise received correspondence.

6.2.2 Genre boundaries and the nature of research

The issue of what exactly a genre is can also be questioned through a consideration of research intentions and the text usually analysed in genre research. That is, I argue in chapters 1 and 3 that paratext, or the information surrounding the body text usually considered by genre research, should also be taken into account as elements belonging to a genre. This suggestion raises
CHAPTER SIX

questions concerning the nature of genre research and how it applies to notions of readers, writers and genre ownership.

For example, I noted in 3.10.1 that the marketing agency contracted to rewrite the *LoyaltyOne* letters also altered the design of the pre-printed A4 letterhead. This was done quite deliberately, to enhance the new marketing communicative purpose of ‘onselling other membership benefits.’ The intention was to create an impact for the reader, presenting further information designed to alter readers’ behaviour by suggesting they use the *TravelAir* website to manage their *LoyaltyOne* account, and to influence them in travel decisions that may lead to further sales. Thus, to fully appreciate the changes made to the *LoyaltyOne* letter, and how communicative purposes were achieved, it seems appropriate in this case to consider the immediate context of the body text rather than the body text alone.

I also noted in 3.10.1 that text surrounding the body text can be constrained by the practices of other communities. Such text also therefore occurs as a boundary element between different practices, and it thus affects local, situated genre knowledge, at least implicitly. In this case, I am referring to the practice of machine folding and enveloping letters, and the automatic scanning of addresses for sorting purposes by the postal service. These are external practices, of which many writers were unaware, however they impacted directly upon the position, size and font, and lack of punctuation in the recipient’s address, all parameters for which writers were responsible in their daily production of the genre.

In academic contexts, genre knowledge may potentially be cultural. For example, in my two years in China I worked as a language editor in the office of a university journal. The journal had the usual author guidelines, pertaining to the style of citations and the presentation of text and diagrams. All submissions of papers by Chinese authors (and a high percentage by overseas authors) did not observe these guidelines, and the full-time academic editors and typesetters considered it part of their job to revise incorrect formatting. I also found that many abstracts did not follow the standard requirements, and I sent many back for revision. My point here is that, while an academic genre study using the methodology provided by Lewin et al. (2001) could provide detailed information on the writing of abstracts that could be particularly useful
for ESP teaching, genre studies generally take for granted knowledge concerning style guides and formatting, and yet it simply would not occur to many Chinese scholars that a submission to an overseas journal may be rejected not on academic or language grounds, but because functional guidelines have not been met. As such, I would argue that there is a place in genre studies for local, contextual and cultural knowledge concerning paratextual elements and elements of formatting such as font choice, spacing, style of references and so on, and that these elements can contribute to the realisations of communicative purposes.

6.3 Ownership and situatedness: COP perceptions and learning change

I noted in 4.4.4 that even editing and proofreading at LoyaltyOne relied on local knowledge as much as on general writing skills. I also made the point that the style change described herein is really remarkably simple, to the extent that anyone with some writing skill should have little difficulty writing in either of the styles presented. I suggested that there is an issue of perception here, which has to do with membership in a COP and so identity and meaning. I wish to unpack this area further here.

My research suggests that a genre can be inextricably linked to the practice of the community of which it is a part. This is particularly so when the genre concerned is highly prestigious. In Beaufort’s research, business letters were low status texts: they had little to do with the success of the company next to grant writing, which in itself is a considerably more complex text (Beaufort, 2000). But in this research, to the LoyaltyOne correspondence department COP, business letters were the primary focus of the job. They represented the company in direct, personal contact with members of the general public, whose loyalty to TravelAir was of paramount importance to the company. For the writer, the letter also represented an end product: it contained and presented the results of their investigative practice and their local knowledge, and it was the means by which their ability to meet employment criteria was judged.
This notion of such localised genre ownership does not suit all genres, of course, as I noted in 3.2.3. Academic writing encompasses groups often widely separated physically; for example different universities and research companies. They are linked by areas of study and research and by the journals and conferences that bring ideas and current positions together for consideration and debate. As such, academic genres are owned by a much larger constellation of practices. The nature of journal articles and their readership, the desire of would-be academics to learn how to write in the necessary style, and the prestige associated with academic publication all contribute to what makes the genre. Business letters, on the other hand, are both more diffuse and more specific. The notion of business letter crosses all styles of business and covers a vast array of possible content. No one group or company can be said to own the business letter genre. Even narrowing the genre down to a sub-genre of business letters-of-reply and considering only the travel and loyalty industries, there are still many companies producing much the same genre, albeit independent of each other. The indeterminate, general nature of the business letter allows a community or constellation of practice to claim ownership of its own variety, in a way far more particular and narrow than would be the case for a genre such as the research paper. In this sense, then, and in this thesis, the notion of genre ownership is conflated with the notion of the situatedness of the specific writing context.

