AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (2008) AND PLAIN LANGUAGE APPLICATION AT SELECTED BUSINESSES IN THE PORT ELIZABETH METROPOLE

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (2008) AND PLAIN LANGUAGE APPLICATION AT SELECTED BUSINESSES IN THE PORT ELIZABETH METROPOLE

By

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DEDICATION

This treatise is dedicated to my family and friends, in particular, my husband and rock Ronald van Jaarsveld, my loving parents Rostan and Margariet Kilian, and my aunt Alida Noort for their support and continuous faith in my abilities.

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- The participating organisations, for their contributions and support which is greatly appreciated.

DECLARATION

I, Roslynn van Jaarsveld, student number 9709016, hereby declare that the treatise

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submitted to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the degree of Magister Artium, is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

ROSLYNN VAN JAARSVELD

ABSTRACT

Businesses communicate a wide variety of messages to diverse audiences using a number of different communication types and channels daily. For example, business communication includes business reports, documents (booklets, leaflets, and official communiqués), notices, agreements, web copy and advertisements that are produced continually to address a variety of business communication needs for a variety of audiences.

Although written business communication has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and consumer attitude which, in turn, affects consumer behaviour positively or negatively, there is a lack of research investigating the knowledge and application of plain language in business communication. Many studies were found to be related to communication and language, however, studies about plain language use were less prevalent. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African Consumer Protection Act (CPA) 68 of 2008 (2009). The application of these plain language principles within businesses in the Port Elizabeth Metropole, with specific reference to its use in written business communication was also investigated. The study also aimed to identify plain language best practices and constraints resulting from plain language application or non-application within the selected organisations. The research focused attention on the impact of business communication on customer satisfaction, consumer attitude and, ultimately, consumer behaviour as well as the need for plain language use in written business communication practices to ensure effective and fair (ethical) communication.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted on communication, communication theory and consumer behaviour, as well as on plain language principles which might add to the effectiveness of organisations' written business communication, to provide a theoretical foundation for the study.

The study's research methodology was approached from a phenomenological (descriptive and interpretive), and somewhat positivistic perspective, utilising qualitative and limited quantitative measures to obtain data. For this reason, three managers from three respective organisations within the Port Elizabeth Metropole were interviewed and asked to complete a rating-scale survey to obtain insight on the written business communication practices of these organisations. A content analysis of documents supplied by the participating organisations were also reviewed to provide commentary on the plain language application in each

organisation. Furthermore, Section 2 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) was also reviewed to measure and comment on the application of plain language in these organisations.

Based on the data analysis, it was evident that organisations in the Port Elizabeth Metropole were aware of plain language and the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), but that they were not certain what the regulations entailed exactly. Furthermore, plain language principles were applied in the participating organisations, however, complications and areas for possible improvement were identified in the data.

From the study's findings, various recommendations were made that could assist the organisations to improve their organisations' plain language application. These recommendations included, for example, appointing plain language champions to monitor plain language application in the organisation, as well as assessing language competence of staff and training them to improve their language competencies.

Recommendations for future research suggested that future studies needed to include a larger research sample, a more diverse sample population to include consumers and a broader industrial demographic. In addition, future studies could attempt to investigate communication barriers that inhibit or challenge comprehension in consumer communication.

Keywords – Business Communication, Plain Language, Customer Satisfaction, Consumer Attitude and Consumer Behaviour

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

The origin of plain language is traced back to a memorandum written by a former US Representative, Maury Maverick (1944 in Greer 2012), in which he requested that "lengthy memoranda and gobbledygook be replaced by short and clear memoranda". In the 1953 publication, '*The power of words'*, United States (US) plain language advocate, Stuart Chase, complained about "gobbledygook" used in texts (Mazur 2000). Subsequently, debate emerged among plain language advocates and the opposing legal fraternity about the possibility of producing business communication that could be both clear and reader-friendly as well as accurate, certain and precise. The debate concluded in favour of plain language implementation and it has since been identified as an active movement in business and communication practices worldwide (Balmford n.d.).

The drive for reader-focussed communication, aptly termed the plain language movement, found its way into the daily business practices of numerous complex operations such as government, legal and financial institutions, and business in general. The impact of complicated language use and industry specific jargon on consumer comprehension and behaviour was increasingly recognised by government and industry as problematic during the late 1970s and gained momentum in the 1990s. Numerous US statesmen such as the late President Nixon (1972), President Carter (1978) and President Clinton (1998) perceived the benefits of plain language implementation from a social and economic standpoint, which over the years has led to specific statutory requirements or protective guidelines being investigated and implemented by several governments globally (Mazur 2000).

The motivation for plain language use was an attempt to encourage the simplification of complex terminology in order to increase consumer understanding and responsiveness to government, legal, financial and other business communications (Balmford n.d.). South Africa followed the example of the US, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia by including sections about plain language implementation in The Short-term Insurance Act, 53 of 1998, The Long-term Insurance Act 52 of 1998, The Companies Act 71 of 2008, The South African National Credit Act 34 of 2005 and also the South African Consumer Protection Act (CPA) 68 of 2008 (2009), in future referenced as South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), which regulates that “information to consumers must be in plain and understandable language” (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013). Although the plain language approach initially originated as a mechanism to ensure clear legal communication to improve consumer access to the justice system and enable consumers to make more informed legal decisions, the use of plain language has since evolved to include a wider business fraternity who have become more interested in producing consumer-oriented communication with both social and economic benefits to organisations.

As a result, organisations adapt to, alter or maintain their environment to achieve their organisational goals through the management of their communication (Steyn and Puth 2000). Sinha (2012) also highlights the importance of effective and ineffective communication for business stating that effective communication can lure clients and ineffective communication could result in loss of clients. In commerce and marketing specifically, communication largely determines whether or not an organisation will achieve its internal and external business objectives. Internal communication aims to impart messages effectively about the organisation’s goals to management and employees in their drive to create products and services that meet consumer needs (Rafiq and Ahmed 2000) while consumers must be made aware of, and be persuaded to purchase these products and services through external marketing messages (Shimp 2007). These messages, which are disseminated by organisations, create consumer expectations which, in turn, translate into levels of consumer satisfaction once the consumer has had an encounter with the organisation, and/or used the organisation’s products or services. Subsequently, these consumer-satisfaction levels often contribute to changes in the consumer’s buying behaviour, either contributing to the businesses success through increased sales if the consumer is satisfied with the encounter, product or service, alternatively, resulting in declined sales owing to consumer dissatisfaction with the encounter, product or service.

It is assumed that the awareness of, and proper application of plain language principles in business communication, could add to the clarity, comprehensibility, truthfulness and legitimacy of the organisation’s communication, which could have a positive influence on consumer satisfaction and, therefore, also consumer behaviour.

In light of the effect that plain language use in business communication might have on customer satisfaction levels and consumer behaviour, this study, therefore, aims to investigate three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses’ awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the

South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), as well as investigate the application of plain language in the written business communication of these organisations. The study also aims to identify plain language best practices and possible constraints resulting from plain language application or non-application within the selected organisations.

1.2 Literature overview

This study originates in the field of communication which is an important aspect of business management and business success. Through the management of communication, organisations adapt to, alter or maintain their environment to achieve their organisational goals (Steyn and Puth 2000). Cleary (2014) describes communication as "the process of creating meaning between two or more people through the expression and interpretation of messages". According to Bock and Mheta (2013), "interpretation plays a central role in the meaning making process", therefore, communication is made up of various elements that are used to construct messages and which contribute to the interpretation and comprehension of written and spoken communicative acts. Misapplication of any one of these elements could contribute to ineffective communication causing distortion and, ultimately, misinterpretation of a communication.

Business communication also involves the practical writing and formatting aspects related to the skill of structuring communication, writing style, use of language and report format. This application of communication also concentrates on the construction and dissemination of effective communication in a business environment (Steyn and Puth 2000). Messages constructed and disseminated by businesses create consumer expectations which would result in levels of consumer satisfaction once the consumer has used a product or service. These consumer-satisfaction levels can be measured by taking note of consumer feedback and changes in consumer buying behaviour. If consumers perceive the organisations' messages as unclear, ambiguous or irrelevant, consumer dissatisfaction could be experienced and this, in turn, could cause negative consumer behaviour and loss of income.

However, persuasive messages are deliberately produced to evoke specific attitudes or behaviours from receivers (Bettinhaus and Cody 1994). Rosenburg and Hovland's (1960 in Bagozzi and Burnkant, 1979) notion that persuasive messages could cause changes in consumers' concepts, beliefs, values and perceptions, as well as changes in emotional states including mood and finally changes in consumer behaviour is of particular relevance. In relation to the study of plain language application in business communication, it is important to note that the message content, how it is constructed, how it is delivered to the consumer, to whom it is delivered and essentially how it is received and interpreted by the consumer has an impact on consumer behaviour. This could, ultimately, either have a positive or negative effect on business goals and relationships with the consumer.

According to Vygotsky (1962), language facilitates human interaction and allows people to communicate ideas with each other. Within a business context, language is used by the business in the construction of messages to share information with consumers while also allowing consumers to provide the business with feedback related to its products and services. The communicative act is seen to be successful when the receiver of the message understood the message as it was intended by the sender of the message. Grammar is also an important consideration when studying written communication in business. It establishes the rules of a language and provides universal guidelines for how words are to be combined into sentences and paragraphs during message construction. If the rules of grammar are applied, they govern message construction to make it meaningful to both the sender and the receiver of the message and, in return, ensure mutual understanding of the message (Newby 2004). Punctuation and spelling, are further considerations that are essential for message construction and message comprehension in business communication.

To protect consumer interests, the use of plain language has become compulsory in most legal systems because it contributes to transparency and sincerity as well as procedural fairness in legal events. In South Africa, legal guidelines such as the National Credit Act and the Consumer Protection Act set basic standards or describe the basic elements that a contract and/or communication has to comply with to be considered plain (Stoop 2011). In addition, *plain language* is a concept that has been adopted worldwide to ensure that business communication is constructed clearly for the ease of correct interpretation and understanding by stakeholders and, in particular, the consumer. Greer (2012) defines plain language (also termed plain writing) as clear and effective communication involving both the textual as well as the visual design of a communication. In addition, Berry (1995 in Mazur 2000) highlights that clarity, straightforward expression, use of only the necessary number of words, avoidance of obscurity and inflated vocabulary as well as complex sentence structure, are essential requirements in plain language application. The aim of plain language application is to eliminate possible communication barriers such as the use of technical vocabulary, outdated wording, overuse of passive voice, complex and long sentence structures, poor organisation and document formats that could cause misinterpretation. For this reason, it is considered a valuable tool that could enhance accuracy, increase consumer understanding and intensify fairness in business processes (Stoop 2011).

The South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) not only regulates the use of plain language, but also defines the concept within the South African context. The Act refers to the consumer's **"Right to information in plain and understandable language"**. A document has, therefore, **s**erved its purpose if the customer experiences the document as clear, relevant, informative, "exactly what I would expect of this institution" or "exactly what I need from this product" (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013). Plain language use in business communication, therefore, is an important consideration as it influences message accuracy, message comprehension and interpretation by the consumer.

With regard to plain language application in written business communication, literature suggests that if communicative competence lacks for whatever reason on either the part of the business or the consumer, meaning might be lost, messages may be misunderstood and the communication might be unsuccessful (De Gruyter 2008). Communicative competence, also known as communicative proficiency, suggests the "competence to communicate". It involves the ability to produce messages so that the intent of the communicator can be determined by others and interpersonal goals can be accomplished. It also involves the ability to receive and understand messages that are conveyed by others (De Gruyter 2008).

Scholarly reviews of communicative competence indicate the importance of language knowledge and language use as well as the application thereof in the structure of communication by both the sender (business) and the receiver (consumer), to facilitate successful communication (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell 1996). The lack of language knowledge and how it is used or the skill to apply this to communication, on the part of both the business and the consumer, could cause failed communication to occur. Celce-Murcia et al (1996) refer to the four components of communicative competence, which include:

- Grammatical competence, which is defined as the "knowledge of the language code" or, more specifically, the grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling
- Sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the "mastery of the sociocultural code of language use" such as the appropriate use of vocabulary, register, politeness and communicative style in a particular context

- Discourse competence, which relates to one's ability to combine language structures into different types of organised texts such as political speech and poetry
- Strategic competence, which relates to "the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication tactics that improve the effectiveness of communication and, where necessary, enables the communicator to overcome the challenges of communication breakdowns"

Habermas (1984) proposed that authentic or distortion-free communication, which he explains as "communication which replicates ideas and beliefs that can be confirmed if it is subject to rational discourse". For Underwood and Ozanne (1998), distortion-free communication is possible through symmetry and the application of the four norms of pragmatics, namely, the norms of:

- truthfulness
- sincerity
- norm of comprehensibility
- legitimacy

By considering Habermas's (1984) conditions for communicative competence when constructing written business communications, the organisations' intended messages might be more meaningful and comprehensible to consumers, contributing to ease of interpretation by the consumer. This would then result in the anticipated response or behaviour from the consumer for which the business was hoping.

Effective communication is essential for the strategic success of a business as it promotes healthy business relationships with consumers and increased sales, whereas ineffective business communication could cause collapses in relationships, loss of customers, increasing negative consumer perceptions towards the business and, in return, have detrimental effects on profits, business growth and longevity. Unsuccessful communication would imply that something went wrong during the communication process which, in turn, resulted in a misunderstanding or a communication breakdown (De Gruyter 2008). Misunderstandings or communication breakdowns are caused by factors that hinder or prevent the successful flow of the message from the sender to the audience. These factors, broadly referred to as communication barriers, include perception, language, physical, physiological and psychological barriers (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2) (Cleary 2014), which could prevent the audience's understanding of a message.

A key consideration in written business communication is a sensitivity to the audience as well as the adjustment of messages to the audience. Littlejohn (1999) refers to this as “Rhetorical Sensitivity”. This necessity, identified by Hart and Burks (1972 in Littlejohn 1999), involves a concern or consideration for self, others and the situation and is believed to “contribute to a more effective understanding and acceptance of ideas delivered in a speech / communicative act”. By considering the audience for which a message is intended, the communicator attempts to balance self-interest with the interest of others and aims to adapt what is said to the level, mood and beliefs of the audience at which the communication is directed. In addition, written communication of an organisation is seen as the voice of an organisation's brand. According to Balmford (n.d.), these communications are often the consumer’s only way of deciding whether to buy a product, whether to continue using a service, working out how to use a product; or understanding and applying professional advice they have received. Therefore, if an organisation’s written communication is unclear, irrelevant, uninformative or vague, written for the wrong target audience or written in an inappropriate tone, the communication experience on the part of the consumer would be a negative one which might result in negative consumer behaviour.

Consumer attitude towards the brand also influences consumer behaviour. For example, consumer attitude will determine how consumers perceive the brand, whether they buy the product or service, what they buy if they do, and what they communicate about the products or services they bought, intend to buy or refuse to buy. Consumers also continuously evaluate their interactions, the brand, as well as product and service experiences they have with organisations. The success or failure of these interactions and experiences could be defined in terms of customer (consumer) satisfaction. Tam (2004) equates satisfied customers to an organisational asset as they tend to repurchase a service or a product and recommend it to other consumers to use (positive consumer behaviour). Dissatisfied customers, on the other hand, might be a threat to an organisation, because they tend to voice their dissatisfaction to other consumers which might result in consumers choosing not to purchase the organisation’s products or services (negative consumer behaviour). Otnes, Ilhan and Kulkarni (2012) argue that “poor execution of marketplace language rituals can lead to a diminishing customer experience and perception of insincerity on the part of the organisation”. As a result, consumer attitude towards the organisation could become negative and, therefore, the business might lose these consumers as potential customers.

Finally, business communication that is vague, unclear, incorrect, false, deliberately evasive or written without considering the audience's capacity to communicate, could be considered as unethical practice against consumers because it places the consumer in a vulnerable and uncertain position of decision making that could impact consumer behaviour negatively. Cooper and Kelleher (2001) state that professional persuaders need to evaluate their claims based on clarity (definition and clarification of claims made to consumers), scientific evidence (provision of objective data that confirm the claim), context for comparison (provision of information about comparative products and services) and audience sensitivity (consider the nature of the audience). This evaluation of messages would assist companies using persuasive messages to communicate with consumers in an ethical manner.

1.3 Problem statement

Following the introduction to the research study as well as the brief literature overview, it is possible to highlight the research problem as it relates to the study of the awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), and its application in selected Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses. The South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) which regulates that "information to consumers must be in plain and understandable language" provides guidelines to assist businesses in adapting their business communication (messages) in ways that are clear and reader-friendly, accurate, certain and precise (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013).

These plain language guidelines are only helpful to the business fraternity and to consumers if businesses are aware of the regulations and guidelines they provide, and if they apply plain language principles into their daily business communication practices. Should this not be the case, businesses might be damaging their brands, straining to attract and retain clients owing to low customer satisfaction levels, might be miscommunicating with their target audiences, and opening themselves up to unethical conduct and possible legal action, as well as the loss of revenue. Consumers, on the other hand, have to contend with message overload where highly-technical, unclear, flamboyant and ambiguous messages are often disseminated by businesses that are all, simultaneously, competing for consumer attention (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

Therefore, understanding the level of awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), and its application (best practice and challenges) in selected Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses could assist organisations to improve the effectiveness of their business communication with consumers.

1.4 Aim of the study, research questions and research objectives

This study aims to investigate three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses' level of awareness about the plain language regulations as stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), as well as its application within these businesses, with specific reference to the use of plain language in written business communication. The study also purposes to identify communication best practice guidelines and possible challenges which could be derived from plain language application within these organisations.

1.4.1 Research question

The research question which guides this study, investigates to what extent the selected businesses in the Port Elizabeth Metropole are aware of the plain language regulations as stated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and how plain language has been applied within these organisations.

1.4.2 Primary research objectives

In particular, the objectives of the study include:

- To analyse the extent of plain language application within the written business communication practices of three Port Elizabeth Metropole organisations
- To assess the reasons for plain language conformity or nonconformity in these organisations
- To establish which activities or processes are implemented by the businesses who attempt to comply with the plain language regulations in the CPA
- To identify best practices and challenges experienced in plain language implementation

1.5 Research hypotheses

The hypothesis guiding this study is that badly-constructed, unclear, ambiguous, irrelevant business communication could cause high levels of consumer dissatisfaction which could be harmful to the organisation and its brand, could cause a decline in consumer interest and support and, ultimately, the loss of income for the organisation. It might also be possible that unethical business communication practices could be traceable to business communication that could be proven to be false, not clear or transparent, or suitable to the target audience for which it was intended. This, ultimately, could result in the consumer purchasing a product or acquiring a service from an organisation.

1.6 Research design and methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses' awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), as well as investigate the application of plain language in the written business communication of these organisations. The study also aimed to identify plain language best practices and possible challenges resulting from plain language application or non-application within the selected organisations.

It was decided, therefore, to approach the study from a predominantly qualitative mode of enquiry, utilising limited quantitative measures to add depth and detail to the findings of the study (Swanson & Holton 1997 in Maree 2007). Approaching the study from a predominantly qualitative perspective allowed the researcher to conduct surveys and literature reviews that, firstly, helped identify theoretical frameworks and conceptual understandings which later supported the research focus. The researcher decided to follow a deductive approach whereby general theories concerning communication and language, in particular, communicative competence and plain language, would be used to provide a clear theoretical position and an appropriate context in which the study could be performed, and the data interpreted (Mouton 2001). In addition, the use of both the phenomenological and positivistic methodological approaches to the study (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1), also made the study exploratory in nature as the researcher set out to understand the relationships between any dominant elements (variables) that might emerge from the data.

1.6.1 Primary data collection

Primary data collection methods included the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which were audio recorded, as well as a limited rating-scale survey to collect the required data. By using semi-structured interviews, directed by a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix 2), all participants could be asked similar questions during the interview process. However, the interviews were flexible which allowed the researcher to modify the order and details of how the questions were covered. Because the participants were asked similar questions, the process also allowed for possible comparisons across interviews (Bernard and Ryan 2010). A minor portion of the study required the collection of data by means of a Likert scale (rating-scale) survey which the participants completed individually after the interview (see Appendix 2). In this section of the interview, the participants were requested to complete the differential sliding scale checklist to rate their current business communication, to determine if they considered their communication to be predominantly clear and understandable for the target audiences with whom they communicated.

1.6.2 Secondary data collection

Secondary data collection included a content analysis of documents provided by the participating organisations as well as a review of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). The content analysis was an "inductive and iterative process" whereby the researcher was "looking for similarities and differences in the texts that would corroborate or disconfirm the theory" (Maree 2007). The documents included a product flyer, awareness campaign text illustrating the use of social media text conventions in a message and, a taxation e-mailer. These documents were reviewed in order to provide general commentary on the plain language use, supported with excerpts from each to validate the researcher's findings.

1.6.3 Data analysis

For the study, NVivo 10 qualitative research software was used to sort, arrange information in a "systematic order" and code the interview transcript data according to patterns or dominant themes that emerged as relevant to the research question (Saldana 2009). For example, if anything strikes the researcher as worthy of a code, a code is selected to describe the issue as explicitly as possible. Using Habermas's (1984) conditions for communicative competence as the main theoretical lens for theme identification, concepts were identified as descriptive anchors in the data, called *nodes* in NVivo 10. The nodes were used to order the collected data, and also group related data that was identified in the interview data transcripts in a meaningful manner. The interview transcript data were classified according to the nodes identified, and the meaning thereof unpacked during analysis (Boeije 2010).

The researcher utilised triangulation, for example, more than one data source such as interview transcripts, a rating scale survey as well as document content analysis to corroborate findings and ensure validity and reliability. In addition, the researcher also made use of member validation to ensure that data was viable and reliable, by requesting the interview participants to check and verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts (Boeije 2010). The researcher's supervisors observed the interviews as moderators to provide support and guidance if necessary.

1.7 Significance and limitations of the study

This study aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge in social science research, particularly in the field of business language and communication, as well as to facilitate plain language use within businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole. As a result, this study presents a rich set of recommendations to assist organisations in the Port Elizabeth Metropole with the practical application of plain language in their written business communication, to facilitate positive consumer experiences, customer satisfaction and, ultimately, positive consumer behaviour that would be of benefit to an organisation's profitability and sustainability.

The small population and sample size resulted in the survey data being sample and context specific, with relevance only to the three participating organisations and their respective industries. Therefore, the study was not representative of the larger population of businesses within the Port Elizabeth Metropole or South Africa.

Demographical limitations restricted the possible correlation of the data with any data from the participant organisation's larger organisations. Although assumed, it is impossible to say whether the findings of this study would correlate with similar studies conducted among the staff of the organisation that are not on management level or even in the participant organisation's head offices, both on a national and international level. Demographic limitations also existed in terms of the organisation types (industries) that were included in this study.

This study has also not allowed for a comparative analysis between data obtained from within the businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole versus that of consumers with whom these businesses communicate.

Despite the limitations, the results of this study could make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge related to business language and communication as well as the application of plain language in written business communication within Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses.

1.8 Structure of the study

Chapter 1 introduced the study by providing a background of the topic investigated, as well as a summary of the rationale, research question and objectives. In addition, Chapter 1 highlighted key theoretical understanding regarding plain language in the literature review to frame the study, discussed the overarching methodology used in the study, and provided a summary of key findings as well as recommendations and suggestions for future study opportunities.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of literature on the topic of communication, business language as well as plain language communication and how it relates to effective written business communication. Chapter 2 also introduces the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations, as well as Communicative Competence as the theoretical anchor of the study and, finally, discusses how plain language affects customer satisfaction, attitude and behaviour from a business perspective.

Chapter 3 describes the study's research design and methodology to provide a meaningful understanding of the level of awareness that three selected Port Elizabeth businesses have of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations, and to evaluate plain language application by the businesses investigated. Chapter 3 also highlights the selected population, sampling method, and measuring instruments used during data collection. Chapter 3 then describes the deductive analysis methods used to analyse the data, which included the use of NVivo 10 qualitative software to code the interview transcript data to identify and order the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews. Finally, the chapter describes the Likert-scale analysis and content analysis which provided insights into the participant organisation's application of plain language in their respective organisations.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings attained from the data analysis that were completed by the researcher. These findings were identified from the interview transcript data, analysis of the Likert-scale survey and the content reviews conducted on participant organisations' documents. The findings were presented together with excerpts from the data to support it. Chapter 4 also highlights the demographics of the participants in the study and then describes the data analysis themes that were identified as nodes and child nodes using NVivo 10 qualitative software.

Chapter 5 provides a broad overview of the study and highlights the most important conclusions revealed by the data. In Chapter 5, the researcher also proposes recommendations based on the research results. Finally, contributions and limitations of the study are discussed and future research possibilities are identified.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

According to Boeije (2010), the literature review provides the researcher with a theoretical context which directs the researcher's analytical and systematic approach to the research topic. For this purpose, Chapter 2 summarises key findings and reviews of various articles and research on various topics related to communication and communication theories, business language use, consumer behaviour, marketing and business management to frame the hypothesis and establish a solid theoretical context for the study. The study, with its focus on the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and its application within three small to large-scale businesses in the Port Elizabeth Metropole, investigated the use of plain language in written business (corporate) communication sent to consumers.

For this study, the investigation of plain language application in business communication is rooted within the broader context of communication and, therefore, communication theory was considered an appropriate theoretical framework.

2.2 Communication theory

This study originates in the field of communication which is an important aspect of business management and business success. Through the management of communication, organisations adapt to, alter or maintain their environment to achieve their organisational goals (Steyn and Puth 2000). Sinha (2012) also highlights the importance of effective and ineffective communication for business as "effective communication can woo clients and ineffective communication can result in loss of clients".

2.2.1 Defining communication

To ensure an adequate understanding of the communication principles discussed in this study, the concept of communication needs to be explored and clearly-defined. Cleary (2014) describes communication as "the process of creating meaning between two or more people through the expression and interpretation of messages". The communication process is further defined by Chitty, Barker, Valos and Shimp (2011) as a message or information which is distributed from one individual or group to another through various methods or channels.

According to Bock and Mheta (2013), “interpretation plays a central role in the meaning making process”, therefore, communication is made up of various elements that are used to construct messages and which contribute to the interpretation and comprehension of written and spoken communicative acts. These include sentence patterns and types, morphology (word structure), the lexical resources (vocabulary), as well as phonology (sound) and orthography (rules of spelling, hyphenation, capitalisation, word breaks, emphasis, and punctuation) needed to recognise communication as speech or writing (Celce-Murcia et al 1996). Misapplication of any one of these elements could contribute to ineffective communication causing distortion and, ultimately, misinterpretation of a communication.

Gifu, Dima and Teodorescu (2014) identify that over the years, many communication theorists such as Shannon and Weaver (1949 in Gifu et al 2014), Lasswell (1948 in Gifu et al 2014) and Craig (2001in Gifu et al 2014) have examined the concept and structure of communication and have developed numerous models that describe its complexity. However, Cleary (2014) considers that communication can best be described by the combination of its main elements, namely, the process of message encoding and dissemination by a source (sender) through a channel (medium) to a receiver or receivers (audience) who decode the message and provide feedback to the sender. Each of these main elements influence the communication success or effectiveness which is ultimately achieved when there is a meaningful exchange of information and communication is understood or interpreted by the receiver (audience) in the manner which the source (sender) intended it to be interpreted (Gifu et al 2014).

Communication applications in business and the terminology that describes it can be specific in meaning and, therefore, requires further clarification for the purpose of the study. These applications include organisational communication, corporate communication and business communication.

2.2.1.1 Organisational Communication

According to Steyn and Puth (2000), organisational communication is theoretical in nature and concentrates on the study of communication and communication processes in organisations. Organisational communication is facilitated through various types of communication, some utilised for internal organisational communication, for example, print communications media such as house journals, newsletters, magazines and annual reports; Intranet which facilitates the organisation’s electronic communication, for example, e-mail. External communication media include the use of, for example, the Internet which facilitates communication channels such as electronic publications, web pages, e-mail and social media, press, broadcast media and also mobile media (Steyn and Puth 2000).

2.2.1.2 Corporate communication

Corporate communication focusses on creating and maintaining relationships with the organisation's stakeholders such as its current and prospective customers (consumers), investors, suppliers and staff, and is managed on behalf of an organisation to increase its organisational effectiveness. Corporate communication is, therefore, commonly-defined as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually-beneficial relationships between an organisation (business) and the public on whom its success or failure depends" (Steyn and Puth 2000). In addition, corporate communication is often the consumer's only way of deciding whether they will support a business and continue to do so in future. The messages businesses distribute, help consumers decide whether they feel an affiliation with the organisation and might encourage consumers to buy a product or use a service supplied by one organisation over another. Therefore, if an organisation's written communication is unclear, irrelevant, uninformative or vague, written for the wrong target audience or written in an inappropriate tone, the communication experience on the part of the consumer would be a negative one which might result in the consumer choosing not to support the organisation (Balmford n.d.).

2.2.1.3 Business communication

The practical writing and formatting aspects related to the skill of structuring communication, writing style, use of language and report format was traditionally known as business writing, which evolved to become known as business communication. This application of communication also concentrates on the construction and dissemination of effective communication in a business environment (Steyn and Puth 2000).

Business communication is also seen as a "universal form of communication (both professional and technical)" (Sinha 2012), which is suitable to nearly all areas of business such as marketing, branding and customer relations utilised to promote an organisation, service and product, and communicate information to stakeholders. It is also described as the "expression, channelling, receiving and interchanging of ideas in commerce and industry" (Sinha 2012).

In commerce and marketing specifically, communication largely determines whether or not an organisation will achieve its internal and external business objectives. Internally, management and employees must communicate effectively to create products and services that meet consumer needs (Rafiq and Ahmed 2000). Externally, consumers must be made aware of, and be persuaded to purchase these products and services through marketing communication (Shimp 2007).

Messages disseminated by businesses create consumer expectations which would result in levels of consumer satisfaction once the consumer has used a product or service. These consumer-satisfaction levels can be measured by taking note of consumer feedback and changes in buying behaviour. The derived hypothesis is that poorly-constructed, unclear, ambiguous or irrelevant business communication could cause high levels of consumer dissatisfaction which is harmful to the business and the brand. This, in turn, could cause a decline in consumer interest as well as support and, ultimately, loss of income. It might also be possible that unethical business communication practices exist if consumer action (purchase or acquisition) were directly linked to business communication that was false, not clear, transparent or suitable to the target audience for which it was intended.

Consumer Behaviour Theory proposes that consumer satisfaction is assumed to depend on both their expectations about the products' performance and the actual (perceived) product performance (Antonides 2012). Consumer satisfaction is reached, therefore, when the expectation, which is created by various forms of business communication, is met or exceeded. Should a consumer's expectations be misguided through vague, unclear, incorrect or inconsistent messages received from an organisation, and the outcome of the consumer's purchase experience not correlate with his/her expectations, this would cause consumer dissatisfaction.

a) Business communication and new millennia technology

Digital or new media also affects business communication practices in significant ways. Social media are some of the most actively-used applications arising from information technology (IT) developments of the past ten years that are being utilised for business communication at present. Owing to the perceived advantages of new media such as immediacy, interconnectivity and interactivity (and because this is the way of the world now), organisations are encouraged to 'get connected' via platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Pitts and Aylott 2012).

With new media use in business communication, generational considerations become important. Electronic communication media, such as SMS, Twitter and WhatsApp, are relatively new technologies. Twitter, for example, was only launched in October 2006 (Grosseck and Holotescu 2008). For this reason, older generations might experience difficulty using this technology and understanding the messages that are distributed through it. However, with new technology (media) use, younger generations, such as Generation Y, are more competent and comfortable with this media type than older generations (Schewe and Noble 2002).

In addition, these media types also bring their own challenges for business communication, one of which is the capacity limits for text. Businesses that utilise new media communication channels need to find ways to communicate effectively and clearly with consumers, and get their intended message across, amidst the text limitations these mediums possess. For example, an SMS only allows 160 characters which led to an evolution of abbreviated text with many words becoming more phonetically spelt, such as 'LOL' instead of 'laugh out loud' and 'Gr8' meaning 'great' (Grosseck and Holotescu 2008). Twitter also limits the number of characters per message to 140. WhatsApp, the social media platform that has surpassed traditional SMS and even Blackberry Messenger in popularity, continues to normalise the use of abbreviated text such as Gr8 instead of 'great' and LOL instead of 'laugh out loud'. However, users may not all be fluent in "abridged text" or Instant Message styles and, therefore, messages may be construed as misleading or confusing, which could be misinterpreted.

When businesses, therefore, use platforms such as SMS, Twitter or WhatsApp, their communication and language options are limited, which could have an impact on effective business communication. These digital examples highlight the challenges of new media communication in light of the plain language requirements in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) which necessitate that consumers understand the messages directed at them irrespective of the medium used to do so.

All business goals and objectives revolve around business communication, from increasing profits and sales and expanding the business, to employee-motivation levels and reducing attrition rates (Sinha 2012). To achieve its desired business goals, organisations often make use of persuasive methods in their business strategies. This could vary from persuading investors to back the organisation financially, to persuading prospective consumers of the benefits they would experience when using its product rather than that of another supplier. Owing to the influence that persuasive messages could have on the attitude and behaviour of its recipients, the impact of persuasive messages are worth considering in the study of plain language application in business communication.

2.3 Persuasion

Persuasive messages are deliberately produced to evoke specific attitudes or behaviours from receivers (Bettinhaus and Cody 1994). Persuasive messages could cause changes in consumers' concepts, beliefs, values and perceptions, as well as changes in emotional states including mood and, finally, changes in consumer behaviour. This view is supported by McGuire (2000) who acknowledges the causal role that persuasive messages play in changing consumers' thoughts, feelings and actions, especially when purchasing goods and services. For example, a supplier of cellular telecommunication can communicate a message to prospective consumers in which they state that their product offers 80% more coverage than other suppliers at half the cost. The perceived value of 80% more coverage at a 50% reduced rate, provides the consumer with a perceived incentive to choose the supplier's product over that of another and can, therefore, persuade prospective consumers to buy or switch to this particular product. Should the consumer make a purchase based on this information, this consumer behaviour would have a positive impact on the business as it would add to sale's volume and enlarge profits. However, should any of the information in the communication be incorrect or false, or be interpreted incorrectly by the consumer, for any reason, it may have a negative effect on the consumer's future buying behaviour, which in return, could also have a negative effect on the success of the business.

In relation to the study of plain language application in business communication, it is important to note that the message content, how it is constructed, how it is delivered to the consumer, to whom it is delivered and essentially how it is received and interpreted by the consumer has an impact on consumer behaviour. This could, ultimately, either have a positive or negative effect on business goals and relationships with the consumer.

The way in which consumers process the information which they receive from marketers, competitors and other consumers as well as the consumer's response to these messages, continuously shape consumer opinions and behaviour (Johar, Maheswaran and Peracchio 2006). Boyd (2006) comments that from both the social psychology and consumer-behaviour standpoint the persuasive process is largely determined by the receiver's interpretation of the communication. Both the processing of messages as well as message interpretation create meaning for the consumer which informs and supports this study of plain language application in business communication.

Therefore, it is evident that messages, especially those used in sales and advertising (Sinha 2012), often include perception-altering messages or incentive-driven stimuli that are intended to create a perception, expectation or spur consumer reaction or choice in favour of the organisation, corporation, product, service or brand. Persuasion is largely achieved by choosing words and images that project a positive view of the facts without it necessarily being misleading. However, persuasion could also be used for the sender's own gain and could be construed as seduction or intimidation which could be negatively interpreted (Gifu et al 2014). The logical conclusion is that these messages and stimuli, which could be verbal, written or symbolic, have an influence on consumer behaviour. For example, Underwood and Ozanne (1998) find that product packaging often forms the consumer's first impression about a product, the product quality and the product value. Packaging, therefore, is often designed to stand out among competitor products in the market and communicate appealing, practical, useful, symbolic and/or informational benefits to consumers, motivating them to make the product purchase. This is particularly important for new brand introductions, brand repositioning, brand extensions and product changes (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

Certain communication practices used in the construction and design of product packaging, could be construed as unethical, as it could deceive the consumer. As a consequence, this has led to stricter government rules regarding packaging (Underwood and Ozanne 1998). Underwood and Ozanne (1998) explain this dilemma for marketers as:

> Marketers face the complex task of aggressively promoting their product in its most favourable light, while concurrently avoiding package communication that may be deceptive. The failure to achieve this trade-off adequately by many consumer product firms resulted in increased government regulation concerning packaging and labelling in the early 1990s.

A further consideration that influences the success of business communication is language and the components that make up language. Correct grammar, for example, is generally accepted as a key requirement for effective communication and, therefore, the assumption is that incorrect grammar would complicate the communicative act, making it more challenging and require more clarity for the recipient to interpret or understand. This, in turn, might cause the recipient's attitude towards the source to become negative.

2.4 Language use in business

According to Vygotsky (1962), language facilitates human interaction and allows people to communicate ideas with each other. Within a business context, language is used by the business in the construction of messages to share information with consumers while also allowing consumers to provide the business with feedback related to its products and services.

Austin (1962 in Littlejohn 1999) refers to the practical use of language as speech acts using the basic units of a language to express meaning and indicate intention from one person to another. Speech acts could occur in the form of sentences, words or phrases, all of which must convey purpose. Four types of speech acts are identified, namely, utterance acts (the simple pronunciation of the words), propositional acts (saying something that is believed to be true), illocutionary acts (designed to ensure understanding of an intention) and perlocutionary acts (designed to have an actual effect on a person's behaviour as was intended).

If a speech act is successful, the recipient will understand the speaker's intention. Language is, therefore, very important in business communication as it is used to convey the business's intentions to its consumers. For example, if a business intends for consumers to buy more of a specific product, this may be communicated as a special offer to attract consumers to purchase it. In this instance, a perlocutionary speech act would be used in the business's communication. Furthermore, if the business's intention is to amend the terms and conditions under which it provides a service to consumers, this would be communicated as an illocutionary speech act. In both examples, the intention of the business is made known to the consumer but could only be construed as successful if the consumers have understood the meaning of the speech acts as it was intended.

As a result, grammar is an important consideration when studying written communication in business. It establishes the rules of a language and provides universal guidelines for how words are to be combined into sentences and paragraphs during message construction. If the rules of grammar are applied, they govern message construction to make it meaningful to both the sender and the receiver of the message and, in return, ensure mutual understanding of the message (Newby 2004). Punctuation and spelling, are further considerations that are essential for message construction and message comprehension in business communication. Punctuation marks such as full stops, semi-colons, colons, commas, parentheses as well as exclamation and question marks, are the symbols used in sentences and paragraphs that help people read and process the message in the way the writer intended the message to be understood. As a result, punctuation, grammar, spelling, sentence structure, style, and word choice are important to the reader because "they drastically affect perceptions of the writer's authority and credibility" as well as professionalism (General Strategies for Editing and Proofreading n.d.). On the other hand, incorrect spelling of words often change the meaning of a sentence or distract the reader from the intended message (Rollason 2001).

In business communication, the use of appropriate grammar, punctuation and spelling is an essential component of the communication process, as it influences the consumers' concentration, interest in, and comprehensibility of the communicated messages. If grammar, punctuation and spelling is used differently to the universal norm, or used incorrectly, a consumer may not interpret the message as the business intended. This may result in misunderstandings between the business and the consumer, and result in a negative impact on the consumer's understanding and/or buying behaviour. For example, Figure 2.1 illustrates how no punctuation could affect the meaning of a message. The message on the poster implies interpretation that only children who are disabled, elderly and pregnant could use the toilet.

Figure 2.1 Incorrect punctuation and its effect on the message

Source: Images that prove grammar and punctuation are important (n.d.)

To assist consumers with protecting their own interests, the use of what is termed plain language, has become compulsory in most legal systems because it contributes to transparency and sincerity as well as procedural fairness in legal events. In South Africa, legal guidelines such as the National Credit Act and the Consumer Protection Act set basic standards or describe the basic elements that a contract and/or communication has to comply with to be considered plain (Stoop 2011). Legal considerations are of utmost importance in business and, therefore, also in business communication. Although all business communication cannot be defined as contracts or being legal in nature, communication which is distributed from the business to the consumer could have a negative impact on a business, and even cause legal procedures against a business if it could be argued that the communication was in some way misleading, untrue or difficult to comprehend. For this reason, and with reference to the study of plain language application in business communication, the term plain language needs further consideration.

2.5 Plain language

The importance of constructing business messages accurately and concisely has been a topic of legislative and educational debate globally for many years (Greer 2012). As a result, *plain language* is a concept that has been adopted worldwide to ensure that business communication is constructed clearly for the ease of correct interpretation and understanding by stakeholders and, in particular, the consumer. Steinberg (1991 in Mazur 2000) highlights the need for plain language to meet the needs of the consumer and defines plain language as "language that reflects the interests and needs of the reader and consumer rather than the legal, bureaucratic, or technological interests of the writer or the organisation that the writer represents".

Kimble (1994) states that "plain language has to do with clear and effective communication – nothing more or less". This view is supported by Greer (2012), who continues that plain language (also termed plain writing) relates to clear and effective communication involving both the textual as well as the visual design of a communication. Finally, Berry (1995 in Mazur 2000) highlights that clarity, straightforward expression, the use of only the necessary number of words, avoidance of obscurity and inflated vocabulary as well as complex sentence structure are essential requirements in plain language application.

The aim of plain language application is to eliminate possible communication barriers such as the use of technical vocabulary, outdated wording, overuse of passive voice, complex and long sentence structures, poor organisation and document formats that could cause misinterpretation. For this reason, it is seen to be a valuable tool that could enhance accuracy, increase consumer understanding and intensify fairness in business processes (Stoop 2011). Therefore, if the application of plain language in business communication could help simplify complex messages and increase the comprehension thereof, plain language could assist the consumer in protecting their own interests and guard businesses from communicating messages which could cause negative business outcomes.

In South Africa, the Plain Language Institute (2013) refers to several acts of government that regulate the use of plain language in consumer communication. These include the:

- Short-term Insurance Act, 53 of 1998
- Long-term Insurance Act, 52 of 1998
- Companies Act, 71 of 2008
- South African National Credit Act, 34 of 2005
- South African Consumer Protection Act (CPA) 68 of 2008

The South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) not only regulates the use of plain language, but also defines the concept within the South African context. The Act refers to the consumer's "Right to information in plain and understandable language". A document has, therefore, **s**erved its purpose if the customer experiences the document as clear, relevant, informative, "exactly what I would expect of this institution" or "exactly what I need from this product" (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013).

Plain language use in business communication, therefore, is an important consideration as it influences message accuracy, message comprehension and interpretation by the consumer. In addition, the customer perspective is key to the definition of plain language in the CPA as referred to Section 22(2), which states that a document is in plain language if, and only if, it is clear and understandable for the target audience. However, according to the Plain Language Institute (2013), there are a number of aspects which could complicate the application of plain language in the South African context. For example, owing to South Africa's complex ethnic make-up and multilinguism, words that are commonly used by English first language speakers may not be well-known to the average African or Afrikaans language speaker. In addition, the language ability of consumers may be limited owing to low levels of education. Furthermore, culture also impacts on understanding as "a communication style which may be considered to be concise and to the point in one culture, may be perceived as being impolite, patronising or unsuitable in another" (Finlayson and Slabbert 2002). For this reason, plain language use in the South African business context needs to be applied with careful consideration of the target audience, with specific attention to aspects such as cultural background, English language proficiency and even education levels.