That is, no matter how skilled a writer may be, writing letters as a newcomer to the LoyaltyOne Service Centre would be a daunting prospect, simply because to write anything the content, terms and conditions of the LoyaltyOne program must first be known (2.5). In this sense, prior knowledge of a business letter genre is of little consequence as only general knowledge of writing skills and letter layout would be of any use. As writers learn the necessary content, so they also learn how the company wishes it to be expressed: the thematic, rhetorical content of the letters. They learn under the pressure of expectations also – the job requires them to close a minimum of 15 queries a day (2.9).

A newcomer enters a community that has been at its practice for many years. Practice is always dynamic, a negotiation of meaning and identity, of general skills and knowledge with local knowledge, and of relationships. But that dynamism is also based on the necessary stability of a community. Its history
incorporates institutionalised processes, jargon, techniques, equipment, rules, shortcuts, and so on. By definition, an expert, insider or oldtimer is recognised as such by their knowledge of and ability in the core practices of a COP.

My argument is that the learning involved in writing a *LoyaltyOne* letter cannot be separated from the socialisation and learning involved in becoming an expert insider in all other areas of the practice of the COP. Indeed, letter writing is so central to the correspondence department COP that to separate it from other areas of practice would be a pointless, abstract exercise. What may seem a very simple style change from the perception of a skilled writer and outsider simply does not take into account the multiple levels of response to the change from a member of the COP who could identify directly with the letter as a focus of meaning: the site of situated rhetorical action and, as I argued in 2.10, a reified boundary object (Wenger, 1998: 106).

That is, as discussed in Chapter 4, the style change affected more than just the obvious surface textual changes. Firstly, it involved a negotiation of ownership (4.4.3) and the negative implication that the current work of the COP was old-fashioned (5.4.3). Secondly, there was the suggestion, again implied, that the primary function of the service centre, that of maintaining relationships, could be improved. These two areas impacted directly on the writers’ identity with, ownership of, and pride in their practice (4.4). Thirdly, repetition and a reliance on intertextual authority had institutionalised content (2.5, 2.9). Dynamic, contentious practice took place over a background of stability; of decisions made and paragraphs worded and re-worded over time (2.10). What writers wrote was directly linked to what they knew they could say. They knew what was appropriate and legally acceptable and many had operationalised the specific phrases and keywords of their writing practice (2.9).

6.3.1 ‘This isn’t a business letter!’

*Worldview and perceived social action*

Negotiating ownership and meaning involved issues of perception, most stridently voiced in the initial opinion of senior correspondence staff: ‘this isn’t a business letter!’ and ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!’ (4.4.3). In identifying with and owning their letters, the writers could be said to have internalised a certain
worldview or ideology, brokered by their induction into the practices of the COP. That is, their practice provided a frame for notions of reality and societal expectation. In the case of the focal business letter genre, the change in writing style marked a change in the perceived formality of business relations, as understood by the correspondence department COP from the manager down.

A perceived need for formality created the original style, developed by the small group who first formed the correspondence COP. Over time, it is likely that the style, and the repeated, intertextual authority of the letters themselves created a perception of the need for formality in the view of subsequent members of the now well-established COP. Or put another way, it can be argued that the original members of the fledgling COP had a great deal of influence over the style of the correspondence; an influence that successive, initially peripheral new members would not be able to match, as their socialisation and learning tended to involve an acceptance of the authority of those who had mastered their practice. To use a construction metaphor, decisions were made as part of the process of laying the foundations of the COP. Succeeding members built on what had already been laid down. Established precedence became institutionalised, and new participants learned how to see this aspect of their world through the genres at hand: thus they learned that TravelAir expected them to engage in a relatively formal written relationship with its customers.