The communication exchange becomes advantageous when the receiver understands the meaning of the message in the way the sender intended it (8 Factors that Influence the Meaning of Business Communication n.d.). Comprehension of the message as the sender intended it is, therefore, a prerequisite for successful message dissemination and effective business communication. Reassessing messages from a plain language perspective often highlight the possible ambiguities, uncertainties and conflicts which are often hidden in traditional writing styles and expose the use of unnecessary detail in these messages which could complicate interpretation (Kimble 1994).

In addition, the effectiveness, adequacy and success of the business communication process depend on communication that is clear and understandable by the target audience in the manner the business intended it. Business communication should, therefore, be continually and critically examined by the business, and regulatory bodies should ensure stakeholder (consumers, investors, staff) protection against misinformation and deception. As a result, plain language contributes to the clear construction of business communication so that it can be correctly interpreted and understood by stakeholders, in particular, the consumer, and, therefore, it contributes to successful business communication.

The theory of Communicative Competence and the models associated with it, also suggest useful benchmarks through which the study of plain language application in business communication could be developed. This is due to the theory's focus on people's ability and proficiency to communicate while it also relates to the facets that would contribute to mutual understanding in the communicative action. The theory also defines important norms by which communicative competence could be evaluated to determine the success of business communication.

2.6 Communicative competence framework

Communicative Competence, also termed by some as communicative proficiency, suggests the "competence to communicate". It involves the ability to produce messages so that the intent of the communicator can be determined by others and interpersonal goals can be accomplished. It also involves the ability to receive and understand messages that are conveyed by others (De Gruyter 2008). Chomsky (1965) refers to communicative competence as the "monolingual speaker-listener's knowledge of language" while the actual use of language in the communicative act is referred to as communicative performance. Hymes (1972 in Bagarić and Jelena 2007) also provides a somewhat broader view of competence, and defines communication competence as an "essential grammatical capability" and also suggests that it involves sociolinguistic components when “both grammatical capability and the ability to communicate” are used in the communicative act.

In addition to the notions of Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972 in Bagarić and Jelena 2007), Widdowson (1983 in Bagarić and Jelena 2007) defines communicative competence in terms of the “knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions”. In addition to this knowledge, Widdowson (1983 in Bagarić and Jelena 2007) suggests “communicative capacity” as a requirement for communicative competence, which he describes as “the ability to utilise knowledge as a means of creating meaning in a language”. Communication competence is, therefore, an essential component of business communication as businesses are required to produce messages that create meaning and can be understood by the consumer for the communicative act to be successful. Businesses, therefore, need to be able to combine what they know about language, their grammatical skill and their ability to communicate to create meaningful communicative acts with the consumer. De Gruyter’s (2008) view that successful communication also involves the ability to receive and understand messages that are conveyed by others, suggests that the consumer also needs to possess communicative competence for the communication they receive to be meaningful and subsequently successful. This suggests that if communicative competence lacks for whatever reason on either the part of the business or the consumer, meaning might be lost, messages may be misunderstood and the communication might be unsuccessful.

2.6.1 Models of communicative competence

Canale and Swain’s (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) model of communicative competence as well as the elaboration of this model by Canale (1983 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) explain communicative competence as the system where knowledge (the knowledge that users possess about language and language use) and skill (how knowledge is used in actual communication) need to be combined to facilitate communication. These respective views of communicative competence once again restate the importance of language knowledge and language use as well as the application thereof in the structure of communication by both the sender (business) and the receiver (consumer), to facilitate successful communication. The lack of language knowledge and how it is used or the skill to apply this to communication, on the part of both the business and the consumer, could cause failed communication to occur.

Canale and Swain’s (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) first comprehensive communicative competence model indicates four components of communicative competence, which include:

- Grammatical competence, which is defined as the "knowledge of the language code" or, more specifically, the grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling
- Sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the "mastery of the sociocultural code of language use" such as the appropriate use of vocabulary, register, politeness and communicative style in a particular context
- Discourse competence, which relates to one's ability to combine language structures into different types of organised texts such as political speech and poetry
- Strategic competence, which is "the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication tactics that improve the effectiveness of communication and, where necessary, enables the communicator to overcome the challenges of communication breakdowns"

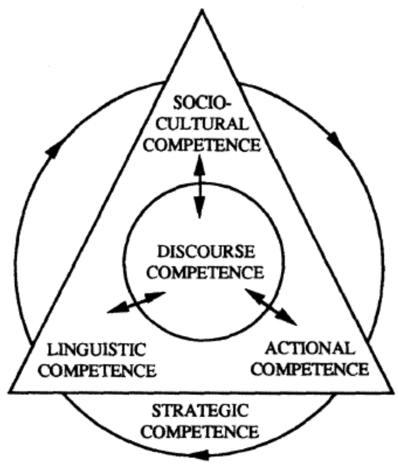
Bachman (1990 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) suggests a further model of communicative competence which elaborates on Canale and Swain's (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) model by focussing its attention on language knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) were of the view that the qualities of language users such as their general characteristics, knowledge about the topic, emotional representations and language ability influence their communicative language ability. Business communication practitioners and those tasked to communicate with consumers need to know their target audience to be aware of their social and cultural characteristics, consumer's subject matter knowledge, consumer perceptions of the organisation and their past experiences with the organisation that influence their emotional position, and the consumer's language competence, which in part also relates to the consumers' education levels. All these facets might have an impact on how the consumer receives and interprets a communication. The relevance of language knowledge and language ability is specifically important to ensure that business communication is constructed for ease of interpretation and understanding of the consumer, and consists of various knowledge components, namely:

- Organisational Knowledge, which involves grammatical knowledge (vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology and graphology which enable the production of grammatically correct sentences as well as comprehension of what the content proposes), a concept which is similar to Canale and Swain's (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) grammatical competence
- Textual Knowledge, which is similar but more elaborate than Canale and Swain's (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) discourse competence, enabling comprehension and construction of spoken or written texts

- Pragmatic Knowledge, which refers to the knowledge of the meaning of words and the ability to use figurative language (lexical knowledge) as well as the knowledge of the relationships between what is being said and the intentions of the communicator (functional knowledge or illocutionary power)
- Sociolinguistic Knowledge which is similar to Canale and Swain's (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) sociolinguistic competence. Differently to Canale and Swain (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996), Bachman (1990 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) focussed on the way language is used to achieve a particular communicative goal within a specific situation or context

Celce-Murcia et al (1996) recommend their own model of communicative competence with the inclusion of what they refer to as "actional competence", defined as a "competence in conveying and understanding the intent of a communication by carrying out and interpreting speech acts", a component similarly referred to by Bacham and Palmer (1996) as "functional knowledge" (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Schematic Representation of Communicative Competence



Source: Celce-Murcia et al (1996)

The model illustrated in Figure 2.2 proposes that discourse is shaped by, and, in turn, shapes the combination of the "lexico-grammatical building blocks" (words, routines, collocations and idioms), the "actional organisational skills of communicative intent" and the "sociocultural context in which the communication takes place". The circle surrounding the pyramid represents strategic competence, which refers to the skills that enable a capable speaker to negotiate messages and resolve problems or "compensate for shortages in any of the other underlying competencies" (Celce-Murcia et al 1996).

The models of communicative competence suggested by Canale and Swain (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996), Bachman (1990 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) and Celce-Murcia et al (1996) propose that effective communication is possible if the necessary elements of communication (knowledge of language and the ability to apply it, grammatical capability and the skill to communicate) is combined to form the communicative act. In other words, a communicative act can be categorised as successful where both the business and the consumer possess the following attributes:

- Have sufficient language (as well as grammatical) competencies
- Understand and appropriately use sociocultural conventions relevant to a particular society and culture when communicating
- Understand what is intended and conveyd by a communication
- Understand and use the type of dialogue that is appropriate to the situation

These models suggest that communication competence is "not static but dynamic in nature, more interpersonal than intrapersonal, relative rather than absolute and also largely context-driven" (Bagarić and Jalena 2007).

2.6.2 Habermas's conditions for competent communication

In an attempt to understand what happens when people engage in communicative behaviour when communication is aimed at reaching mutual understanding, Habermas (1984) reasoned that users would be able to identify communication mistakes that inhibit competent communication, if they understood the necessary conditions or contexts for everyday communication to take place. Habermas (1984) proposed that authentic or distortion-free communication, which he explains as "communication which replicates ideas and beliefs that can be confirmed if it is subject to rational discourse", is possible through symmetry and the application of the four norms of pragmatics. Underwood and Ozanne (1998) identify the four norms as the norms of:

- truthfulness
- sincerity
- comprehensibility
- legitimacy

In other words, effective communication is possible if communication takes place in a balanced environment where both the sender and receiver of the message have equal opportunity to perform speech acts during communication (symmetry), and where the ideas and beliefs (intentions) of the sender are conveyed to the receiver in a sensible dialogue (rational discourse) that would result in the receiver understanding the message as the sender intended it. The conditions or contexts for everyday communication, referred to by Habermas (1984) as symmetry and pragmatic norms, are explained as various communication norms.

2.6.2.1 General symmetry

Habermas (1984) suggested that it would be possible for a rational agreement to be reached if there were a symmetrical (equal) distribution of chances to select and perform speech acts during communication. General symmetry would, therefore, exist when all the contributors to a communication have an equal, unconstrained (without barriers) opportunity to engage in dialogue. Distorted communication moves dialogue away from an ideal speech situation, often placing people in a market-place exchange where they purchase products that are inappropriate for them or do not meet their needs or expectations. It is important for businesses to meet consumer's needs and wants, not only pretend to meet them to secure a sale or use of a product. This would be damaging to the longevity of the business and, therefore, it is in the best interest of all businesses to communicate without misrepresentation (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

Habermas (1984) developed a standard which he believed could be used to compare all forms of communication to determine its success relative to the degree of consensual understanding. It is assumed that consensual understanding (communication without distortion) can be achieved by meeting each of the four types of "universal validity claims" identified by Habermas (1984). These norms include the norm of truthfulness, the norm of sincerity, the norm of comprehensibility and the norm of legitimacy. These norms or expectations provide a standard through which daily communication activities can be measured for truthfulness and clarity (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

2.6.2.2 Truthfulness norm

Habermas (1984) reasoned that when people engage in conversation with others, they anticipate truthfulness and accuracy in the communicative act (norm of truthfulness). However, consumer studies have indicated that consumers are often sceptical about the legitimacy of business communications. They often suspect that the facts about products and services that are communicated, are inaccurate, misrepresented or false.

2.6.2.3 Sincerity norm

Habermas (1984) also suggested that it is generally anticipated that people will communicate their true intentions (norm of sincerity) in day-to-day communication and this creates a sense of trust. Consumers measure the perceived truthfulness of business communication continuously to determine the true intentions of the organisations from which they endeavour or choose to purchase. With consumer choice increasing, consumers take time to search for and select products and services which they believe are true to the promises made whether it be in their advertising, product packaging or face-to-face sales techniques.

2.6.2.4 Comprehensibility norm

The norm of comprehensibility suggests that people expect that others will communicate in a way that they can understand. In business communication, this norm is disrupted when consumers do not understand what is being communicated to them. It could be the result of consumers misunderstanding manufacturing processes or technical descriptions, language barriers and vague, ambiguous communication (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

For Habermas (n.d.), communicative acts are subject to the mutual understanding of what is being communicated between the sender and the receiver of a message. The rules of communication suggest that if at least two speakers understand the meaning of the word, sentence or symbol based on "reciprocal recognition" (communicative act performed by an appropriate speaker to an appropriate audience), the communicative act will be effective. Only in this case will it be possible for both speakers to understand and identify meaning from their own position and from that of the other person at the same time. Fillmore (1977 in Channell (1994) also states that interpreting a communication or text involves more than the mere processing of meanings that are provided by the content of the communication or text. Interpretation also involves conscious and unconscious cognitive (mental) processing that draws on the memories, knowledge and current perceptions of the interpreter as well as a set of measures which the interpreter applies to determine if the text is rational.

Habermas (1984) also alludes to the aspect of illocutionary force, referring to the way in which the receiver of a message interprets a communication and performs what has been asked, which also relates to the influence of communication on consumer behaviour. This aspect becomes increasingly problematic for non-native speakers where the receiver of the message simply does not understand the illocutionary intent of the communication and, therefore, does not behave as the communicator expected (Celce-Murcia et al 1996).

2.6.2.5 Legitimacy norm

People also communicate with context in mind (norm of legitimacy). In other words, a communication is evaluated based on the legitimacy or acceptability of the source. For example, one would not necessarily trust legal advice given by a veterinarian or medical advice from a grocer (Underwood and Ozanne 1998). As a result, consumers continuously filter messages and information they receive based on the credibility, or the believability thereof. This becomes an important consideration for message producers who would like their messages to be the ones that are attended to, recalled and acted upon. Messages and the information they consist of, therefore, need to be legitimate and credible otherwise users (consumers) could reject the information as not credible, which could result in the information not being processed and not being able to impact on the knowledge, attitudes or behaviour of the users (consumers) (Wathen and Burkell 2002).

Similar to the universal norms described by Habermas (1984), Grice's (1975 in De Gruyter 2008) theory of "conversational implicature", provides further insights about the characteristics of successful communication. For conversational implicature, communicators are expected to follow the "cooperative principle" when "making a required conversational contribution, when it occurs, for the recognised purpose of the conversation in which the speakers are engaged" (De Gruyter 2008). Littlejohn (1999) summarises four maxims, which lead to cooperative behaviour in communication and which influence the success of a communicative act positively or negatively. These are described as:

1) Quantity maxim (expected amount of communication) which can be violated when communicators are over- or under-informative

2) Quality maxim which involves truthfulness in the communicative act and which can be violated when communicators deliberately lie or where the communication does not reflect the communicator's honest intentions

3) Relevancy maxim where the communicators should make relevant contributions to the topic associated with the purpose of the communicative act

4) Manner maxim which is concerned with the clarity of the communication and the expectation that the communicator will avoid obscurity, ambiguity or being disorganised

The ultimate purpose of business communication is for the business to convey its intention towards consumers by constructing meaningful messages and transferring these to the consumers in a manner which the consumer can understand and easily interpret. This would then result in the anticipated response or behaviour from the consumer for which the business was hoping. In order to determine whether a communication could be labelled as effective, it is important to understand what is meant by effective communication. Effectiveness in a communicative situation describes the outcome of communicative competence. An unsuccessful communication would imply that something went amiss during the communication process which produced a misunderstanding or a communication breakdown (De Gruyter 2008).

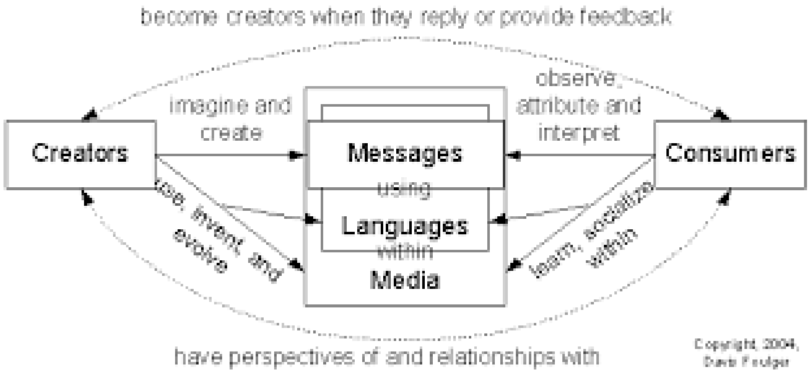
2.7 Effective communication and communication barriers

Effective communication is essential to the strategic success of a business as it promotes healthy business relationships with consumers and increased sales. However, ineffective business communication could cause collapses in relationships, loss of customers, growing negative consumer perceptions towards the business, which have detrimental effects on profits, business growth and longevity.

2.7.1 Effective communication

Effective communication describes the outcome of communicative competence. Unsuccessful communication would imply that something went wrong during the communication process which, in turn, resulted in a misunderstanding or a communication breakdown (De Gruyter 2008). However, effective communication processes and effective message construction could be achieved by focussing on the elements in Laswell's (1949 in Foulger 2004) Communication Model which was elaborated by Foulger (2004). Laswell's (1949 in Foulger 2004) model suggests an emphasis on "who (sender), says what (message), in which channel (medium), to whom (audience) and to what effect (purpose)". Foulger (2004) expands on this model by creating the "ecological model of the communication process" which describes a number of relationships that need to be considered in the construction of a successful communication (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Foulger's Ecological Model of the Communication Process



Source: Foulger (2004)

Figure 2.3 highlights the relationships in Foulger's (2004) model, which are also relevant to this study's focus on plain language's application in business communication within the Nelson Mandela Metropole. From Foulger's (2004) model, the following aspects of message structures and their impact on communication relate to this study of plain language application:

- Messages are created and consumed using language
- Language occurs within the context of media
- Messages are constructed and consumed within the context of media
- Consumers of messages interpret those messages within the context of their perspectives of, and relationships with, creators of messages and consumers make attributions of meaning based on their opinion of the message creator
- Messages created are almost always a partial and imperfect representation of what creators would like to say
- Consumers interpret messages within the limits of languages used and the media those languages are used in
- Consumer's interpretation of a message may be very different than what the creator of a message imagined

Foulger's (2004) considerations clearly identify a number of essential components that need to be taken into account when business messages are constructed and distributed to consumers. For effective business communication to take place, it is, therefore, not only important to develop properly-structured messages, but also to use appropriate language, to consider the medium through which the message will be distributed, and also to consider their target audience as well as factors such as consumer opinions and their relationships with the organisation which might influence the interpretation of messages.

Effective communication is also achieved through clarity (for example, tone, ease of correct interpretation and understanding) and message accuracy (truthful and trustworthy content). These components need to be added to the communication process to ensure clear, direct and comprehensible communication with consumers, using only the necessary words. Effective communication would also safeguard against using overly technical, obscure language that is riddled with inflated vocabulary and guard against complex and longwinded sentence construction. These negative elements, also referred to as barriers to communication, can often cause ambiguity and/or confusion during the communicative process.

2.7.2 Communication barriers

Misunderstandings or communication breakdowns are caused by factors that hinder or prevent the successful flow of the message from the sender to the audience. These factors, broadly referred to as communication barriers, include barriers in perception, language barriers, physical barriers, physiological barriers and psychological barriers (Cleary 2014), which can prevent the audience's understanding of a message.

2.7.2.1 Perceptual barriers

Perception allows people, and, more specifically, consumers to process and evaluate communicative acts so that they can interpret and assign meaning to what was being communicated. Consumers would, therefore, process information based on various individual and unique influences such as their own cultural background, life experience which also relates to generational differences, selection (what they want and what they are interested in), needs and education. From this perspective, it is imperative that communicators put themselves in the position of the audience to whom they will be communicating, to alleviate miscommunication as far as possible (Cleary 2014).

2.7.2.2 Language barriers

Language and how it is used can often cause breakdowns in communication. For Cleary (2014), these linguistic barriers impact on meaning and understanding, and include:

- Jargon (specialised language of a particular field or profession)
- Difficult words (words that are too complex for the intended audience)
- Ambiguity or innuendo (meanings understood differently by the audience to what was intended by the sender of the message)
- Insensitive language (discriminates on the bases of race or gender, for example sexism, slang)
- Incorrect pronunciation (causes confusion and impacts on meaning)

- Incorrect grammar (affects clarity of the message)
- Long sentences (difficult to decode long messages that cause confusion)
- Spelling and punctuation errors (clarity and meaning of the message impacted)

2.7.2.3 Physical barriers

Physical barriers to communication refer to hurdles that are brought about by the external environment in which a communicative act takes place. These could include noise levels during communication or an uncomfortable heat on a summer's day that influences a consumer's attention span and concentration, information overload, writing that is too small to read, incorrect grammar and/or spelling and so forth (Cleary 2014).

2.7.2.4 Physiological barriers

Physiological barriers are contributors to ineffective communication that appear inside the sender or the audience such as a bad headache, sleepiness or hunger that hinders concentration (Cleary 2014).

2.7.2.5 Psychological barriers

Psychological barriers are experienced in the mind and include aspects such as embarrassment about the subject, boredom or a bad attitude to the message (Cleary 2014).

2.7.2.6 Vague language use

Channell (1994) identified vagueness in language use as a phenomenon in communication that could be seen as a potential communication barrier as the use of "vague language is not bad or wrong, but also not inherently good". The appropriateness or inappropriateness of vague language use needs to be considered within the context of the communication. For example, producing a press release and providing a vague description of an occurrence which is under legal review to safeguard against legal consequences, would be considered an acceptable use of vague language. This communicative occurrence is also referred to as "equivocal communication", which was developed by Bavelas (1990 in Littlejohn, 1999), where messages are deliberately unclear, not direct or straightforward. Channell's (1994) studies attribute the use of vagueness to the following reasons:

- Tailoring of a communication: providing only the right amount of information to the audience (making the contribution as informative as required for the purpose of the exchange and not making it more informative than required)
- Withholding information deliberately: withholding information because of uncertainty, culturally or socially-appropriate conditions

- Using language persuasively: providing limited information about a product or special offer to draw attention to it
- Avoiding lexical gaps: using vagueness to convey meaning in situations where the necessary words or phrases for the concept a person wants to describe escapes the individual
- Being unspecific: lacking specific information or knowledge about a subject
- Displacing: using vagueness when there is uncertainty about what a speaker wants to say
- Self-protecting: using vagueness to safeguard against making mistakes
- Using power and politeness: utilising vague language to be polite, protect another person's feelings and save face with superiors
- Avoiding informality and atmosphere: using vague language is often associated with informal conversational settings which are regarded as appropriate in certain communicative acts

2.7.2.7 Education and literacy levels

A further communication barrier often overlooked by professionals in business and even communication practitioners, is the education and literacy levels of consumers. According to Reisberg (2006), education can expand the number of words a person knows and understands through the large amount of reading required, which points out possible processing and interpretive limitations when education is inadequate. Census 2011 data (Census 2011 Methodology and Highlights of Key Results 2011) revealed that the South African population was close to 52 million people, and the education levels of South African citizens at this time indicated that the educational level of most South Africans was limited:

> Although there was an increase in education levels in the country between 1996 and 2011, the percentage distribution of persons aged 20 years and older by level of education still indicated that 8,6% had no schooling, 12,3% had some primary education, 4,6% had completed primary education and 33,9% had some secondary education.

These statistics indicate that more than half (59,4%) of the South African population did not possess grade 12 literacy. Interestingly, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa reports in its South African Fact File (2013) in February 2013, that of the 51.770 million population, 2011 estimate (StatisticsSA 2011), adult literacy was estimated at 89% (South African Fact File 2013). Although adult literacy levels in South Africa seem high, the education levels indicated by Statistics SA (2011) still poses a definite ethical dilemma for organisations that rely on print and electronic channels to communicate with their customer base aged 20 years and older. It is, therefore, very important for businesses to know their target audiences intimately. Businesses need to be aware of and understand the limitations that the varying education levels in South Africa place on business communication success.

2.7.2.8 Rhetorical sensitivity

Finally, a key contributor identified as relevant to the study and related to effective communication is a sensitivity to the audience as well as the adjustment of messages to the audience. Littlejohn (1999) refers to this as "Rhetorical Sensitivity". This necessity, identified by Hart and Burks (1972 in Littlejohn 1999), encompasses a concern or consideration for self, others and the situation and is believed to "contribute to a more effective understanding and acceptance of ideas delivered in a speech / communicative act". Through rhetorical sensitivity, the communicator attempts to balance self-interest with the interest of others and aims to adapt what is said to the level, mood and beliefs of the audience to whom he/she is communicating.

Ultimately, clear and accessible language and structure of a text from the viewpoint of the target audience would depend largely on the local context, the profile of the target audience as well as the purpose and use of a document (A Customer Landscape that is not Plain n.d.).

Owing to the complexities in the South African business landscape, and because it is necessary for consumers to protect their own interests, the use of plain language in business communication has been included as an essential component of numerous South African legislative acts. The study of plain language application in business communication within the Nelson Mandela Metropole is conducted with specific reference to, and within the context of the plain language requirements set out in The South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and, therefore, requires further review to provide a suitable background for the study.

2.8 Plain language and the Consumer Protection Act

According to the Plain Language Institute (2013), "the South African CPA not only regulates the use of plain language, but also defines the concept within the South African context". In Figure 2.4, the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) Section 22 states that the use of plain language in consumer documentation (notices, documents or visual representations) is required by the Act to ensure that communication is understood by the consumer it was intended for, without unnecessary effort.

Figure 2.4 Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009)

Part D

Right to disclosure and information

Right to information in plain and understandable language

22. (1) The producer of a notice, document or visual representation that is required, in terms of this Act or any other law, to be produced, provided or displayed to a consumer must produce, provide or display that notice, document or visual representation—

(a) in the form prescribed in terms of this Act or any other legislation, if any, for that notice, document or visual representation; or

(b) in plain language, if no form has been prescribed for that notice, document or visual representation.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, a notice, document or visual representation is in plain language if it is reasonable to conclude that an ordinary consumer of the class of persons for whom the notice, document or visual representation is intended, with average literacy skills and minimal experience as a consumer of the relevant goods or services, could be expected to understand the content, significance and import of the notice, document or visual representation without undue effort, having regard to—

(a) the context, comprehensiveness and consistency of the notice, document or visual representation;

(b) the organisation, form and style of the notice, document or visual representation;

(c) the vocabulary, usage and sentence structure of the notice, document or visual representation; and

(d) the use of any illustrations, examples, headings or other aids to reading and understanding.

(3) The Commission may publish guidelines for methods of assessing whether a notice, document or visual representation satisfies the requirements of subsection (1)*(b)*.

(4) Guidelines published in terms of subsection (3) may be published for public comment.

From Figure 2.4, it is evident that the producers of messages are responsible for constructing messages that are easily understandable to the intended consumer. Consumers are broadly defined in the Act as ordinary consumers, with average literacy skills and minimal experience as a consumer. Messages should be constructed by taking cognisance of points 22.2(a) to (d), for example, context, comprehensiveness and consistency as well as vocabulary and sentence structure, and must also be understandable with no undue effort on the part of the consumer, irrespective of the medium used to disseminate the message. The regulations, set out in Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), state that a document's purpose has been achieved if "the customer (consumer) experiences the document as clear, relevant, informative", communicating exactly what they expect from the organisation and communicating exactly what they need from a product (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013). Consumer interpretation, and their perspective of the content of a communication is, therefore, key to the definition of plain language as described in Section 22 (2), which states that "a document is in plain language if, and only if, it is clear and understandable for the target audience" (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013).

The central concepts underlining Section 22 of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language requirements indicate to the researcher that business communication has to take three communication aspects into careful consideration, namely, sender, receiver and content:

1. Sender: The sender (producer) of the message is responsible to ensure that the message is produced, provided or displayed in the prescribed form which the CPA and any other legislation stipulates, or, if no specific form is prescribed by the Act or legislation, the message must be delivered in plain language.

2. Receiver (audience): According to the CPA (2008), a message is delivered in plain language if the message is directed at / understandable and meaningful to consumers:
   a) of a certain level (class) that would understand the content and would not require legal advice to interpret the message
   b) with average literacy skills
   c) who have minimal experience as a consumer of the relevant goods or services
   d) with the ability to understand the content, significance and consequence of the intended message (notice, document or visual representation) without undue (excessive, unwarranted, unnecessary, unjustifiable) effort (energy, determination, struggle, work)

3. Content: In message construction of a notice, document or visual representation, the following aspects are must be considered:
   a) Context (the setting, background, situation, framework, environment and perspective of the situation in which the message is created); comprehensiveness (inclusiveness, completeness and extensiveness of the information supplied); and consistency (reliability, uniformity, regularity and dependability of the information supplied)
   b) Organisation of the message, including the planning and flow thereof, as well as message form (procedure, method, arrangement) and style (design)

Balmford (n.d.) states that plain language needs to be repositioned so that decision-makers in business and government will regard clear legal and related communications as important to their organisation's success. For example, business communication creates consumer expectations, which if not met by the business and its products and services, could lead to consumer dissatisfaction and relatedly also to a decline in consumer support and income which could have detrimental effects on business success.

2.9 Plain language and business success

According to Balmford (n.d.), it is imperative for decision makers in business and government to understand the important impact that plain language and clear legal and related communications could have on business success. Balmford (n.d.) points out two concepts that help relay the relevance of plain language in business communication, namely, the "voice" and the "brand". Communication through speaking and writing is also impacted by communication variables such as voice or tone. The voice or tone of a communicative act is heavily influenced by the audience as well as the purpose of the message. Often, the communication meaning "is lost in translation" because communicators lose focus of the audience with whom they are communicating and why the communication is taking place (purpose). In addition, from a related standpoint, messages often become distorted or misinterpreted when communicators attempt to sound professional and scholarly with the hope that the communication will carry more weight, be more trustworthy or sound more impressive.

The brand, on the other hand, relates to what is represented by the organisation, what it stands for and what differentiates it from its competitors, and, ultimately, articulates an organisation's reputation (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). Brand image and brand differentiation (attributes that set the organisation apart from competitors in the minds of consumers) are important in all industries, whether related to government, professional services or retail case studies. Building and maintaining a brand, is about aligning what is said about the brand in communication, advertising and marketing, with what is actually delivered by the organisation. If customer expectations, which were created through communication, marketing and advertising, are not met by the reality of the product or service delivered, the success of the brand and the business would be in danger (Bauer et al 2008).

Written communication of an organisation is seen as the voice of an organisation's brand. According to Balmford (n.d.), these communications are often the consumer's only way of deciding whether to buy a product, whether to continue using a service, working out how to use a product; or understanding and applying professional advice they have received. Therefore, if an organisation's written communication is unclear, irrelevant, uninformative or vague, written for the wrong target audience or written in an inappropriate tone, the communication experience on the part of the consumer would be a negative one which might result in negative consumer behaviour. As communication impacts on consumer attitude and behaviour, Balmford (n.d.) identifies that it is important that organisations:

> … pay the same amount of attention to what is being communicated to their consumers, how it is communicated and how well these communications are received and understood by the consumers as they do when spending time and money on the construction and purification of their brands in terms of logo and visual identity design as well as advertising

In other words, the brand value of paying adequate attention to the organisation's messages and how consumers relate to and understand these messages are often underestimated by organisations.

2.9.1 Plain language impact on customer satisfaction, consumer attitude and behaviour

Consumer attitude towards the brand influences consumer behaviour (how the consumer perceives the brand, if they buy the product or service, what they buy if they do, and what they communicate about the products or services they bought, intends to buy or refuses to buy). Lutz (1991) suggests that "attitude comprises of cognition, affect and behaviour" and suggests that there is "a causal flow from cognitions (thoughts, understanding and perceptions) through attitude (a positive or negative emotion towards an object), leading to intentions and ultimately behaviour". In marketing, it is understood that communications such as advertising could influence attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Shimp 2007). For example, if a product is advertised as being helpful to meet a particular consumer need at a price that is perceived as acceptable to pay by the consumer, the consumer's attitude could become positive towards the product, which could then lead to the consumer purchasing the product (behaviour).

Consumers continuously evaluate their interactions, the brand, as well as product and service experiences they have with organisations. The success or failure of these interactions and experiences can be defined in terms of customer (consumer) satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is defined by Olivier (1997) as "an individual's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance in relation to his or her expectations". Customer satisfaction is believed to be a key differentiator between businesses, and a key element of business strategy in the competitive marketplace where organisations compete for customers daily (Lamparello 2000).

For Gomez, McLaughlin, and Wittink (2011), customer satisfaction is vital as "organisations that will survive in today's economic climate are the ones who will not just focus their energy on sales volume to create profits, but focus on customer satisfaction implicitly to create long-term profitability". Tam (2004) also equates satisfied customers to organisational assets as they tend to repurchase a service or a product and recommend it to other consumers to use (positive consumer behaviour). Dissatisfied customers, on the other hand, may be a threat to an organisation, because they tend to voice their dissatisfaction to other consumers which may result in consumers choosing not to purchase the organisation's products or services (negative consumer behaviour). For Seybold (2002), because organisations want their consumers to behave positively towards their brands, products and services the Total Customer Experience (TCE) is imperative:

> Total Customer Experience (TCE) is a consistent demonstration and faultless execution, across distribution channels and interaction points of the emotional connection and relationship the business wants the consumer to have with the brand.

The "interaction points" identified by Seybold (2002) include business communication, therefore, the lack of effective business communication could impact the total customer experience negatively and result in loss of consumers and ultimately income.

Therefore, the information (messages) which the organisation shares with the consumer about itself, its brand, its products and services is what drives the consumer towards a particular organisation, brand, product or service. If these messages are interpreted as clear, precise, to the point, understandable, truthful and consistent with the brand promise (written in plain language), consumer satisfaction levels could be high and consumer behaviour could have a positive outcome. However, if these messages are perceived to be a contradiction to the brand promise, irrelevant, unclear, ambiguous, filled with useless technical jargon, are difficult to interpret and cause confusion (not written in plain language), consumer satisfaction levels would often be low and consumer behaviour negative. Otnes et al (2012) argue that "poor execution of marketplace language rituals can lead to a diminishing customer experience and perception of insincerity on the part of the organisation". As a result, consumer attitude towards the organisation could become negative and, therefore, the business might lose these consumers as potential customers.

Both the impact that plain language has on consumer attitude and behaviour, and the ethical considerations with regard to the application of plain language in business communication are important aspects that need further reflection when considering influences on business success.

2.10 Plain language and the ethics of business communication

Business communication that is vague, unclear, incorrect, false, deliberately evasive or written without considering the audience's capacity to communicate, could be considered as unethical practice against consumers because it places the consumer in a vulnerable and uncertain position of decision making that could impact consumer behaviour negatively.

Hamilton (1989 in Edgett 2002) also considers persuasive business communication and the perceived benefit that the resultant consumer action or behaviour could have on business success:

> The “bottom line” of any public relations/advertising campaign is the extent to which the project affects the behavior(s) of the target public. Ultimately, the actions of the target public produce the pay-off for the client and/or company.

As a result, public relations and advertising messages could affect the behaviour of consumers which, if positive towards the organisation, could have benefits for both the organisation and consumers.

To illustrate the ethical dilemma facing practitioners of business communication and advertising, Cooper and Kelleher (2001) considers the use of the words “better” and “best” to describe an organisation, product, service or brand in business communication. The words and/or phrases that are used to create meaning for the purpose of persuasion are not, in themselves, wrong or unethical, but could be defined as unethical if a description is not, in fact, a true reflection of the actual state of affairs. The questions, what is the meaning of “better”, how is the item better than, and what is the item “better” than, again illustrates how ambiguity can be related to words and phrases used in business communication. For Cooper and Kelleher (2001), professional persuaders need to evaluate their claims based on clarity (definition and clarification of claims made to consumers), scientific evidence (provision of objective data that confirm the claim), context for comparison (provision of information about comparative products and services) and, audience sensitivity (consider the nature of the audience).

2.11 Conclusion

Consumers are crucial stakeholders in the business environment. With regard to the study of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and plain language application in businesses in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan area, consumers constitute the audience at whom the business communication processes being investigated is directed. These consumers are the reason why businesses exist and their attitude and behaviour towards the business and its products or services represent the bloodline for business survival. Thus, communicating effectively with the consumer is a key function and responsibility of any business. According to the Plain Language Institute of South Africa (2013), each customer document in a company or financial institution has different owners. Consumers as well as each owner of a document, for example, marketing, legal, and Information Technology, have their own needs and requirements for a particular document, referred to as the document's purpose. The purpose of the document directs the message and intended meaning of the communications as it will be produced by the business and also influences how the consumer will eventually interpret the message they receive.

As communication barriers could prevent the audience (or consumers) understanding of messages sent by a communicator (business) during communication, it is important that communication barriers are limited as far as possible during the communication process, to ensure a positive and meaningful business exchange between the business and the consumer. Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Vrba (2007) identify both intra-personal factors such as consumer perception and language competence, as well as interpersonal factors which would include trust in the organisation and organisational climate, structural factors and technological factors, all of which could have an impact on the effectiveness of business communication. The process of ensuring that consumers understand the messages sent by the business is perpetually complicated by a number of variables or barriers which impact on the message that the audience receives and, as a result, the message's purpose. In particular, language use, message construction and clarity (tone, ease of correct interpretation and understanding), message accuracy (truthful and trustworthy content) and message delivery (channels used to distribute it) impact on the meaning and understanding of the intended communication. These factors all contribute to and determine the effectiveness, adequacy and success of the business communication process (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

As a result of the need for accurate, unambiguous and clear business messages, the initiative termed the plain language movement increased its momentum during the mid-1980s as campaigners drove the belief that clear and reader-friendly communication could at the same time be accurate, certain, and precise or specific (Kimble 1994). In addition, the need for plain language use in government, legal, financial and other business communications was believed to deliver large scale benefits potentially for organisations (Balmford n.d.). Since the inception of the plain language ideology, the application thereof has been mainly prescribed by statutory regulations in countries that recognised its value, such as South Africa, and, subsequently, plain language regulations have been written into numerous statutory laws such as the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009).

Knowledge of and application of plain language in business communication is of utmost importance to businesses from both the position of legal requirements as well as ensuring customer satisfaction and, consequently, business sustainability and growth.

Chapter 3 describes the study's research design and methodology to provide a meaningful understanding of the level of awareness that three Port Elizabeth businesses have of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations, and to evaluate plain language application by the businesses investigated. Chapter 3 also highlights the selected population, sampling method, and measuring instruments used during data collection which included qualitative semi-structured face-to-face interviews, a limited rating-scale survey as well as content analysis of documents supplied by each of the participating organisations. The deductive analysis methods which were used to analyse the data, and included the use of NVivo 10 qualitative software to code the interview transcript data to identify and order the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews, as well as the Likert-scale analysis and content analysis, which provided insights into the participant organisation's application of plain language in their respective organisations are also explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Applied research is predominantly aimed at the use of knowledge to change or improve situations and contexts (Boeije 2010). Therefore, this analytical study explains why or how something is happening and also identifies the variables that cause the occurrence. Specifically, it is an attempt to gain a meaningful understanding of the level of awareness that three Port Elizabeth Metropolitan businesses have of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations. In addition, the study intends to evaluate the application of plain language communication principles in the selected Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses, and, by identifying the contributory variables, draw meaningful and helpful conclusions from the data to detect barriers in plain language communication. Finally, it intends to identify possible best practices, which could impact on the effectiveness of future business communication application in these organisations (Neville 2007).

As a result, it was decided to approach the study from a predominantly qualitative mode of enquiry while limited quantitative data was obtained to enable triangulation of the data to enhance the validity and credibility of the study (McMillan and Schumacher 2001 in Maree 2007).

For Silverman (2005), it is important to think critically about qualitative data analysis to provide more valid findings. Silverman (2005) suggests using appropriate tabulations, for example, qualitative researchers can use quantitative measure such as simple counting techniques using member's own categories to survey the whole data corpus ordinarily lost in intensive qualitative research. As a result, for the study NVivo 10 qualitative software identified the number of references to nodes identified. These numerical references were not explanations in terms of mechanisms but they were merely quantitative descriptions of formal (not substantial) associations (Sayer 1992). Therefore, the research's validation was extended by thinking critically about the qualitative data by noting the number of various transcripts' nodes retrieved and considering deviant cases (Harran 2006).

Boeije (2010) defines qualitative research as focusing on three key elements which include looking for meaning in the data gathered, using flexible research methods to gather data which enables contact with participants and providing qualitative findings. Approaching the study from a predominantly qualitative perspective, allowed the researcher to conduct surveys and literature reviews that firstly helped identify theoretical frameworks and conceptual understandings which later supported the research focus. The researcher decided to follow a deductive approach whereby general theories concerning communication and language, in particular, communicative competence and plain language, would be used to provide a clear theoretical position and an appropriate context in which the study could be performed, and the data interpreted (Mouton 2001).

Both a phenomenological (descriptive and interpretive), and somewhat positivistic methodology was required to provide the researcher with a rich data set and, therefore, these two approaches were incorporated into the study's research design. The phenomenological approach is relevant to the research methodology (Neville 2007) because of the study's social reliance. For example, people often influence events and activities by acting in ways that contradict societal rules or norms. As a result, the application of plain language within business communication is ultimately reliant on human behaviour, even though it is regulated by law. In addition, the positivistic approach to this research would assist the researcher to "identify, measure and evaluate" any dominant elements (variables), and provide a sensible explanation for it by establishing causal links and relationships between the different elements (or variables) and relating them to the theory or practice of communication.

An analysis of participant perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences as captured in the research data, would aim to establish how the participants interpret the dominant elements (variables) related to this study (Maree 2007). The use of both the phenomenological and positivistic methodological approaches to the study, also made the study exploratory in nature as the researcher set out to understand the relationships between any dominant elements (variables) that might have emerged from the data while attempting to determine whether the three selected Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses were aware of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and how plain language was applied in these businesses (Neville 2007).

The data obtained from the interviews, surveys and content analysis of documents supplied by the organisations would assist the researcher to determine whether the results supported the assumption that there was a lack of awareness regarding the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and its plain language regulations, as well as a lack of plain language application in written business communication in the selected Port Elizabeth businesses. Relevant theory was also used to identify themes for data analysis purposes with a focus on Habermas's (1984) conditions for communicative competence as a theoretical framework (Boeije 2010).

3.2 Population and sampling method

According to Collins and Hussey (2003), a sample is made up of a few members of a total population. The population could refer to a body of people or any collection of items that are studied for the purpose of the research. The study's sampling method was convenient and purposeful, as the sample was intentionally-selected according to the needs of the study from a defined research population (Boeije 2010). Stratified purposeful sampling (Maree 2007) was also used to identify possible participants based on a list of predetermined criteria that was suitable to the study. For example, participants were required to be in management positions and involved with communication practices in small, medium or large organisations within the Port Elizabeth Metropole. The participants were also selected based on convenience, whereby the researcher secured interviews with those participants agreeing to be interviewed from a pool of prospective participants. For the study, there was "no pretence of being representative of a population" (Leedy 1997) as the study included only three participants. Although the researcher approached a number of potential participants from various organisations, many were not keen on being interviewed on the topic as it was presented to them. In these cases, the researcher was referred to their companies' legal departments for assistance.

However, as samples in qualitative research are often small, the selected three cases or organisations were studied intensively and each case typically generated thick data (Boeije 2010). For the study, one representative per organisation (three in total) were interviewed. The researcher believed that the data that would emerge from this data set would provide interesting results, as many of the organisations in the city had regional responsibilities that were mainly channelled to them by their national and international head offices. For example, the researcher assumed that regional staff within the organisation would not be as informed of the plain language regulations in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) as staff in national offices might be. In addition, there was the assumption that there might be a lack of ownership or responsibility for effective communication regionally because national and international head offices possibly dictated communication practices.