It was (at least in part) this issue which gave rise to the need for negotiation when the new style was first mooted, and a realignment of perceptions as part of its implementation (4.4.5.1). The style change altered a significant sense of the writers’ identity with their job – their relationship with the customer. This change in perception was primarily provided by the textual changes, not the other way around, and writers thus had to provide themselves with a new aspect of ideology (worldview) and work identity – they had to change the way they saw one important, relational aspect of their world as employees/writers at LoyaltyOne.

My argument is predicated on an understanding that social action and motive is not simply there as some kind of static force animating a community, but that, much like the notion of genre, it is both institutionalised and fixed, and
evolving and dynamic. That is, perceptions of what social action/motive is in a
given practice must also be negotiated within that practice.

What TravelAir did in appropriating ownership of the LoyaltyOne business
letter genre cannot merely be stated in terms of stylistic language changes.
TravelAir’s goal was to affect its customers’ perception of their relationship
with the company, and in doing so it also challenged the writers to change their
perception of their own relationship with the customer.

Frow concludes his introduction to genre by echoing Miller’s (1984) influential
work:

…what we learn, in ‘doing’ genre (in performing and transforming it),
is the values we share or don’t share with others and the means with
which to challenge or defend them. Through the use of genres we learn
who we are, and encounter the limits of our world (2005: 144).

In transforming the LoyaltyOne business letter genre, TravelAir recognised the
power of the letters to alter or shape perception. Many things go into a
customer’s impression of a company, including the goods and services they
sell, advertising through a variety of media, news stories (e.g. on finance or
charitable works) and so on. A customer’s most recent direct experience,
especially personal communication, is highly likely to affect his view
(regardless of previous experience), the more so if that experience is in any
way negative. For TravelAir, then, the formality of the language in the
LoyaltyOne letters would, at some level, affect how recipients perceived the
company. And TravelAir wanted the letters to project a more informal,
personal, youthful and caring attitude, something the ‘relationship marketing’
manager felt better reflected the ‘spirit’ of the company.

Of course, I do not mean to suggest that this change in itself would have quite
such a profound impact as may be implied. Nor was the change quite so simple
as one of formality in tone. In terms of communicative purpose, sales and
marketing rationales were beginning to vie with the primary functions of
service and loyalty retention. The exit moves described in Chapter 5 were
directing traffic to the more impersonal, if highly interactive, realm of the
internet. Some of the more cynical writers felt that the more personal image projected by the style change covered a move away from more personal service.

6.3.2 Modes of belonging: Engagement, imagination and alignment

One very useful aspect of Wenger’s COP framework is his development of modes of belonging as a source of identity and negotiation: engagement, imagination and alignment. These three modes also provide a framework through which an understanding of genre as both static and dynamic might be enhanced.

At LoyaltyOne, the daily engagement with the business letter genre and its position as a focal point for identity and negotiation meant that the genre was always shifting and changing, as unique circumstances of individual writers and customers caused shifts in expectations and required social action. Over time, paragraphs were refined, words and phrases went in and out of fashion, new employees brought fresh perspectives that altered aspects of the text even as they learned to conform. At the same time, the community owned its understanding of why letters were written as they were, and it had a long history of reification and identification. Newcomers, as peripheral participants, learned to align themselves with the community expectations: they had neither the authority nor the position to challenge alignment. They engaged with practice first, their alignment was assumed (after all, they were paid to do the job, and to do it the way the community said was right) and ‘why’ questions were generally left to their imagination. That is, if anyone actually asked ‘why do we write this way?’ he would probably be told about the terms and conditions. If the questioner then specified style and tone as opposed to content, it is likely he would be told that the letters were formal because they were usually to business people – they were business letters.