The research site was the Port Elizabeth Metropole as it was an appropriate setting for the study and its scope was manageable. Three cases or organisations within the Port Elizabeth Metropole were identified for the study, and to provide a comparative angle, the study included one small, one medium and one large organisation as classified by the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber.

The selected sample complied with the following criteria:

- One small organisation: Between 1 and 50 employees
- One medium organisation: Between 51 and 350 employees
- One large organisation: 351 and more employees

The organisations that were selected, represented the telecommunication, motor vehicle retail and financial services sectors to provide a diverse sectoral perspective for analysis purposes. At each organisation, possible participants, all at senior levels within their respective organisations, were approached to take part in the study voluntarily. The participants needed an in-depth understanding of the business's day-to-day operations, regulations and business writing practices specifically related to communication with their various audiences. As a result, the selected participants' roles ranged from manager in a small concern to directors within the medium and large organisations. Table 3.1 illustrates the participant demographics.

Table 3.1 Participant Demographics

Participant	Geographic Location	Organisation Size	Sector	Management Level	Management Focus	Business Communication Responsibility
1	PE Metro	Small	Motor Vehicle Retail	Middle Management	Local	High
2	PE Metro	Medium	Financial Services	Senior Management	Regional	High
3	PE Metro	Large	Telecommunication	Senior Management	Regional	High

Table 3.1 illustrates the range of organisation types as well as their varying sizes. All other identifiable biographical details of the organisations and the participants were confidential owing to the ethics requirements and sample size.

3.3 Primary data collection

The study focussed on the current awareness of plain language regulations in the CPA, the business communication processes followed in selected organisations within the Port Elizabeth Metropole specifically related to the CPA's plain language regulations and its application in these organisations. Apart from establishing whether the selected businesses in the Port Elizabeth Metropole were aware of the plain language regulations presented in the CPA, a valuable element of the study was to determine whether these organisations had adopted plain language regulations or not and their reasons for applying or not applying plain language in their communication practices.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

According to Boeije (2010), data collection in a qualitative study takes place by means of semi-structured measuring instruments that are tailored to the research subject and refined as the process progresses. In this instance, the researcher made use of qualitative semi-structured, face-to-face interviews that were conducted with the selected participants within each of the three organisations in the Port Elizabeth Metropole. The interviews were audio-recorded for record purposes with participants responsible for business communication within their respective organisations. These semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which were about 40-60 minutes in duration, were recorded on a digital recorder and notes were taken during the discussions. Interviews were conducted over a period of one week during the third quarter of 2014.

By using semi-structured interviews, all participants were asked similar questions during the interview process. However, the interviews were flexible which allowed the researcher to modify the order and details of how the questions were covered. Because the participants were asked similar questions, the process also allowed for possible comparisons across interviews (Bernard and Ryan 2010).

To guide the interview process and provide some structure to the interviewing process, a questionnaire (see Figure 3.1 and Appendix 2) was prepared based on the research topic's theoretical framework. However, the questionnaire was not entirely pre-structured in terms of content, formulation and question sequence. The semi-structured interview style proved to be a successful data-gathering method as the organisational responsibilities and professional backgrounds of the participants were diverse. The researcher also did not ask questions to provoke specific answers but rather to engage the participants to talk about the emerging topics using their own words and perceptions (Boeije 2010). The semi-structured interview style provided for a thick data set as it allowed for probing and clarification of answers. For example, the excerpt below is an extract from the questionnaire and illustrates the questions used in the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2 for the complete Questionnaire).

Through posing various probing questions as suggested by Bernard and Ryan (2010), the researcher could clarify statements, concepts and ideas during the interview process and notes could be made regarding the responses received. The study's data collection process followed a deductive approach whereby a theoretical background was constructed about business communication, the plain language philosophy as well as the plain language regulations stated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). This enabled the researcher to probe her plain language use assumptions so that they could be validated during the research (Boeije 2010). For example, theory suggests that authentic or distortion-free communication is possible through symmetry and the application of the four norms of pragmatics which include the norms of Sincerity, Truthfulness, Legitimacy and Comprehensibility as explained in Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2 (Underwood and Ozanne 1998).

This theoretical framework assisted the researcher to identify facets related to plain language application which needed to be assessed during the data gathering process, and, therefore, also assisted the researcher to structure the interview questionnaire and survey. The relevance and validity of the theory could also be tested by noting the commentary of participants during the interview process. For example, the literature review highlighted numerous measurable concepts related to the topic of plain language application in written business communication such as Habermas's (1984) conditions for communicative competence (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2). These conditions which include general symmetry, as well as the norms of legitimacy, truthfulness, comprehensibility and sincerity were tested for their relevance by including probing questions in the questionnaire. Participants were asked a series of questions related to these norms to probe whether the participants identified with them in their respective business communication processes. An example of such a probing question was:

> **Researcher:** *For you, what would be the five main considerations or elements in an effective communication that's comprehensible?*

The answers that emerged from the semi-structured interviews also assisted the researcher to corroborate the data gathered from other sources such as the rating-scale survey and content analysis and contributed to the triangulation of data (Maree 2007).

3.3.2 Rating-scale survey

Qualitative researchers can also use quantitative measures which might be lost in intensive qualitative research. This also allows researchers to test and revise their assumptions by removing "nagging doubts about the accuracy of their impressions about the data" (Silverman 2005). As a result, a portion of the study required the collection of quantitative data by means of a Likert scale (rating-scale) survey which the participants completed individually after the interview (see Appendix 2). The Likert scale provided an "ordinal measure" of the participants' attitudes towards, and opinions about plain language application in their organisation's business writing practices (Maree 2007).

In this survey section of the interview, the participants were requested to complete the differential sliding scale checklist to rate their current business communication, to determine if they considered their communication to be predominantly clear and understandable for the target audiences with whom they communicated (Leedy 1997). The participants were asked to rate, in their own opinion, statements directly related to the requirements of the CPA's plain language regulations in their company's business communication. A series of statements were listed which the participants were asked to rate in their personal opinion according to a scale of one to five (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently and 5 = At all times). The statements aimed to determine a frequency rating in terms of the following message elements:

- Message content disseminated to stakeholders
- Message construction (language use, sentence construction and punctuation)
- Plain language use (communication tone as well as clear, concise language use avoiding jargon and vague messages as well as complicated or highly-technical language)
- Message accuracy (consistent with intended target audience, including truthfulness)
- Message delivery (channel types)
- Message structure (consistent with audience language proficiency and literacy levels)
- CPA compliance / noncompliance (level of adoption of the plain language regulations in messages)

3.4 Secondary data collection

In addition to the primary investigation, a content analysis of documents that were obtained from the selected organisations was also conducted. The content analysis was an "inductive and iterative process" whereby the researcher was "looking for similarities and differences in the texts that would corroborate or disconfirm the theory" (Maree 2007). The documents were reviewed in order to provide general commentary on the plain language use, supported with excerpts from each to validate the researcher's findings. The researcher utilised systematic content analysis methods to identify suitable and/or inadequate plain language use that were evident in the supplied documents and summarised message content related to the study of plain language application in business writing within businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole (Maree 2007).

Documents used for external communication were supplied by the organisations for review (also see Appendix 5). These documents included a product flyer, awareness campaign text illustrating the use of social media text conventions in a message and, a taxation e-mailer. Excerpts taken from each of the documents were analysed to highlight facets of plain language use in each one.

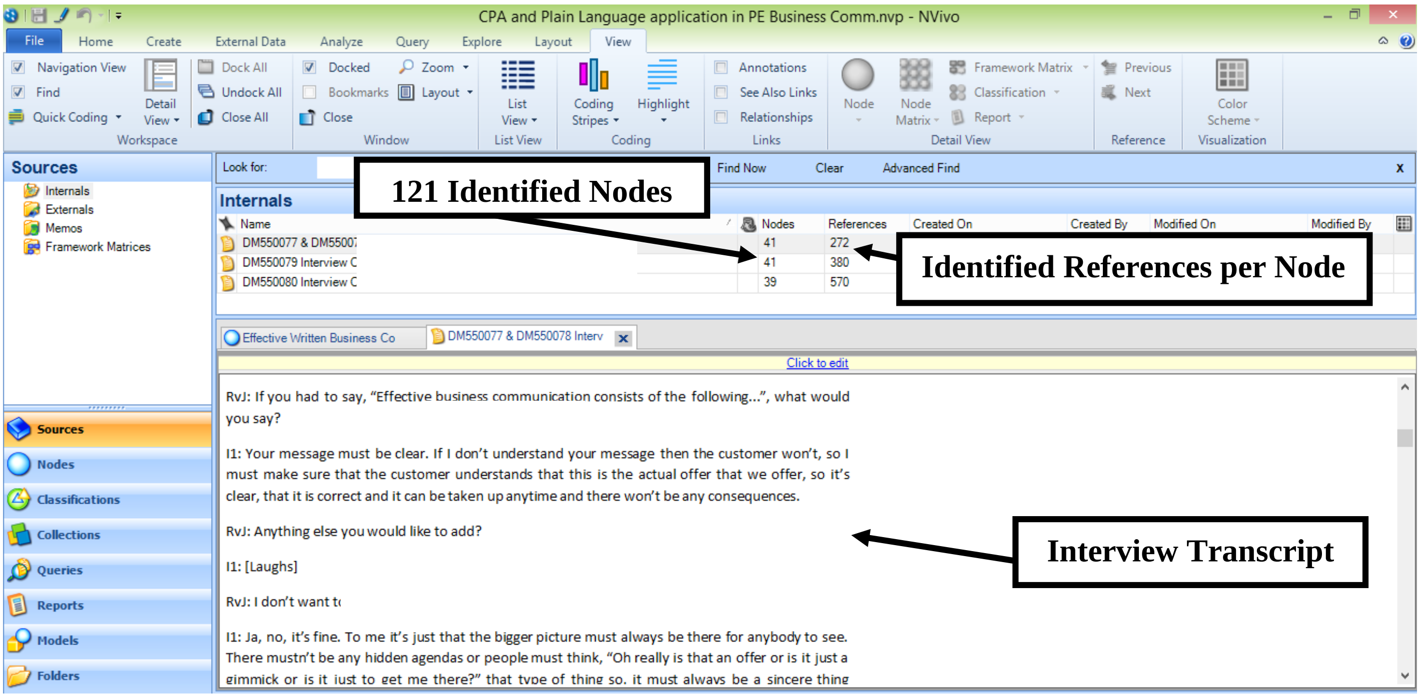
3.5 Data analysis

According to Bogdan and Bilken (1992 in Boeije 2010), data analysis is the practice of systematically examining and arranging interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that are collected to increase the researcher's understanding of interview responses and to enable the researcher to present what had been identified to others. Analysis involves working with data, organising it, segmenting it into manageable units, combining it, searching for configurations, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to share with others in terms of relevance. Bernard and Ryan (2010) also describe analysis as "looking for regularities" or patterns.

For the study, NVivo 10 qualitative research software was used to streamline the analysis of the study's interview transcripts as it is a very flexible tool which allows the researcher to save, select, code, annotate and browse large volumes of research data (Harran 2006). The data could then be sorted and retrieved according to the coding of themes made salient by their relevance to the research questions (Goetz and LeCompte 1984). For the discovery of patterns, variables and relationships, the data needs to be coded. For example, if anything strikes the researcher as worthy of a code, a code is selected to describe the issue as explicitly as possible. The codes selected are usually initially descriptive, "attributing a class of phenomena to a segment of the text" (Miles and Huberman 1994) to identify code patterns and relationships related to the theoretical framework. For the study, concepts were identified as descriptive anchors in the data, called *nodes* in NVivo 10. Nodes were used to order the collected data, and also group related data that was identified in the interview data transcripts in a sensible manner. The interview transcript data were classified according to the nodes identified, and the meaning thereof unpacked during analysis (Boeije 2010).

Figure 3.1 illustrates an extract of an interview transcript as it was imported into NVivo 10 for coding and analysis purposes.

Figure 3.1 Interview transcript using NVivo 10



From Figure 3.1, it is evident that the researcher identified 121 nodes in NVivo 10 software from the interview transcript data and, that the participants respectively made 272, 380 and 570 related references to these identified Nodes.

In this study, transcribed data was analysed by systematically collecting and coding the raw data in a structured manner using NVivo 10 analysis software as well as utilising it to gain new knowledge and uncover possible complexities related to the research problem (Faherty 2010). The analysis involved dividing the data into manageable parts in an attempt to uncover and understand the coding elements. Nodes were identified to order the data into manageable parts or dominant themes. These nodes were then identified and coded in the interview data transcripts, for example, target audience focus, communication norms, communication barriers and language challenges and considerations.

The relationship between the concepts were then inspected to identify meaningful, shared themes, patterns or trends that might be isolated in the participants descriptions of their common experiences (Mouton 2001; Leedy 1997).

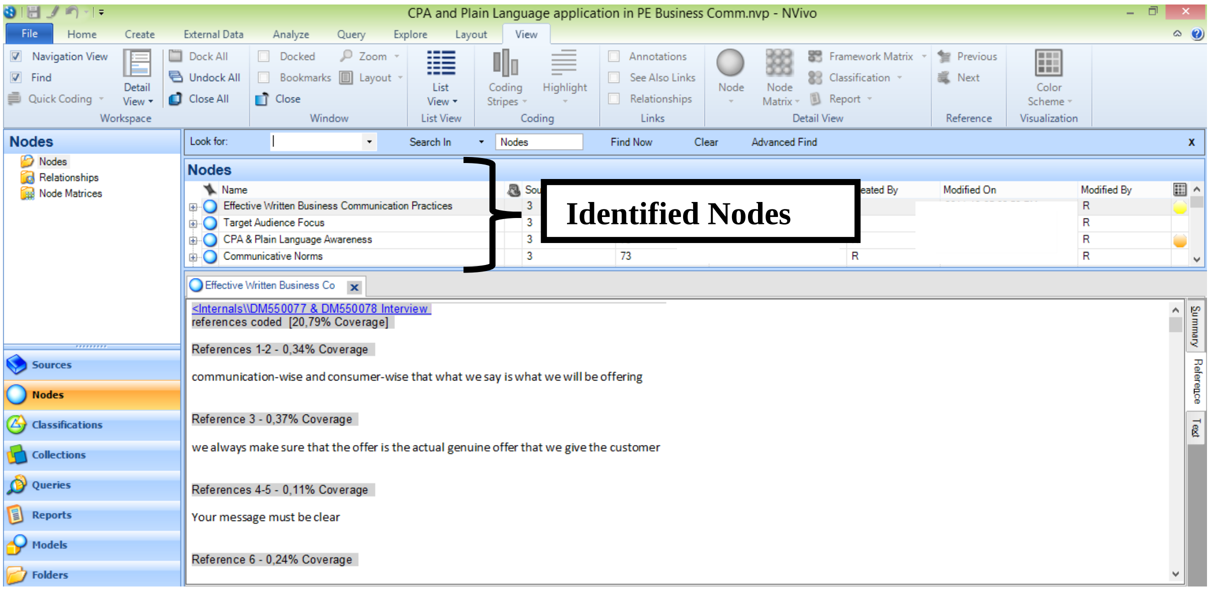
3.5.1 Data coding

The transcribed qualitative raw data obtained from the interview recordings were uploaded onto NVivo 10 qualitative research software to map or code data themes. Data themes were identified by coding relevant sections of the data which were selected, organised and labelled as *parent* and *child* nodes (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). For example, a dominant theme that emerged from the interview transcript data identified by the researcher as a parent node, was *Effective Written Business Communication Practices*. Child nodes that were linked to or influenced the theme of Effective Written Business Communication Practices were identified, for example, *Comprehensibility, Audience Specific Communication, Clarity* and *Language Use Varieties*. These labels were used to identify the collected data with the theory in which the study established its legitimacy.

The process gradually advanced from coding the data to developing conceptual categories, and eventually, linking the data with the theory (Boeije 2010). For example, this study is based on the theoretical foundation of Habermas's (1984) conditions for communicative competence and, during the coding process, conceptual categories such as Habermas's (1984) communicative norms emerged from the data as dominant themes in the interview transcript data (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2). The themes identified were then analysed to find similarities and or differences between the three interview responses (Bernard and Ryan 2010). Each of the code or node categories were then individually reviewed and interpreted to determine the findings. For example, within the parent node Effective Written Business Communication Practices, the child node Language Use Varieties was identified and then further broken down into categories which included *Descriptive Language, Informal Language, Technical Language, Vernacular Language Use,* and *Visual Communication*.

Figure 3.2 illustrates examples of the dominant themes the researcher identified within the interview transcript data.

Figure 3.2 Coding in NVivo 10 by identifying data themes (nodes)



From Figure 3.2, it is evident that for Effective Written Business Communication Practices, *Target Audience Focus*, *CPA*, *Plain Language Awareness* and *Communicative Norms* were identified as dominant themes in the interview transcript data. In the example, the number of references made to these themes throughout the interview were 176, 86, 73 and 73 respectively.

Figure 3.3 illustrates an example of parent and child nodes identified by the researcher during coding of an interview transcript.

Figure 3.3 Parent and child nodes

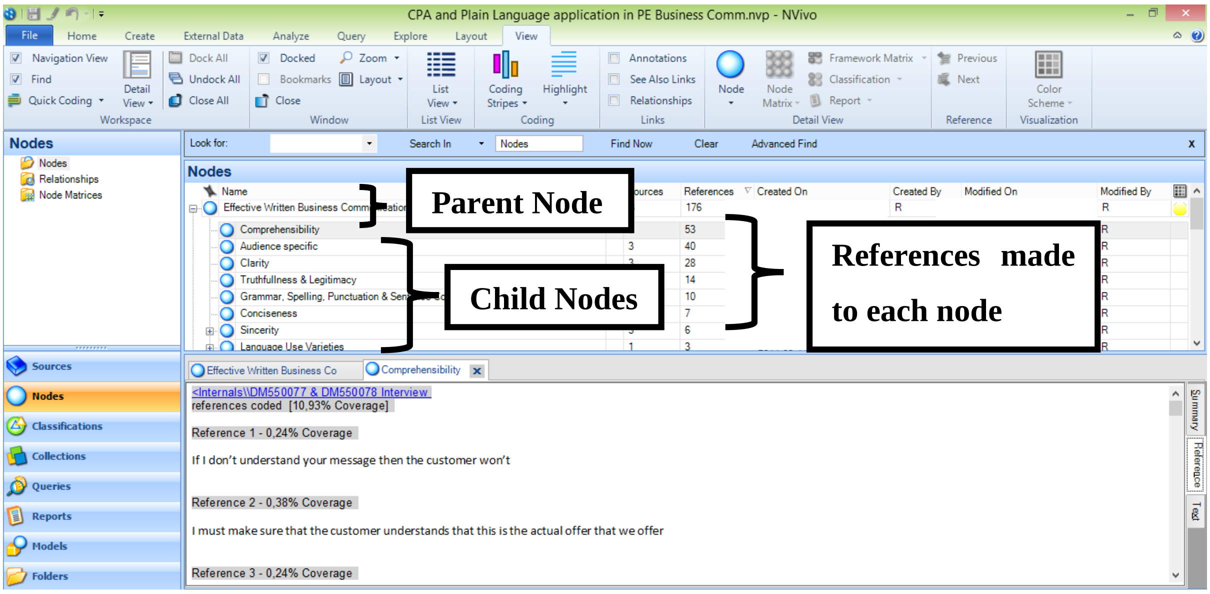


Figure 3.3 illustrates that the parent node, identified by the researcher as Effective Written Business Communication Practices, which involves aspects (child nodes) that impact on the parent node, for example, *Comprehensibility, Audience Specific Communication, Clarity, Truthfulness and Legitimacy, Grammar Spelling, Punctuation* and *Sentence Construction*. In addition, column three of Figure 3.3 indicates the number of references made to each of the child nodes during the interviews.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Trustworthiness of qualitative research is an important consideration and requires various data and stakeholder checks (Maree 2007). The researcher utilised triangulation, for example, more than one data source such as interview transcripts, a rating scale survey as well as document content analysis to corroborate findings and ensure validity and reliability. In addition, the researcher also made use of member validation to ensure that data was viable and reliable, by requesting the interview participants to check and verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts. The researcher's supervisors observed the interviews while these were in progress for support and guidance (Boeije 2010).

3.6.1 Validity

The validity and quality of research is based on the accuracy of the measurement tools utilised during the research process, as well as the objectivity with which the data was gathered and interpreted by the researcher (Boeije 2010).

To assist with the legitimacy of the interview process and the resultant dataset gathered in the study, the questionnaire was designed based on the theoretical background of the research topic. Before its implementation, the semi-structured interview questionnaire also underwent internal face validity (Maree 2007) as it was reviewed by both of the researcher's supervisors who were regarded as experts in the study of Language Studies and Communication. As a result, it was perceived as a sufficient tool to use during fieldwork to obtain the required data (Maree 2007). The semi-structured interview questionnaire was also reviewed and cleared for ethics purposes (see Appendix 2).

To ensure further accuracy of the gathered data, each of the transcripts were also quality checked by the researcher before forwarding it to each participant for review and authentication. Participants were requested to provide feedback regarding the transcripts by either accepting the information as correct or informing the researcher of any changes or additions they deemed necessary to improve the validity of the data.

Transcripts and audio recordings of all interviews as well as data coding documentation (data sources) was electronically stored for future use and possible data validation purposes (Mouton 2001).

3.6.2 Reliability

To offer a research perspective from different angles (Boeije 2010), a process of triangulation was used to ensure the reliability of the data. The researcher utilised multiple methods of data collection including semi-structured face-to-face interviews as well as document analysis to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study while considering the relevant theory.

The main measurement instrument, the semi-structured questionnaire, was standardised and used in all the interviews. The questionnaire design and construction was done in accordance with research best practices and reviewed by the researcher and supervisors for possible ambiguity, leading questions and other possible errors that could result in response inaccuracy (Mouton 2001). Probing was done in cases where the participants' answers warranted the approach to enrich the dataset. All interview questions were answered by all the participants which provided comparable data.

Boeije (2010) comments on the process of member validation which is identified as a procedure to verify research by presenting its findings to participants and requesting their endorsement thereof. With this in mind, the reliability of data and findings were further strengthened by requesting participant validation. The participants of the study were asked to review interview transcripts to verify its accuracy, point out corrections or adjustments that might have been needed and make additional comments that would deepen and enrich the data.

3.7 Ethics clearance

The study entitled, AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (2008) AND PLAIN LANGUAGE APPLICATION AT SELECTED BUSINESSES IN THE PORT ELIZABETH METROPOLE was submitted for ethics clearance to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Faculty of Arts FPGSC Higher Degrees sub-committee of the Faculty Postgraduate Studies Committee. The application was approved by the committee.

The Ethics clearance reference number, H/14/ART/JMS-003, was allocated to the study and was valid for three years, from 1 October 2014 to 1 October 2017 (see Appendix 1).

The researcher ensured that the participants were adequately informed of their involvement. Each participant provided a written letter of consent, verifying that they understood and agreed to the conditions of the study. All participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also informed that their identities would remain confidential and that the data would be securely stored for five years and possibly made available for future studies.

3.8 Study limitations

All studies have limitations which might be related to the methodology, sample selection, data collection processes or data analysis procedures followed (Maree 2007). In this study, the small population and sample size resulted in the survey data being sample and context specific as the participants were all managers who commented on probes from their own industry and managerial experience, and might, therefore, not be representative of the larger population of businesses within the Port Elizabeth Metropole or South Africa.

Demographical limitations also did not allow the researcher to correlate the data with any data obtained from the participants' larger organisations.

This study has also not allowed for a comparative analysis between data obtained from within the businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole versus that of consumers with whom these businesses communicate. Therefore, the opinions that were expressed by the participants regarding their organisational business communication might differ substantially from how the consumers of these businesses experienced the communication processes followed.

3.9 Conclusions

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to describe the research design and research methodology used in this study, to gain a meaningful understanding of the level of awareness that three selected Port Elizabeth Metropolitan businesses have of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations, as well as evaluate the application of plain language communication principles in these businesses. As a result, it was decided to approach the study from a predominantly qualitative method of enquiry, with limited quantitative data to assist with the triangulation of the study.

Participants for this study were identified by using a stratified purposeful and convenience sampling method (Maree 2007) based on a list of predetermined criteria that was suitable to the study. For example, participants were required to be in management positions and involved with communication practices in small, medium or large organisations within the Port Elizabeth Metropole.

Primary data collection methods included both semi-structured face-to-face interviews with participants as well as a Likert scale survey that was completed by the participants after their interviews. The secondary data collection was done by analysing the content of organisational documents supplied by each of the participants.

Data validity and reliability was accomplished by a process of triangulating data, utilising face-to-face interviews, Likert-scale surveys and content analysis to validate the data. Participants were involved in checking and verifying the data that was collected. This study also complied with the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's ethics requirements.

Finally, the study was conducted within some limitations. The small sample size and limited population demographics were the two main limitations noted during the implementation of this study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the study's research design and methodology so that meaningful findings could be drawn by the researcher.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings attained from the data analysis that was completed by the researcher. Chapter 4 also highlights the demographics of the participants in the study and then describes the data analysis themes that were identified as nodes and child nodes using NVivo 10 qualitative software. A number of key aspects or practice-based themes that needed careful consideration in the application of business communication principles were identified by the researcher. These themes included, for example, *Effective Written Business Communication Practices* as the most relevant practice-based consideration with 176 references, *Target Audience Focus* was the second most relevant with 86 references and *CPA and Plain Language Awareness* as well as *Communicative Norms* as the third and fourth most relevant considerations with 73 references respectively (see Figure 4.1).

The interview transcript data (see transcript example in Appendix 3) also revealed, for example, that all participants identified comprehensibility, clarity and truthfulness as important considerations which could affect effective written business communication practices. These facets that were identified correlated with the communication theory on communicative competence and plain language in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1). The evaluation of the participants' insights during the study revealed a number of communication barriers which impacted on the practitioners day-to-day business communication practices, for example, perceptual barriers, language barriers, physical barriers, education and literacy levels and rhetorical sensitivity (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2). Plain language application in participant organisations were assessed by evaluating the results of the Likert-scale survey completed by each of the participants, as well as analysing the content of documents that participating organisations supplied for review. These documents revealed that although the participants were mostly confident that their business communication was written in plain language, certain plain language shortcomings could still be identified in their documents. The researcher decided to add a content analysis of Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) to evaluate the application of plain language in its content. In this instance, the researcher observed a number of plain language errors that could affect the interpretation and understanding of this section of the Act as well.

4.2 Data analysis themes

Identifying practice-based themes that emerged from the interview data transcripts, assisted the researcher to divide the transcript data into manageable *nodes* and *child nodes* by utilising NVivo10 qualitative software (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5). These themes enabled the researcher to evaluate the insights and feedback from the participants in a meaningful and reliable way and draw valid conclusions from the available data.

4.2.1 Identifying practice-based themes

The analysis of the transcript data involved reading the data recursively and organising the data into manageable parts or concepts to reveal the relevant coding elements. The relationship between these concepts were inspected to identify meaningful, shared themes, patterns or trends that could be identified in the participants descriptions of their common experiences (Leedy 1997). For example, the interview transcript data revealed that all participants identified comprehensibility, clarity and truthfulness as important considerations which could affect effective written business communication practices. By using semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1), all participants were asked similar questions during the interview process. To guide the interview process, a questionnaire (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.1 and Appendix 2) was prepared based on the research topic's theoretical framework. The researcher utilised the questions set out in the questionnaire to engage the participants to discuss the emerging topics using their own words and perceptions (Boeije 2010). The semi-structured interview style provided for a rich and thick data set as it allowed for probing and clarification of answers.

Reflexive analysis of the interview data transcripts, revealed a number of practice-based themes (nodes) that occurred in business communication within the three selected Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses. NVivo 10 qualitative software was used to organise the recurring themes and further permitted an aggregate coding of the child nodes that were identified (see Figure 4.1), to capture the dominant business communication practices that emerged during the interviews. The identification of the dominant themes (nodes) and sub-themes (child nodes) was enriched by the comments and insights gathered from the participants.

Figure 4.1 Dominant business communication practices identified by child node aggregate coding

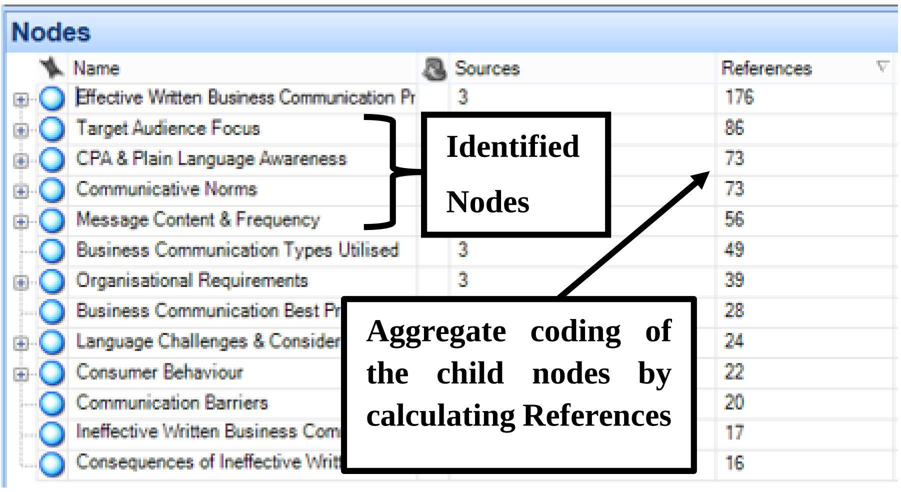


Figure 4.1 illustrates the aggregate coding of the child nodes from highest to lowest as identified from the interview data transcripts. These nodes highlighted a number of key aspects or practice-based themes that needed careful consideration in the application of business communication principles (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Practice-based themes identified

Nodes	Ref Count	%
Effective Business Communication Practices	176	26
Target Audience Focus	86	13
CPA & Plain Language Awareness	73	11
Communicative Norms	73	11
Message Content & Frequency	56	8
Business Communication Types Utilised	49	7
Organisational Requirements	39	6
Business Communication Best Practices	28	4
Language Challenges & Considrations	24	4
Consumer Behaviour	22	3
Communication Barriers	20	3
Ineffective Written Business Communication	17	3
Consequences of Ineffective Written Business Communication	16	2
	679	100

Table 4.1 illustrates the relevance from most relevant to least relevant practice-based themes to consider in written business communication. For example, *Effective Written Business Communication Practices* was the most relevant consideration with 176 references (26%), *Target Audience Focus* was the second most relevant with 86 references (13%) and *CPA and*

Plain Language Awareness as well as *Communicative Norms* as the third and fourth most relevant considerations with 73 references (11%) respectively. The respective aggregates that were identified, indicated the number of times these themes were mentioned by the participants during their interviews and, therefore, indicated a measure of importance that these considerations or practices had for the participants relative to their own business communication processes. The dominant themes and considerations initially identified, were ranked from highest to lowest and included:

- communication effectiveness
- target audience focus
- CPA and plain language awareness
- communicative norms
- message content and frequency
- business communication types (media used to communicate for example e-mail)
- organisational requirements
- business communication best practice
- language challenges and considerations
- consumer behaviour
- communication barriers
- ineffective written business communication and
- consequences of ineffective written business communication

The dominant themes were evaluated by, firstly, assessing the interview data transcripts in terms of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and plain language awareness within the Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses. Secondly, the plain language application within Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses as it related to the research focus of the level of awareness that Port Elizabeth businesses have of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations, and plain language application in the businesses were assessed and evaluated.

The sub-themes or child nodes that were initially identified for each of the dominant themes (nodes) in the interview data transcripts and were unpacked in more detail for analysis of the data. Dominant themes included awareness of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations within Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses as well as plain language application which comprised facets of comprehensibility, audience specific communication, clarity, truthfulness and legitimacy, grammar, spelling and punctuation, conciseness and sincerity. Language use varieties and the communication barriers that impact on effective communication were also identified in the data.

4.3 South African CPA and plain language awareness within three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses

The study attempted to gain a meaningful understanding of the level of awareness that three Port Elizabeth businesses had of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations. This would ensure meaningful and helpful conclusions from the data were drawn from a predominantly qualitative perspective. As a result, the data interview transcripts were coded using NVivo 10 qualitative software and then analysed (Boeije 2010).

According to Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) as well as Shimp (2007) communication largely determines whether or not an organisation will achieve its internal and external business objectives. The need for and the use of plain language in business communication is of specific importance to meet the needs of consumers (Mazur, Revisiting Plain Language 2000). Not only is the awareness and utilisation of plain language in business communication important for business success (Balmford n.d.), it is also a requirement of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) which regulates the use of plain language in South African businesses. Owing to the legitimacy of the statutory requirements passed by government, it is of the utmost importance that business communicators are aware of the rules and guidelines that are set out by the Act.

a) CPA and plain language awareness

The interview transcripts revealed that the participants were aware of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), but were unsure or even unaware of the plain language requirements set out in the Act. Participants 1, 2 and 3 expressed this uncertainty in the interview excerpts:

> **Participant 1:** *We know about the CPA but **we don't know about all the details**.*
>
> **Participant 2:** *I am aware of it, **but I don't know the exact details**. I wouldn't be able to quote it no, but I am aware of it, yes.*
>
> **Researcher:** *Being in this type of industry and obviously your position here as a senior, I'm assuming as an senior, I'm going to ask you whether you are aware of the plain language regulations, specifically in the Consumer Protection Act*
>
> **Participant 3:** *Plain language?*
>
> **Researcher:** *Yes, not? It's fine if you're not.*

Although the participants indicated that their organisations knew about the CPA, they did not know all the details. Participant 2 and 3 later indicated with more certainty that the regulations that were mentioned had been adopted into their business's communication processes.

Researcher: *Alright, a question that you have answered already but I'm going to state it anyway. Have the regulations that you've mentioned been adopted into your communication process?*

Participant 2: *Yes,* ***absolutely****.*

Researcher: *You did say you're not aware of the CPA regulations, specifically around the plain language aspect, but in terms of looking at clarity and understandability and so forth, in your communications do you believe that similar aspects have been adopted in your organisation?*

Participant 3: *Ja, definitely. I mean even in the last two years our tagline is* ***cutting through complexity****. So I think* ***in everything we try and do we try and make it clear****.*

b) Plain language comprehension

In order to determine the participants' understanding of what plain language in business communication entailed, each participant was asked to define what they understood the CPA's plain language regulations to be or what they believed it would include. The interview excerpts illustrate their understanding for the need of truth, transparency, clarity and understanding in their communications (see bold in excerpts):

Participant 1: *Make sure that what you say in an advert or an email or a letter that* ***it's true and concise*** *so that it protects the company and it protects the customer.*

Participant 2: *So in terms of the Act, it's obviously to* ***be transparent****, to be open and that nothing is hidden, although we still use the traditional terms and conditions but to do that you need to make sure that your conditions and terms are very* ***clear****. You need to* ***be very clear*** *on what the message is and what it is that you are selling or demonstrating for that matter, and that if there is a liability or a risk then that needs to be* ***clearly pointed out****.*

Participant 2: *Also, the* ***message needs to be very clear and very understandable****, it cannot be ambiguous because then you could set yourself up to fail. And obviously for a company like ours, we have to proof read, we double check, triple check everything before we send it out. And we do make mistakes and we have from time to time but then we've had to honour those. In terms of the Act, you have to.*

Participant 3: *Well I think hopefully an implication is that it is more* ***clear****.*

The evaluation of the responses gathered, revealed that participants believed that the plain language regulations were to ensure truthfulness, conciseness, transparency and clarity, as well as comprehensibility, avoid ambiguity, and honour promises made to the consumer. The responses, therefore, indicated a reasonable level of understanding of the term plain language, as it related to the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). However, the responses lacked reference to other important aspects highlighted in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), such as the significance of literacy skills and consumer experience as well as:

(a) message context and consistency
(b) message organisation, form and style
(c) vocabulary, usage and sentence structure
(d) illustrations, examples, headings, or other aids to aid reading and understanding

c) Significance of plain language regulations

Participant insights highlighted the significance of the plain language regulations in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and indicated why it was important to their respective businesses. For example, Participant 2 identified that by supporting the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), they also respected their customers, therefore, creating a trust relationship between the organisation and the consumer. Participant 2 also highlighted that by aligning to the Act, the consumer as well as the organisation were protected (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 2:** *Well obviously for us our customers are very important, so it's very important that we support what the Act says and that we respect our customers, and through that, you* ***form a trust relationship*** *because if you don't adopt the policy then you are immediately saying well then I don't trust what the consumer wants or I'll dictate what the consumer wants, which is not necessarily that what the consumer wants.*
>
> **Participant 2:** *The Consumer Act is* ***very important for us*** *because when you sign up for a new cell phone contract, I'm not talking prepaid, you're signing a* ***legal document*** *and that we've needed to change in terms of regulation etc. So I just want you to know that we are very aware and have aligned to that consumer act* ***so they are protected and so are we****.*

These responses indicated that businesses had a high regard for customer trust and respect, and recognised the protective value provided by the Act. Therefore, they supported what they believed the plain language regulations in the Consumer Protection Act to be.

4.4 Plain language application within three Port Elizabeth Metropole based businesses

Berry (1995 in Mazur 2000) highlights that clarity, straightforward expression, the use of only the necessary number of words, avoidance of obscurity and inflated vocabulary as well as complex sentence structure, are essential requirements for plain language application. In a South African context, the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) refers to the consumer's "Right to information in plain and understandable language". A document has, therefore, served its purpose if the customer experiences the document as clear, relevant, informative, "exactly what I would expect of this institution" or "exactly what I need from this product" (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013). Both Mazur (2000), the Plain Language Institute

(2013) as well as the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) indicate facets of communication that associate directly with the framework of Communicative Competence and the communication models designed by, for example, Canale and Swain (1980 in Celce-Murcia et al 1996) as well as Celce-Murcia et al (1996) and Habermas (1984) as described in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1). These communication practices impact on the application of plain language in business communication processes, and determine whether or not the communication can be defined as effective.

It was evident from participants' feedback that, within their respective areas of responsibility, they were not always in control of all business communication that was disseminated from within their organisations. They merely took responsibility for the departments and the staff they managed directly. Also, not all communication was or could be checked before it was sent to consumers which left room for error and, consequently, misrepresentation as well as misunderstanding. This is illustrated in the interview excerpts below:

> **Participant 1:** *No, no, not at all. Not from an HR perspective but **we have control on what internally goes into it from the marketing side**.*
>
> **Researcher:** *Who is responsible for the use of plain language in your business communication?*
>
> **Participant 2:** *Corporate affairs.*

Participant 1 indicated some control over plain language use in marketing communication only and not, for example, in communications that were distributed for HR purposes while Participant 2 indicated that corporate services were responsible for the use of plain language in their organisation.

4.4.1 Applying plain language principles for effective business communication

Participants were asked to provide insights into the methods they followed to ensure that the business's communication they distributed to consumers conformed to the plain language regulations in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), as they understood it.

4.4.1.1 Organisational requirements and control

Two of the participant organisations were responsible for the regional business activities of their respective international concerns. In these cases, the businesses received the majority of their communication directives from their head offices based on a national level elsewhere in South Africa, who, in turn, coordinated international guidelines on how to deal with business communication within the company.

The third participant organisation served as the Dealer Group office in the Port Elizabeth Metropole, and coordinated the communication practices for numerous franchise dealers. However, in this case, the regional Dealer Group office, which was classified as a small business concern for the purpose of the research, also received their franchise communication directives from the franchise head offices on a national level. Consumer communication such as advertisements and consumer e-mails were sent to the franchise head-offices for approval. It would seem that small concerns had less formalised regulations, checks and templates in place to assist staff with effective plain language practices. This is illustrated in Participant 1's responses to the question of whether they had a checklist in place to test their business communication against the plain language guidelines of the CPA before it was disseminated.

a) Internal checks and checklists

Participant 1 confirmed that although there was no checklist, they had an "external check":

> **Participant 1:** *No, there's **no checklist***
>
> **Participant 1:** *We've also got an **external check** that we do, especially our advertising and some of our emails that go to the customers, **we send to our franchise head offices for approval**.*

An observation regarding the communication practices of the small concern surveyed was that the checks seemed to be approached from a simpler, more functional angle even though the dealers were bound to the communication standards of the franchise. Participant 1 describes that they usually checked that they abided by their franchise standards. They also checked spelling, appropriate use of the corporate identity, referred to here as colours and logos and, that the correct information was included in the offer, for example, the price of the product:

> **Participant 1:** *You normally **check for spelling***
>
> **Participant 1:** *Have you used **the right logos** because we have various franchise dealers*
>
> **Participant 1:** *So if I want to see this vehicle, I want to see the **price**. Is it visible? Would I be able to notice it? You **check for colours and logos**, that your actual **offer is correct** and that you **abide to the franchise standards** of course*

b) Internal responsibility and control over plain language use

The responsibility and application of communication within the participant organisations did not just reside with those who were tasked with communication management and had the expertise that would be expected in this regard. Staff in various departments within the organisations had responsibilities to communicate within their functional areas. Control over which messages were communicated and how messages were communicated, often did not reside with management or communication specialists in these instances.

Most staff, however, received communication training but generally, communication and plain language application within the organisations was not entirely controlled. Participant 1 explained that staff received communication and business writing skills training "when things come about", which was translated as "when issues arise". However, Participant 1 indicated that communication was not controlled by anyone:

> **Participant 1:** *When things come about,* ***they do offer people communication skills or business writing skills*** *or that type of thing but there's* ***nobody that's really policing it****.*

Management guidance was, therefore, limited, and not all communications could be checked before being disseminated.

c) Toolkits, templates and training

A significant and expected finding was that the participant organisations who had an international footprint were more resilient in terms of training or providing templates or toolkits, checklists and approval mechanisms for their business communication. Participant 2 explained that their organisation provided a communication tool kit for their entire team, especially their management team. The tool kit included, for example, pre-proposed proposal letterheads, letter templates and speech structures. Participant 3 also commented that communication skills were taught to their staff in annual training but did not mention the use of a checklist or a tool kit as such (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 2:** *Yes,* ***we have a tool kit*** *that is available to our* ***entire team****, in fact, but* ***predominantly our management team*** *that are in these roles.*

> **Participant 2:** ***We have a tool kit****, in fact, that we give to our* ***management teams*** *with* ***pre-proposed proposals letterheads, template*** *and also, for example, if you are writing to a government employee or senior person in government, what the structure needs to look like. When you are doing verbal speeches etc. there's a structure that has to be followed in terms of protocol and all of that.*

> **Participant 2:** *So they normally get a buy in from everybody before they go and present but the* ***tool kit*** *is there so they basically just have to slot in the information.*

> **Researcher:** *Do you have a checklist that serves you within the organisation and says that these are the kind of things you need to watch out for or look for when you communicate with your customers at all?*

Participant 3: *I think it's really taught to us in our training. We have **annual training** where that type of thing is communicated to us.*

Researcher: *Alright, so there's nothing internally such as a formal checklist or anything but **it is trained**...*

Participant 3: *Ja, **it's covered in our training** when we do a lot of our risk management and we do annual declarations.*

The organisations that either provided training or toolkits for consumer communication confirmed that the training and toolkits made reference to applying plain language principles in their communication efforts. Participants 2 and 3 described the impact of audience on language use:

Researcher: *And your toolkit, you said your templates are there, do they take into consideration plain language? You did say...*

Participant 2: *There again, it depends on what kind of **audience** but absolutely plain language. Ja, it's straight forward communication.*

Researcher: *Will that include aspects such as plain language?*

Participant 3: *Yes*

d) Management control and responsibility

An important observation was that the majority of the template support and intense communication training was provided to staff on senior and mid-management level who were then responsible to share the knowledge and skills regarding the expected communication standards with their teams. This posed concerns regarding the communicative support available to, and the communication competence of staff on the ground level of the organisations. Participants 2 and 3 identified that management within their organisations were responsible for guiding their junior staff members in terms of communication principles and processes (see excerpts in bold):

Participant 2: *Yes, they would control it. So let me give you an example, let's take a division like the corporate team. So you've got a **manager** and that corporate team has two sales people and those two sales people need to go do a presentation. Maybe the one needs to do a presentation to the MD of a big company or they've got to go give a proposal or a tender or one of those. There are **strict guidelines on exactly how to do it, what the template must look like, the CI, the information that you give, all of that is controlled by the manager then to the people**.*

Participant 3: *Sometimes the training will be tailored so your more **senior people** who are engaging with clients and issuing the deliverables, the training will be more comprehensive on certain things, whereas your lower level staff it will be a bit less **but***

it is explained to them because for example, even our administration staff, they are dealing with clients all the time or they are responding to emails so it is explained to them.