The actual reason letters were written in a formal style had more to do with the preferences of the original manager and writers of the LoyaltyOne program when the COP was being established, as suggested above. However, as practice and identification arguably require some level of alignment, most
writers, if asked to verbalise the tacit, used terms like ‘formal’ and ‘business relationship’ in order to justify the style, and to show a personal ownership of meaning.

As such, when alignment and imagination are largely tacit, the dynamic nature of a genre in an established community of practice is at the level of engagement and practice. Thus, the genre can be highly stable, transparent and unquestioned, and yet, within quite fixed parameters, it retains its potential for change, for unique and individual development. Over time, changes in practice are likely to lead to changes in engagement and eventually in alignment and imagination. For example, the introduction of email correspondence at **LoyaltyOne** caused a slow movement away from the traditional, formal style of business letter. The nature of the medium – perceived to be far more immediate than the postal service or facsimile – may be responsible in part for the change in practice, as well as a marked difference in the nature, style and tone of the queries received.

When another COP appropriated the meaning of the business letter, and changed it, they interfered with the ongoing process of engagement and practice, forcing the question of alignment. For this reason, the writers raised the issue of generic type. The new style was not the same, and so it could not be a business letter. The writers had invested significant levels of identification in their writing. While their imagination could perhaps conceive of a different approach to business letters, that was not how they had chosen to understand what a business letter was and they had aligned with the notions of formality, respect and authority, all of which appeared to be undermined by the new style.

**COP notions of identity and alignment, engagement and imagination demonstrate a number of angles from which to consider the nature of perception, change, and a very social perspective of the nature of a genre. While perhaps the textual changes are arguably fairly straightforward, the affect of these changes on the community of writers, in terms of their practice and their identity, were quite profound, and required them to re-perceive the business letter genre, re-aligning their expectations as both a prelude to and a part of the learning process.**
6.4 Communities of practice: A broad brush?

Recent work using COP as the primary unit of analysis has moved in a particular, practical direction: creating and sustaining communities as a means for business to manage knowledge (Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003, Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger’s original monograph considered COPs from the primary perspective of situated learning, an area that has also continued to garner interest (Wenger, 1998, Barrett, 2005, Stehlik and Carden, 2005).

In this research, I chose to use COP for several reasons. As noted in 1.4.2, I followed Dias et al. in considering COP to be ‘both more general [than the notion of a discourse community], in that it covers activity beyond language, and more precise, since it centers on what groups of people do’ (1999: 29). I was also interested in providing a social account of learning; the way in which the style change impacted the writing community and how that community reacted, in terms of their understanding of the change (perception and worldview), their ability to master the practical aspects of it, and their learning strategies. COPs original emphasis on learning within a community formed around a given practice provided a useful set of units of analysis from which to consider both social learning and my own position as participant and observer.

To a certain extent, Wenger’s more recent work redefines COP for the specific purpose of knowledge management. He describes a department’s purpose as ‘To deliver a product or service’ and a team’s purpose is ‘To take care of an ongoing operation or process,’ both of which accurately describe the formal purposes of the LoyaltyOne correspondence department and its constituent teams. The purpose of a COP, however, becomes ‘To create, expand, and exchange knowledge, and to develop individual capabilities’ (Wenger et al., 2002: 42). This purposing moves away from the initial view of COP as a social theory of learning, and the related notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) as a means of gaining access to a practice and becoming a fully invested master (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Indeed, Wenger et al. find it necessary to introduce the notion of domain to define the topics and issues a community cares about (2002: 45), which previously appears to have been conflated with the idea of engagement in social practice. As such, this research relates
primarily to Wenger’s original thesis, and the question I first wish to revisit here concerns the issue of boundaries, as considered in 2.7 and 4.3.1.

While a community’s borders can be acceptably fuzzy, COP as a unit of analysis may be in danger of losing coherence if what constitutes a community cannot readily be defined. Wenger’s original monograph briefly defines community as ‘a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence’. Practice is ‘a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action (1998: 5). On this basis, the writing teams under the correspondence department umbrella formed a COP, while the administration teams that also belonged within the department did not. However, in introducing domain as another definition of membership, Wenger et al. potentially blur the boundaries created by practice.