A further observation was that the more complex and professional the functional aspects of the industry seemed to be, the more checks and balances (guidance) were put in place by organisations to manage their communication processes. For example, Participant 2 identified the guideline and template control measures:

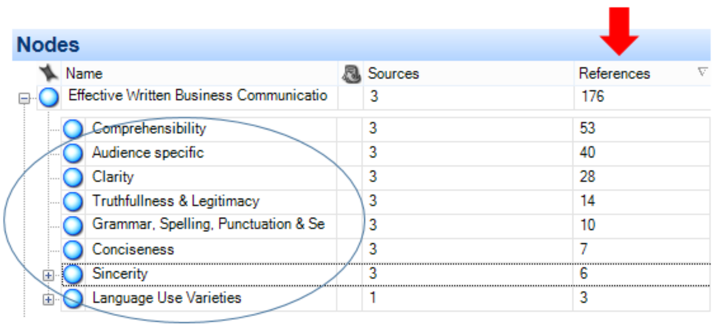
> **Participant 2:** *There are **strict guidelines** on exactly how to do it, what the **template** must look like, the **CI**, the **information** that you give, all of that is **controlled by the manager** then to the people.*

4.4.2 Plain language and communicative competence

Communicative competence or as some refer to it, communicative proficiency, suggests the "competence to communicate". This involves the ability to produce messages so that the intent of the communicator can be determined by others and interpersonal goals can be accomplished. It also involves the ability to receive and understand messages that are conveyed by others (De Gruyter 2008).

The interview data transcripts revealed that participant companies acknowledged the features associated with plain language and communicative competence as it was described in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1) of the study. The participants identified a number of these aspects (see Figure 4.2) during the face-to-face interviews, pointing out that these facets were key to effective business communication with their consumers and, ultimately, related to plain language application in their respective organisation. Only the dominant competency measures in the interview transcript data, identified and categorised as child nodes in NVivo10 under the node *Effective Written Business Communication Practices*, is discussed in this section. Figure 4.2 illustrates the dominant child nodes identified.

Figure 4.2 Dominant child nodes identified from transcribed interview data for the dominant theme (node) Effective Written Business Communication Practices


Nodes

Name	Sources	References
Effective Written Business Communicatio	3	176
Comprehensibility	3	53
Audience specific	3	40
Clarity	3	28
Truthfullness & Legitimacy	3	14
Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation & Se	3	10
Conciseness	3	7
Sincerity	3	6
Language Use Varieties	1	3

a) Effective business communication practices identified

Figure 4.2 illustrates the key effective business communication practices that the participants identified during the face-to-face interviews. These practices influenced effective business communication with their consumers, which, ultimately, related to plain language application in their respective organisations. These business communication practices included, for example, comprehensibility, audience specific communication, clarity, truthfulness and legitimacy. In analysing the data with the NVivo10 qualitative software, the researcher noticed that the most prominent features mentioned by all three participants during the face-to-face interviews associated with communication effectiveness, and communication competence (ranked in order of importance from highest to lowest, and calculated as a percentage out of the total references for *Effective Written Business Communication Practices*) were as follows (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Effective business communication practices

Nodes	Ref Count	%
Effective Business Communication Practices		
Comprehensibility	53	30
Audience specific	40	23
Clarity	28	16
Truthfulness & legitimacy	14	8
Grammar, spelling, punctuation & sentence construction	10	6
Conciseness	7	4
Sincerety	6	3
Language use varieties	3	2
Unspecified	15	9
	176	100

Table 4.2 illustrates the features that predominantly influence communication effectiveness and communication competence as comprehensibility (30%), audience specific communication (23%) and clarity (16%). Participants also commented that truthfulness and legitimacy of communications (8%), grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction (6%), conciseness (4%), sincerity (3%) as well as language use varieties such as the use of vernacular languages, slang, descriptive language and visual communication (2%) influenced communication effectiveness.

b) Vernacular translation and use of slang

Participant 1 commented on the translation of English messages into certain vernacular languages when the target audience required this.

> **Participant 1:** *English is the main language but* ***we do have one or two that we do translate*** *to Xhosa and then of course when we go to Die Burger we do an Afrikaans translation as well.*

The use of slang is an important consideration in language use and comprehensibility, as it is usually very particular to a specific ethnic group, culture, vernacular orientation, or generation and could even be linked to a geographic location where individuals come from or find themselves. The use of slang could have a negative implication on business communication if it is interpreted as negative and classed as *bad language*. Participant 1 pointed out that slang was not acceptable business language.

> **Researcher:** *You said bad language, what would you class that as?*

> **Participant 1:** *It's like* ***slang****. So a business must use business communication, business language.*

The use of slang in business communication might cause misunderstanding of messages if it were directed at the wrong audience. Therefore, approval for the use of slang in business communication was identified as a requirement in Participant 2's organisation.

> **Participant 2:** *It's not a process where we are just going to go and use* ***slang*** *because we are talking to the youth. If we ever do that, that has to go through corporate affairs. Not to say we can't do it and we do do it, especially in the* ***vernac****, because there you* ***use the words and the phrases that they use and that the culture is used to****. You know, that would not fall into the normal guideline. We would* ***need to get approval*** *on that.*

c) Clarity

Clarity involves specific, descriptive language that is directly linked to the need of the consumer. According to Participant 1, a product needed to be accurately described in terms of its features to ensure that the consumer could make purchase decisions based on the information supplied to them.

> **Participant 1:** *Well, if I want to describe this taxi, for instance, I must say it's a 16 seater taxi, it's got aircon, whatever, whatever and it's safe and it's got safety bags so it must be clear to the customer. So if I just say it's a taxi and it's R300 and whatever, it doesn't really say what I want. If I want a taxi, I want to know does it have 16 seats, does it have 20 seats because that's my need.*

d) Visual communication

Visual communication was considered by Participant 1 to transcend language barriers. Participant 1 explained that visual communication helped the consumer to see the product and explained its features in a visual manner that might be more understandable to the consumer.

> **Participant 1:** ***Visual thing does transcend language barriers*** *because they can actually see the product and you can explain it to them and that overcomes maybe a lot of the reading part and the language issues that they might be experiencing.*

4.4.2.1 Comprehensibility

The norm of comprehensibility suggests that people expect that others will communicate in a way that they can understand. In business communication, this norm is disrupted when consumers do not understand what is being communicated to them. This could be the result of consumers misunderstanding the manufacturing processes or technical descriptions, language barriers and vague communication (Underwood and Ozanne 1998). Celce-Murcia et al (1996) indicate that the interpretation and comprehension of a message is influenced by the elements used in the construction of a message. Sentence patterns and types, word structure, vocabulary as well as sound and the way language is written (rules of spelling, hyphenation, capitalisation, word breaks, emphasis, and punctuation) could impact on the success of the communication processes.

a) Communicators' intent

All the participants identified the importance of message comprehensibility as a factor which determined effective communication. For example, audience, language use, technical language and translation complexities. According to Participants 1 and 3, the consumer needed to accurately understand the senders' intent (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 1:** *I must* ***make sure that the customer understands*** *that this is the actual offer that we offer.*

> **Participant 3:** *Often they don't* ***understand*** *our scope.*

> **Participant 3:** *We find a lot of people read an audit report but don't* ***understand*** *what it is.*

> **Participant 3:** *Ja, I think it's getting that message across. So if you've got a very important message to bring,* ***that the person will understand that important message*** *and not maybe get lost in some of the detail.*

> **Participant 3:** *I think in the beginning we have to* ***outline and confirm exactly what our scope of work was****, so what advice were they seeking from us and what opinion, what confirmation, whatever it is, that we'd outline in the beginning. We'd explain the work performance, maybe what assumptions we used, what reliance of external information we brought in to come to a conclusion and basically the deliverables that they engaged us to do. So, that's if I would say, that format.*

Making the sender's intent known also included purposefully ensuring that consumers understood what the organisation offered and what its services entailed to enable effective communication. Participant 3 explained the importance of stating clearly what the communicator's assumptions were about a situation or subject and how this could impact the communication with the consumer as well as their understanding of the communication:

> **Participant 3:** *We usually **state our assumptions** so that it's **very clear what our scoping was and how we've come to certain conclusions** because very often in business, you know, you have to make certain assumptions to reach a conclusion and if those assumptions change your conclusion may change but then at least the reader can understand what assumptions have we made.*

Participant 1 also remarked that if the sender of the communication did not understand the message, the customer would not understand it either.

> **Participant 1:** *If I don't **understand your message** then the customer won't.*

b) Language use

Language, and specifically clear, plain English, was also mentioned as a determining factor in comprehension by Participant 3:

> **Participant 3:** *Generally when you are just writing to your decision makers, it will be **very plain, clear English, no ambiguity and very factual** so there's no interpretation. We try and steer away from that.*
>
> **Participant 3:** *I think it's an English thing – **comprehension**. I think it's what I referred to in the beginning.*

c) Failure to read

Participant 3 also described how messages might be misunderstood because receivers of messages did not read messages properly:

> **Participant 3:** *I think if they don't understand the context or the background as to the work done, sometimes the scoping of it and I think a big thing is that it's **not read properly** so it's basically scanned through.*

d) Technical language use

For Participant 1, technical or industry specific descriptions used in business communication could be misunderstood by consumers:

> **Participant 1:** *Not to use your own company descriptive words for a product but to **make sure that your audience understands**.*

e) Target audience focus

All the participants identified that the comprehension of messages could be influenced by the target audience to which it was distributed (see excerpts in bold):

Participant 1: *Your advertising must be as plain and simple as can be so even if it goes to the wrong* ***target market****, it lands in somebody else's post box or cafe, that that person* ***understands*** *what that advert is actually about.*

Participant 2: *So for that answer I would say it depends from time-to-time on what you are faced with and how you need to communicate and always* ***the audience*** *that you are communicating with.*

Participant 3: *Some of our* ***clients*** *have definitely got sophisticated integrated IT systems, whereas others really don't have it at all so then the way we discuss it with them will be completely different.*

Participant 3: *Understanding your* ***target audience****.*

f) Vernacular language use

Participant 1 also identified that the use of vernacular language, where required, was an enabler of understanding:

Participant 1: *What is nice is that you have that diversity in your company so you can always fall back on somebody that can speak the language and ask them to* ***translate*** *one or two sentences into a language that you understand.*

g) Vague messages

Participant 2 identified vagueness and as a misleading factor in business communication:

Participant 2: *Also, the message needs to be* ***very clear and very understandable****, it cannot be ambiguous because then you could set yourself up to fail.*

h) Message structure and format

Structure or format of the message as well as the document it is presented in, for example, writing in point form rather than in narrative, as well as factuality were identified as practices that enabled comprehension. Participant 3 described that their industry required factual communication that was best presented in point form or summarised for ease of understanding by clients and that they refrained from using narrative or descriptive communication (see excerpts in bold):

Participant 3: *We usually lay that out very* ***factually*** *and the way we try to do it in our profession is often in a* ***point form****, so* ***not narrative****. That's usually how the lawyers do it and then we spend days trying to understand it.*

Participant 3: *We deal with a lot of lawyers because TAX is a legal act, now if look at the wording they give me for some of my clients, its narrative and I often have to go back and say, "Just* ***explain this to me in two points*** *so that I understand".*

Participant 3: *If they give me a deliverable to a client, like I'm thinking of one in particular, I won't change it but for me to understand it and apply that content, I will* *put it on rough notes in a different format or* ***I'll summarise it in a different way****, just because I think we sometimes think differently. So we're not disagreeing with them, we're just trying to understand what's the bottom line, what's the actual implications.*

Participant 3: *So certainly the way we present our reports and findings to him is usually a* ***one pager*** *and we go through it quite slowly and I always ensure the financial manager's there so that he can follow up or emphasise stuff when we aren't always around.*

Participant 3 also identified that format of the communication could complicate understanding for highly-trained audiences, not just the average consumer.

Participant 3: *We deal with lawyers quite a lot. They write in a narrative format, like any legal agreement is story, its narrative, long words, long sentences. Whereas us* ***accountants, write in a more factual and more bullet point*** *but now if you look at some of our TAX opinions that are done, we deal with a lot of lawyers because TAX is a legal act, now if look at the wording they give me for some of my clients, it's narrative and I often have to go back and say, "Just explain this to me in two points so that I understand".*

i) Complex message structure

Limiting complexity in business communication could also assist consumer comprehension of messages. Participant 3 highlighted the importance of ensuring that messages were simple and that consumers understood the messages, was an ethical duty for businesses.

Participant 3: *I think from an ethical point of view, you know, if you've got a message to bring,* ***you need to bring that message across in a way that that person can understand****. You know, I think those days are actually gone now where in the past you would make something so complex that your reader wouldn't really understand and say, "Okay, they're a professional. I'll just accept it." I think those days are gone and I think we have a duty to, in a very plain way, inform the reader what the risks are or what our conclusions are in a way that they understand that. I think we do have a duty to do that.*

The participants' companies indicated that they encouraged consumers to clarify information that they did not understand. In this instance, Participant 3 confirmed that consumers were welcome to request clarification of messages, however, both Participants 1 and 2 indicated that this rarely or never happened.

Participant 3: *In any of our communication we always state at the end that they are* ***welcome to come back to us to clarify information*** *or maybe they want more information in a different format or to emphasise more.*

Researcher: *Have any of your customers ever emailed or phoned in to clarify anything that they didn't understand?*

Participant 1: *No.*

> **Participant 2:** *Very, very seldom.*

4.4.2.2 Audience specific communication

Communication success or effectiveness is achieved when there is a meaningful exchange of information and communication is understood or interpreted by the receiver (audience) in the manner which the source (sender) intended for it to be interpreted (Gifu et al 2014). The South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) specifically relates the need for plain language application to a defined target audience by stating that for Section 2:

> For the purposes of this Act, a notice, document or visual representation is in plain language if it is reasonable to conclude that an ordinary consumer of the class of persons for whom the notice, document or visual representation is intended, with average literacy skills and minimal experience as a consumer of the relevant goods or services, could be expected to understand the content, significance, and import of the notice, document or visual representation without undue effort …

According to the extract, plain language is achieved if an ordinary consumer with average literacy and minimal experience as a consumer can understand the intent of the message received without effort.

a) Target audience focus

The interview transcript data revealed that directing the business's communication at the appropriate target audience and tailoring the intended messages to these selected audiences, were key determinants of effective business communication. Participants 1, 2 and 3 revealed that knowing with whom the business needed to communicate, determined the message content and its complexity (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 1:** *Not targeting the right market, because if I send a message to you as woman, that I am selling men's shoes, okay you can buy for your hubby or whatever but to me **your target market must be direct**.*

> **Participant 2:** *It depends on what kind of **audience** but absolutely plain language. Ja, it's straight forward communication.*

> **Participant 2:** *Let's say we're talking to the **estate agency community**, so we've got our database, now we're going to communicate to them. Lots of them are our customers. This is a beautiful deal we can give you, because you are in the estate agent business, we can give you a laptop, a phone, a tablet, whatever, all in this deal so when you're with a customer you can take photos etc.*

> **Participant 2:** *Well that would depend on the **audience** that you are speaking to, firstly. Very important to understand firstly what it is that you want to get across, **who is the audience that you are talking to** and what is that community interested in that*

you are going to connect with. So connecting with your audience is going to be through what you are giving them.

Participant 3: *We do **tailor** it because often you've got a situation where you are sitting with a JSE listed company and you're sitting with the board and where you are sitting with an audit committee, their expectations of what they want to see are quite different and we often try and always check with the client regarding their needs.*

Participant 3: *It can be very ineffective if we've done a lot of work and we've made some valuable findings that are beneficial to the client but we communicate it in a very generic document that's not **tailored and made specific for them** and they could get lost in the detail and actually make a wrong business decision then all the work we've done is actually a waste of time.*

Participant 3: *With your smaller entities there isn't that requirement so you don't need to adhere to it, but we do try and **tailor** it to those specific needs. If we do a presentation ... where say they don't have a sophisticated purchasing department then they will tailor the presentation and maybe miss out a few slides.*

b) Target audience knowledge

In-depth and updated knowledge concerning the businesses' various consumers was highlighted as an enabler of effective, targeted communication with consumers. Participant 3 stated that knowledge of ones client as well as the nature of the client's needs, impacted on the manner in which the business communicates with its consumers.

Participant 3: *Even if we've got an existing client, like we have some audit clients that we've been doing for 30 or 40 years, every three years we have to go back through that system and **ensure that we've updated it** for changes and shareholders' changes in the group structure, changes in directors, changes in the nature of the business as well, because that might conflict with something or it helps us to **understand the client** further.*

Participant 3: *I think you have to have **knowledge of your client** or what they are specifically looking for.*

c) Flexibility and adaptability of messages and communication strategies

Effectiveness of the business communication could be improved by being flexible and linking the product to the appropriate target market, irrespective of the communication medium used. This was supported by Participants 1 and 2 who identified that different communication mediums were used to target different audiences with products that would be suitable to those specific audience's needs.

Participant 1: *So we make sure that the product is **appropriate to certain markets**, even when we sent emails, even when we do some placement in certain paper media and that type of thing, just to make sure that we do really get the best results.*

> **Participant 2:** *So you use* ***different mediums for different people and different markets and different segments*** *etc. etc. and so we're very flexible in that.*

Different communication strategies were implemented for different target audiences. For example, target audiences could differ in terms of lifestyle (LSM), needs, education levels, professional and business experience. As a result, Participants 2 and 3 confirmed that communication strategies were adapted to various levels of audiences with whom their organisations needed to communicate (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 2:** *In our region, if you look at it and you take this map, you've got Transkei, lower LSM type of customer, we've got medium...we've actually got a good kind of mix here, lower-medium-high and down in the George area you've got probably medium to high more.* ***Very different strategies for different areas within the same province.***
>
> **Participant 2:** *I don't enjoy the pamphlets at the robots that are just given out to whoever and whatever. Although, we also do it but we do it specifically at a time that we are trying to* ***capture a specific market****.*
>
> **Participant 3:** *I've got some smaller owner managed businesses, now we've got set templates, let's say for a management report or corporate findings and a lot of them will say to me, "we don't want the PowerPoint presentation, can you just give me a one pager", and then we will do that so the content is the same, it's just* ***presented in a different format****.*
>
> **Participant 3:** *Once again I think* ***it depends on who your client is*** *because I think you are maybe going to make that understandability different. You know if it's a board, we might be discussing the importance of governance, for example. Whereas if it was an owner managed business we would just really be stating the bare facts or the bare minimum of what they need to do. So I think you have to* ***make your communication specific to who your target audience*** *is.*
>
> **Participant 3:** *We've got a new client at the moment in the IT business, very experienced, but we still are* ***learning what the best way is to communicate with them****.*

Flexibility was also identified as an important enabler of effective communication. Participant 2 supported that the generational status of the target audience needed to be taken into consideration, and language use adapted to suit the profile of the target audience:

> **Participant 2:** *You need to be* ***flexible*** *depending on what audience you are talking to. If you are talking to youth and you use old English, you are just not going to cut it. You've got to then talk the language that they talk.*

d) Language preferences and proficiency

Language preference and proficiency was a further consideration which dictated how language was used to communicate with consumers. Participant 3 described how they needed to adapt their communication with clients who were not, for example, English first language speakers.

> **Participant 3:** *Yes we do have that in like owner manager business and we've even got the* ***challenge of a language issue****. I'm not Afrikaans and he's Afrikaans. He speaks to me in Afrikaans and I speak back to him in English actually most of the time, and we communicate that way but I find when we have a meeting with him, I ensure that his financial manager's with him so that when I speak to the owner of the business, he's very successful but he doesn't have a higher education, I have to break it down in very, very simple format …*

e) Communication roles

Participant 3 also identified that the complexity of the message dictated who in the organisation should be tasked to communicate to a specific target audience:

> **Participant 3:** *If there is other specific information, say for example I do have some clients in the family business where they're wanting advice on succession planning and how they structure their estate, now that's* ***a bit more complex so I would not let a trainee or even a manager communicate with the client*** *if they wanted to send an email or a report, that would have to come through myself.*

4.4.2.3 Clarity

Kimble (1994) states that "plain language has to do with clear and effective communication". Berry (1995 in Mazur 2000) highlights the need for clarity, straightforward expression, using only the necessary number of words, avoidance of obscurity and inflated vocabulary as well as complex sentence structure, as essential requirements in plain language application.