The notion of domain does seem to have potential. For example, groups of employees in the workplace whose practice is diverse but who are linked at times by other forms of membership directly related to the workplace, such as active members of a trade union, may usefully be defined as a COP. On the other hand, and in the case of this research, the use of domain may have changed the COP boundaries to include at least one of the administrative teams in the correspondence department (coding/sequencing, see 2.3.2, 2.4.1), and employees in the call centre, thus moving the focus away from the particular practice of the writers. At the very least, recent developments in COP do seem to require researchers to be very specific about the nature of the particular COP they are investigating, and the perspectives by which that COP is defined.

The second issue raised by COP as a unit of analysis concerns the levels of detail it may usefully describe. COP lends itself to Geertz’s ‘thick’ description, and much more could have been said concerning the social dynamics of the LoyaltyOne service centre. However, in describing the practice of the correspondence department, I found it necessary to introduce alternative analytical devices that could better capture the stages and details of writing and genre knowledge. Those that complemented COP included the diagram in 2.5
which followed Johns (1997) in considering the sources of genre knowledge
and, primarily, Beaufort’s (1997, 2000) notions of writing roles and stages of
apprenticeship (2.6, 4.4.4). In attempting to explicate the level to which some
writing at LoyaltyOne may almost become automatic, I turned to Activity
Theory and the notion of operationalisation (2.9). In some instances, therefore,
COP units of analyses may be too general to allow a close examination of
specific areas of practice. The framework does, however, appear to provide a
conceptual space with a consistent set of general principles, flexible enough to
accept and ground other methods of analysis, and rich enough to present a wide
range of descriptive analyses.

6.5 Further research directions

This research has highlighted the potential for change within genres that might
otherwise be considered institutionalised and fixed. Since the time of this study,
TravelAir has made further changes to the LoyaltyOne letters, resulting in a
new style manual. The correspondence department no longer exists and has
been combined with the call centre, producing teams who ‘multi-skill.’ This
means that there is no longer a group of writers, but rather teams who answer
inbound calls and correspondence. Writers who were originally part of the
correspondence department now also answer phones, and call centre staff are
also expected to answer correspondence. These changes raise a number of
issues, particularly concerning the quality of letter-writing, which leads to
questions of literacy and grammar comprehension. While I have indicated that
this was an issue within legitimate peripheral learning, the operationalisation of
writing procedures and the use of standard paragraphs, the scope of this
research did not consider causes and solutions.

The learning practices of companies with such ‘multi-skill’ teams would be of
interest both in terms of communities of practice and the repetition and
institutionalisation of generic texts.
I have also remarked upon my own involvement in coaching and providing a new textual ‘history,’ which directly impacted upon the results described herein. Further studies of change management, including community coping strategies, negotiation, identity and alignment, may also provide a wider context from which to examine genre change, and a greater critical consideration of communities of practice.

The consideration of the business letter-of-reply genre is intentionally narrow in this thesis and, as such, only the immediate intertextual context has been examined. Research into wider genre relationships may prove interesting, particularly in areas such as business-to-public relations and loyalty retention, methods of written contact (individual writers responding directly versus direct mail (3.10.2) with varying content based on demographic information), and the moves, acts and lexical markers of relevant fields such as advertising, marketing and service provision. Synchronic and diachronic studies across several companies operating in these fields and focussed within a specific business area (such as a section of the travel industry) could provide information about trends in correspondence and cultural shifts in genre and style expectations.
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Appendices

All fieldwork relating to this research, including the use of questionnaires, was approved by Deakin University Ethics Committee (approval no. EC 45-2001). A plain language statement was supplied to all employees involved, and those who agreed to take part signed and returned an appropriate form. All company and individual names in this work and the appendices have been changed to assure anonymity.

Appendix A. Questionnaire 1

The formatting and layout of the questionnaires have been altered for this document.

Please fill in this questionnaire in your own time, and place it (in the envelope provided) in the box in [Name] office on the 8th floor. The questions should take you about 15 minutes to answer.

For your information...

This questionnaire forms part of my research into linguistic change. Please refer to the ‘Plain Language Statement’ for details – ask me if you need a copy.

To aid my research, I’d like your opinions on a number of areas. The more information you’re willing to provide, the more comprehensive my investigation can be. Of course, anything you write here will remain entirely confidential – the only people who will see it are my university supervisor, Dr Ron Goodrich, and myself. You don’t have to take part – this is entirely voluntary, and not a part of my employment here or yours.

You can choose how much information to disclose. I have asked for your sex and age bracket, whether English is your first language etc. If you choose not to answer these you can still answer the other questions – any information will
be of use to me. Please be honest – leave a question if you don’t want to answer it.

**What will I do with this information?**

I’m looking for similarities and trends. I’ll produce a summary of general findings and statistics, which will be made available to you if you’re interested. I can’t stress enough that my summary will be a general one, and will not abuse confidentiality. I am constrained by Deakin University Ethics committee, which approves the methods by which I gather information and conduct my research.

Thanks for your help.

**Team:** [A]     [B]      [D/E]        [C]        Other  

**Sex:** F      M

**Age bracket:** 18-24      25-29      30-34      35-39      40-44      45-49      50+

**Questions:**

You write letters. It's a fairly large part of your job. Take a moment to think about where your letter ends up. People read your letters when they come home from work – they might sit with a drink, going through the mail. Or at the breakfast table, or their desk at the office. It’s likely that they sent something to [LoyaltyOne] a month ago or more. A lot has happened since then. Your letter may be read in between a postcard from a friend, a bill and some blurb from the bank about a new loan.

1. What is your own opinion of the letters you write?

2. What’s your opinion of the letters we send out, in general?  
   (Perhaps compared to letters you receive at home from other businesses)

3. Why do you think [TravelAir] might be interested in the style of letter we send out?

4. Can you describe anything you’ve heard about the proposed change?

5. Following is a list of ways you might have heard about the change. Please ring as many as apply to you:
6. When (roughly) did you first hear about a proposed change to the way we write?

7. From what you’ve heard/seen so far, how would you describe the new letter style/tone?

8. Can you think of any words/phrases/sentences that differ from those you use at the moment?

9. In your opinion, what is it about the words/phrases/sentences you noted in Q8 that prompted you to describe the new letter style/tone as you did in Q7?

10. Why do you think [TravelAir] want to change the style of the letters we send out?

11. What do you think about the proposed change?

These questions are more personal. Again – you can choose what you answer and, apart from me, no-one at [PSP] will read this document. If a question doesn't apply to you, simply write N/A.

12. How long have you worked for the company?

13. How, and why, did you apply for a job here?

14. In what department/team did you start?
15. How long have you been in the Correspondence department?

16. If you came from another department, why did you move to Correspondence?

17. What do you find satisfying about your job?

18. What do you find difficult about your job?

19. Can you describe any weaknesses in your team or department?

20. Is there anything you would change about your job, or physical environment?

21. List any languages other than English that you speak fluently.

22. What is your first language?

23. What level of education have you had (ie: year 12, BA degree etc)?

24. Do you see your kind of job as a career opportunity? If so, why, if not, why not?

If you have any other comments you’d like to add, please do so here…

Thank you for your time. Now, please place the questionnaire back in the envelope provided and place it in the box in [Name’s] office on the 8th floor.
Appendix B. Writing Style Questionnaire No. 2, Part 1

The table below contains a list of words or phrases that might be used to describe the correspondence we send out.

Tick a box on the right to indicate which style you think the description best fits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>old style</th>
<th>new style</th>
<th>both</th>
<th>neither</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Informal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patronising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long winded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chatty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easy to write</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard to write</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old fashioned</td>
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<td>Too informal</td>
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<td>Too formal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard to say ‘no’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard to be sympathetic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard to be business-like</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard to be personal</td>
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<td>Plain English</td>
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<td>Youth oriented English</td>
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<td>Good for e-mail not letters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good for letters not e-mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suitable for all formats</td>
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Appendix C. Writing Style Questionnaire No. 2, Part 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control details</th>
<th>This questionnaire is confidential and anonymous. The following details will help me relate information provided here to the previous questionnaires. It is not intended to be a means of identifying you.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Team [A] [B] [D/E] [C] Other Sex: M F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age bracket:</td>
<td>18-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did you start?</td>
<td>Phones Correspondence Other (please state):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in Correspondence?</td>
<td>0-6 6-12 1-2 2-3 3+ years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Back in April you attended a workshop introducing a different style of letter writing. Since then, you’ve been expected to write to members in that ‘new’ style. My previous questionnaire asked for your thoughts about the change before it happened. I’d like to know what your views are now.

Once again, you don’t have to answer any questions if you’d rather not. No one at [PSP] will read your answers, however a summary of any general results I obtain will be made available.

If you have any questions, please come and ask me, or call me on x62795. And thank you again for your help – I really appreciate it!

Questions:

1. Would you describe the letters you are writing now as ‘business letters’?
   YES / NO
Before the change…

2. Here are three positive general comments about the ‘old’ style. Please circle any you agree with.
   a. “It gave an impression of authority and responsibility”
   b. “It was standard, formal, business-English”
   c. “It was suitable for any format – letter, fax or e-mail”

3. And three negative general comments about the ‘old’ style. Again, please circle any you agree with.
   a. “It was too formal – old fashioned and out of date”
   b. “It was suited to letters, but not e-mails”
   c. “It was patronising and long-winded”

*If you don’t agree with any of the above, or you’d like to add detail about your answers, please comment here:*

The workshop…

4. How did you view the style change before the workshop?
   a. “I was looking forward to using the ‘new’ style”
   b. “I wasn’t really bothered either way”
   c. “I was concerned because I didn’t think the change would be easy”

5. How did you view the workshop?
   a. Did you receive enough information to write in the ‘new’ style?
      YES  /  NO
   b. Did you think the workshop was thorough enough?
      YES  /  NO
   c. Did you find the Style Guide and Standard Paragraphs (macro) helpful?
      YES  /  NO

*If you don’t agree with any of the above, or you’d like to add detail about your answers, please comment here:*
Immediately after the workshop...

6. What was your reaction to the style change after the workshop?
   a. “I was confident – it wasn’t that big a change”
   b. “I wasn’t very confident, but the standard paragraphs (macros) were helpful”
   c. “I got back to my desk and just didn’t know where to begin!”

If you don’t agree with any of the above, or you’d like to add detail about your answers, please comment here:

Now...

7. You’ve been writing in the new style for at least X weeks now.
   a. Have you asked anyone for help with wording in the new style?
      Often / Sometimes / Rarely
   b. Have you found any particular type of letter hard to write in the new style?
      Often / Sometimes / Rarely
   c. Have you felt that there is still a place for the old style?
      Often / Sometimes / Rarely

If you don’t agree with any of the above, or you’d like to add detail about your answers, please comment here:
(eg: 7b – which letters, if any, have you found hard to write?)
8. Here are three positive general comments about the new style. Please circle any you agree with.
   a. “It’s modern and up-to-date”
   b. “It’s ‘natural’ and easy to write”
   c. “It gives an impression of authority and responsibility”

9. And three negative general comments about the new style. Again, please circle any you agree with.
   a. “It’s too informal and chatty – not business-like”
   b. “It’s suited to e-mails, but not letters”
   c. “It doesn’t work well when you have to say ‘no’ to a member”

If you don’t agree with any of the above, or you’d like to add detail about your answers, please comment here:

10. What do you understand the term ‘business letter’ to mean?

Thank you.

You may have other comments about aspects of the ‘new’ writing style, which weren’t included in my questions. I’m interested in your opinions and your feelings. If there is anything else you want to add, about the writing style change, the workshop, the support you’ve received – in other words anything, helpful or unhelpful, about the change that has affected you – please comment (if necessary use the back of this sheet).

You can also come and see me, in confidence. Whatever you say will remain strictly confidential unless you specifically request otherwise.

Please return your finished questionnaire to the box in [Name] 8th floor office.