The interview transcript data confirmed that all participants acknowledged the importance of clear and specific communication with consumers (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 1:** *Your message must be* ***clear*** *… very specific, in terms of the detail.*

> **Participant 2:** *Also, the message needs to* ***be very clear*** *and very understandable, it cannot be ambiguous because then you could set yourself up to fail.*

> **Participant 3:** *I think we would definitely bring that* ***clarity*** *into it and I think we would make it very specific as well so that the wording would be in a very specific format from what they would want.*

a) Descriptive language

Clarity involves specific, descriptive language that is directly linked to the need of the consumer. Participants 1 and 2 identified that liability or risk needed to be clearly pointed out:

> **Participant 1:** *Well, if I want to describe this taxi, for instance, I must say it's a 16 seater taxi, it's got aircon, whatever, whatever and it's safe and it's got safety bags so*

it must be clear to the customer. So if I just say it's a taxi and it's R300 and whatever, it doesn't really say what I want. If I want a taxi, I want to know does it have 16 seats, does it have 20 seats because that's my need.

Participant 1: *If I want to convey a message, one of our products, okay, so I'll take a product, say for instance the taxi,* ***I must make sure that the customer knows the quality of the product, what it offers, what the correct pricing would be, even where you can finance the product, who the person can contact to get the product****. So it goes on the product and where the product can be found and clear communication on what it contains about the product and the address of the person that offers the product.*

Participant 2: *You need to* ***be very clear on what the message is and what it is that you are selling or demonstrating*** *for that matter and that if there is a liability or a risk then that needs to be* ***clearly pointed out****.*

b) Communicative responsibility

The data suggested that clarity was the responsibility of the communicator. As a result, communicators needed to take time to ensure that their communication was clear and comprehensible, as well as explain technical and legal aspects of documentation to consumers where needed. Participant 2 confirmed that, even though consumers often did not read contracts, communicators needed to point out fine print in their messages:

Participant 2: *A lot of times the* ***consumers don't read*** *but* ***a lot of times we don't point it out to the consumer****. We might be busy, though it's there in fine print, we don't always take time to explain to customers, which is very important because if you are signing a long contract, you're kind of just going to glimpse over it because you feel under pressure.*

c) Staff training

Participant 2 also identified that training and the orientation of staff regarding the importance of, and the rules of plain language, was highlighted as a consideration that would enable effective business communication:

Participant 2: *I think to* ***get buy-in*** *from the people involved in using the plain language and ensure that they understand what the rules are and that must be clear and transparent at all times.*

d) Message structure

For Participant 3, clarity could be achieved by structuring messages factually and in point form:

Participant 3: *We usually lay that out very* ***factually*** *and the way we try to do it in our profession is often in a* ***point form****, so not narrative.*

Participant 3: *It's usually like in a* ***block or point form****. We find that easier and we almost make it mirror each other so that if there are four bullet points for the*

> *procedures that we are doing, so it's very clear exactly what we've done and what we haven't done.*

e) Ethnic and linguistic challenges

Clarifying messages, particularly when delivered in different languages, or in an environment where the receivers were of different ethnic origin, was identified as an enabler of effective business communication. Participant 3 indicated that interpreters were often requested to assist with communication, because the business's intended messages could become distorted or misinterpreted when the receivers of the messages were not English first language speakers.

> **Participant 3:** *Yes, definitely. Like for example, a lot of our clients in Port Elizabeth are German owed in the motor manufacturing industry so we've got a* ***fluent speaking German practitioner in our Cape Town office so we will often bring him in on a conference call, just sometimes to explain it in German*** *because often we think we are talking the same information but it's getting a little bit mixed up so we do do that, certainly.*

f) Protective clauses

Most participant organisations referred to using "Terms and conditions" in their communication. Although Participant 2 highlighted the traditional use of terms and conditions, Participant 1 also identified its importance in advertisements and email:

> **Participant 1:** *In an advert or an email we will always put in "Terms and conditions apply" and that consumer act protection thing is in there, but we always make sure that the offer is the actual genuine offer that we give the customer.*

> **Participant 2:** ***We still use the traditional terms and conditions*** *but to do that you need to make sure that your conditions and terms are very clear.*

4.4.2.4 Truthfulness and legitimacy

Habermas (1984) reasoned that when people engage in conversation with others, they anticipate truthfulness and accuracy in the communicative act. People also communicate with context in mind and evaluate communications based on the legitimacy or acceptability of the source (Underwood and Ozanne 1998). Consumers also continuously filter messages and information they receive based on the credibility, or the believability thereof.

Truthfulness and legitimacy were communication practices identified as being applied in the respective participant businesses. For Participants 1 and 2, the accuracy of their communication was important.

> **Participant 1:** *Communication-wise and consumer-wise* ***that what we say is what we will be offering****.*

> **Participant 2:** *We **double check, triple check everything before we send it out**. And we do make mistakes and we have from time to time, but then we've had to honour those.*

> **Participant 2:** *One of our mottos is "speed, simplicity and **trust**" so your consumers have to trust you.*

a) Consumer guidance

Participant 3 identified the need for providing guidance to consumers from an area of expertise and authority which added to legitimate communication practices:

> **Participant 3:** *At the moment we are doing some specific work for a client that had a dispute with their supplier so it's a contractual dispute, we aren't legal attorneys, we can't advise them on that so that's something we'll state up front.*

> **Participant 3:** *That's not our area of expertise, we have already agreed with that particular client that we have specific procedures we will perform and then in the communicated report, **we would remind them that that is our scope** so we can only give advice on that specific area.*

4.4.2.5 Grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction

In business communication the use of appropriate grammar, punctuation and spelling as well as sentence construction is an essential component of the communication process, as it influences the consumers' concentration, interest in, and comprehensibility of the communicated messages. Specific aspects that are covered in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), related to message construction include organisation, form and style, vocabulary usage and sentence structure.

a) Improper language use

Participant 1 identified the use of bad communication, bad language and bad spelling in business communication as ineffective communication:

> **Participant 1:** *Bad communication, bad language, bad spelling.*

The lack of "old" English application in business communication was identified as a worrying factor for some participants. This might be escalated by the emergent social media language variations. Participant 2 elaborated on the lack of proper English use in business communication and, identified social media language use as an enabler of bad grammar and language use which contributed to misunderstandings in communication:

> **Participant 2:** *Well obviously I've had some very interesting ones where the grammar and the actual old way of doing English. … I got an email yesterday from a colleague, and I was quite horrified to read that to see the **lack of English in the actual body of***

***this email**. I though wow, this is quite a senior person and that's worrying for me ... Because of everything, the social media, the English language is transforming into a language that not everybody understands.*

Participant 2: ***Old English** for me is the typical grammar that we learnt at school**.***

Participant 2: *So that's what I mean with old English: **properly written, punctuation** and all of that.*

b) New language variances

The relevance and use of new language variances needed to be considered as times change. Participant 2 identified the challenge of deciding when it would be acceptable to use new language variances in business communication:

Participant 2*:* *But that is important because that's how we communicate and not to say that the new language is not right. How do you transform from the old to this, if it's the new, and where do you cut it off? Where do you say it's unacceptable to write a sentence like that, it's unacceptable ... You know, English is an old language that has been around forever.*

Participant 2 also highlighted an example of how SMS text language was used in one of their organisation's internal business communications:

Participant 2: *We've done a little campaign which is really nice, it's a little rubber band, like you know you get the save the rhino band, it's a little thumb band and it says, "**W8 to send**" and you are encouraged to wear that when you are driving so that when you sit at the robot and quickly check your text.*

c) Grammar

Participants 2 and 3's insights confirmed that appropriate grammar and the use of plain language principles in sentence construction enabled effective business communication:

Participant 2: *You see that goes back to the whole thing of **grammar** for me and the whole structure of sentences.*

Participant 3: *We deal with lawyers quite a lot. They write in a narrative format, like any legal agreement is **story, its narrative, long words, long sentences**. Whereas us accountants, write in a more **factual and more bullet point**.*

4.4.2.6 Conciseness

Participants 1, 2 and 3 confirmed that keeping communication concise and to the point assisted to ensure effective business communication:

Participant 1: *Make sure that what you say in an advert or an email or a letter is ... **concise** so that it protects the company and it protects the customer.*

Participant 2: *Keep it **short and concise**.*

> **Participant 2:** ***Short, to the point****, that people can remember at least one point of what you make. If you are going to waffle on, you've lost me as a reader after the very first paragraph.* ***Short, to the point, concise****, it must be informative and it must have information that I'm going to want to remember. I must find it interesting.*

> **Participant 3:** *I think the bottom line is that we are bombarded with way too much information and I think our diaries are so busy. If we look at our main clients that we deal with at a board level, director's level, that's ultimately the decision-makers, they don't have time to go through a 30/40 page document. They want the executive* ***summary****.*

4.4.2.7 Sincerity

Interview transcript data revealed that sincerity was a consideration when participant organisations communicated with consumers:

> **Participant 1:** *It must always be a* ***sincere*** *thing between us and the customer.*

Support for the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) indicated the organisation's commitment and respect for their consumers:

> **Participant 2:** *Well obviously for us our customers are very important, so it's* ***very important that we support what the Act says and that we respect our customers****, and through that, you form a trust relationship.*

Organisational "buy-in" into the plain language principles of the CPA was suggested by Participant 2 as a mechanism to ensure plain language application and transparency in the business's communication:

> **Participant 2:** *I think to get* ***buy-in from the people involved in using the plain language and ensure that they understand what the rules are and that must be clear and transparent at all times****.*

4.4.2.8 Language use varieties

Participants acknowledged the existence of language varieties in business communication, and its impact on what was communicated to which target audience. Participant 2 emphasised that it was very important to use the correct language for the appropriate audience:

> **Participant 2:** *It's very important to know that you* ***use the right language for the right audience****.*

a) Vernacular translation

In addition, translation of English messages into certain vernacular languages was indicated as useful communicative strategies that could be followed when the target audience required this.

Participant 1 described how translation was used in their organisation to facilitate effective communication:

> **Participant 1:** *English is the main language but we do have one or two that we do* ***translate*** *to Xhosa and then of course when we go to Die Burger we do an Afrikaans translation as well.*
>
> **Participant 1:** *Ja, because what is nice is that you have that* ***diversity*** *in your company so you can always fall back on somebody that can speak the language and ask them to* ***translate*** *one or two sentences into a language that you understand.*

b) Visual communication

In addition, Participant 1 highlighted the need for visual communication to be seen to transcend language barriers:

> **Participant 1:** ***Visual thing does transcend language barriers*** *because they can actually see the product and you can explain it to them and that overcomes maybe a lot of the reading part and the language issues that they might be experiencing.*

c) New language conventions

The more widespread use of new media language conventions in business communication was troublesome to some participants but it could be used effectively in certain campaigns, when aimed at the correct target audience. For example, Participant 2 highlighted that although the use of new language conventions seemed problematic in communication, their organisation utilised new media language in a catchy internal awareness campaign:

> **Participant 2***:* *But that is important because that's how we communicate and not to say that the* ***new language*** *is not right. How do you transform from the old to this, if it's the new, and where do you cut it off? Where do you say it's unacceptable to write a sentence like that, it's unacceptable ...*
>
> **Participant 2:** *We've done a little campaign which is really nice, it's a little rubber band, like you know you get the save the rhino band, it's a little thumb band and it says, "****W8 to send****" and you are encouraged to wear that when you are driving so that when you sit at the robot and quickly check your text.*

4.4.3 Language challenges and considerations

After the interview data transcripts were unpacked, coded and organised according to dominant themes using NVivo10 qualitative software, each of the identified nodes and child nodes were unpacked and evaluated to determine recurring themes and considerations that could be of significance to the study. The evaluation of the participants' insights during the study revealed a number of communication barriers which impacted on the practitioners day-to-day business communication practices.

Cleary (2014) states that misunderstandings or communication breakdowns are caused by factors that hinder or prevent the successful flow of the message from the sender to the audience. These communication barriers, as they are termed, could prevent the audience's understanding of a message, which, in turn, could cause ineffective business communication to occur.

4.4.3.1 Perceptual barriers

Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2 highlights that perceptual barriers allow consumers to process and evaluate messages to interpret and assign meaning to what was being communicated. Information is processed based on consumers various individual and unique influences such as their own cultural background, life experiences, which also relates to generational differences, selection (what they want and what they are interested in), needs and education (Cleary 2014). The interview transcripts identified participants' insights regarding perceptual barriers and the obstructions they caused in their communication processes.

a) Ethnicity, language competence and culture

Differences in ethnicity, language competence and cultural backgrounds caused certain communication breakdowns to occur. Participant 3, who worked in a highly-professional field, experienced challenges when working with clients of varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Limitations in language competence were also identified in this instance, not owing to a lack of education, but rather vernacular differences. Participant 3 described how ethnic differences complicated communication between the organisation and its clients and, how the organisation had to adapt its communication processes by adapting the way in which they presented information for group reports to accommodate this (see excerpts in bold):

> **Researcher:** *So there's often **ethnic and cultural language barriers**?*
>
> **Participant 3:** *Those are hard, yes definitely. I mean one of my other clients, we do reporting, they are **South African based** but they're fully **German owned** so the reporting we do monthly for them is South African based and German, but every quarter Germany wants different reports done and when they first communicated it to us we did it in a way we thought, but we've had to have two conference calls to understand what's in their minds because they're looking at it from a group perspective with different information and we had to change the way we presented information for the group reporting information. So I think that I find **from a language point of view with some of our clients is a bit more of a challenge**.*

b) Professional predisposition

Professional predisposition was identified as a possible challenge as well. Although the communicators in this case were highly-trained managers, their point of departure and arguments on the topic of discussion were made from their own, professional angle. In this case, the communicators also came from different ethnic backgrounds. Participant 3 described how their organisation's communication from a financial angle was interpreted differently by the receiver who deduced the communication from a legal standpoint:

> **Participant 3:** *That's the one instance we had, he was looking at it from a legal agreement point of view but we were trying to explain the TAX implications from a South African point of view and we were saying to him if we do this in South Africa we are worried we will be fined here but what's the TAX implications for the German holding company. Now he was the wrong person because* ***he only looked at it from a legal point of view****. We eventually had to have another conference call with a German TAX person to understand and be able to interpret that and that might end up having a third conference call so we're clear here from a South African TAX point of view, the implications for Germany may need to change for the legal agreements. That's where that conversation was going around and I've found it takes more than one discussion to really get to the right conclusion.*

c) Generational perceptions

Generational perceptions were also identified as a causal influencer of effective communication. In the case of Participant 2, her children found no fault with the composition of messages used in social media formats because they were growing up in a time when social media language was widely-used and acceptable to their generation. However, Participant 2 indicated that, in her opinion, the use of social media language formats was transforming the English language into a language that not everyone understood:

> **Participant 2:** *Because of everything, the social media, the English language is transforming into a language that not everybody understands. So that is dangerous and I have different views on it.* ***I talk to my children about it and they don't even understand, "Mom there's nothing wrong with that sentence structure".***

d) Technical sophistication and knowledge

Technical sophistication and knowledge was a consideration highlighted by Participant 3 as potentially problematic in the communication situation. The level of technical sophistication and knowledge of the topic that each of the communicators possess, brought about by various factors such as education levels and professional experience, would influence the success of a communicative interaction:

> **Participant 3:** *Some of our clients have definitely got **sophisticated** integrated IT systems, whereas others really don't have it at all, so then the way we discuss it with them will be completely different.*

e) Contextual perceptions

Contextual understanding of the subject that was being communicated, or the lack thereof, influenced the success of the communicative act. The lack of contextual understanding could be caused by various aspects including, for example, generational differences, insufficient technical knowledge about the subject and not reading the subject matter properly. Participant 3 indicated that understanding the context or background of the work being done is an enabler of effective communication:

> **Participant 3:** *I think if they don't **understand the context or the background as to the work done**, sometimes the scoping of it and I think a big thing is that it's not read properly so it's basically scanned through.*

4.4.3.2 Language barriers

Cleary (2014) identifies linguistic barriers which impact on message meaning and the understanding thereof and could cause breakdowns in communication. For example, the use of jargon or technical language (specialised language of a particular field or profession), difficult words (words that are too complex for the intended audience), insensitive language (discriminates on the bases of race or gender, for example sexism, slang), incorrect pronunciation, incorrect grammar and long sentences, spelling and punctuation errors.

a) Misuse or lack of appropriate grammar

The participants' insights highlighted examples of the language barriers that caused breakdowns in successful communication within their respective organisations. For example, the misuse and or lack of "old English" grammar use was identified as a concerning factor in message construction in both older and younger generation communicators. Participant 2 identified the lack of proper grammatical application even among senior level professionals in business:

> **Participant 2:** ***Grammar and the actual old way of doing English**. You see, that for me is a challenge nowadays because I look at it even with my children. They'll write a paragraph, and in fact I got an email yesterday from a colleague, and I was quite horrified to read that to see the lack of English in the actual body of this email. I though wow, this is quite a senior person and that's worrying for me, that's very concerning for me.*

b) Vernacular ability and application

Differences in vernacular ability and application thereof, was also identified as a hindrance to effective communication between senders and receivers of messages. Participant 3 pointed out the difficulties that arose from communicative acts that occurred between English first-language speakers and Afrikaans first-language speakers as an example of this. The same difficulties would, therefore, apply to communicators in South Africa that were first-language speakers of any of the other indigenous languages such as Xhosa or Zulu, for example:

> **Participant 3:** *We've even got the* ***challenge of a language issue****. I'm not Afrikaans and he's Afrikaans. He speaks to me in Afrikaans and I speak back to him in English actually most of the time, and we communicate that way, but I find when we have a meeting with him, I ensure that his financial manager's with him so that when I speak to the owner of the business, he's very successful but he doesn't have a higher education, I have to break it down in very, very simple format because I need to know that his agenda at the end of the day, is how can he make more money come out of the business.*

In a South African context, it was also important to note the existence of many foreign residents in the country, which further complicated the success of the business communication:

> **Participant 2:** *You also find a lot in the areas where we use* ***vernac****, you can't only rely on vernac because you've got a lot of* ***foreigners****, and Pakistanis and other people staying there.*

The interview transcript data indicated the use of interpreters in instances where the communicators might not possess the same level of vernacular ability. In business writing, this aspect could, therefore, be identified as highly-problematic, because messages were constructed in one or perhaps a few languages, but they might not be interpreted by consumers who had the required level of vernacular ability that was needed to interpret that specific language. Participant 3 indicated how a translator assisted to clarify challenging vernacular communication situations within their organisation:

> **Researcher:** *And do you often pull, especially when you work with international barriers, even here in South Africa you might have a very Xhosa speaking client or an Afrikaans, do you sometimes pull or draw in people that have a vernacular link?*
>
> **Participant 3:** *Yes, definitely. Like for example, a lot of our clients in Port Elizabeth are German owed in the motor manufacturing industry so we've got a fluent speaking German practitioner in our Cape Town office so* ***we will often bring him in on a conference call, just sometimes to explain it in German*** *because often we think we are talking the same information but it's getting a little bit mixed up so we do do that, certainly.*

c) Slang

The use of slang was an important consideration in language use and comprehensibility, as it was usually very particular to a specific ethnic group, culture, vernacular orientation, or generation and could even be linked to a geographic location where individuals came from or found themselves. The use of slang could have a negative implication on business communication if it were interpreted as negative. Participant 1 also pointed out that slang was not business language:

> **Researcher:** *You said bad language, what would you class that as?*
>
> **Participant 1:** *It's like **slang**. So a business must use business communication, business language.*

Participant 2 provided an alternative view on the matter of slang and generational jargon which was termed "new language" and, suggested that flexibility was necessary when communicating to different audiences, with specific reference to the youth market. The audiences' needs might require or dictate communication to include slang or jargon for effect and or ease of understanding. Participant 2 commented on language flexibility and when the use of "new language" was acceptable or unacceptable:

> **Participant 2:** *But that is important because that's how we communicate and not to say that the **new language** is not right. How do you transform from the old to this, if it's the new, and where do you cut it off? Where do you say it's unacceptable to write a sentence like that, it's unacceptable... You know, English is an old language that has been around forever.*
>
> **Participant 2:** *You need to be **flexible** depending on what **audience** you are talking to. **If you are talking to youth and you use old English, you are just not going to cut it.** You've got to then talk the language that they talk.*

The use of slang in business communication might cause misunderstanding of messages if it were directed at the wrong audience. Therefore, approval for the use of slang in business communication was identified as a requirement in Participant 2's organisation:

> **Participant 2:** *It's not a process where we are just going to go and use slang because we are talking to the youth. If we ever do that, that has to go through corporate affairs. Not to say we can't do it and we do do it, especially in the vernac, because there you use the words and the phrases that they use and that the culture is used to. You know, that would not fall into the normal guideline. **We would need to get approval on that**.*

d) Technical terminology

The use of technical terminology was also identified as a barrier for successful communication. A specific term used within a message might have various meanings for different consumers.

Participant insights concurred that the use of jargon and technical terminology, which was specific to an industry or company, should be limited as far as possible:

> **Participant 1:** ***Not to use your own company descriptive words*** *for a product but to make sure that your audience understands.*

> **Participant 1:** *Sometimes you will use a* ***technical word*** *and actually your customer doesn't know what it means, so make sure it's descriptive and it's...I'm actually looking for a better word...but it's not technical.*

e) Consumer experience and professional orientation

Meanings were often determined by consumer experience, which was one of the specific considerations in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), as well as professional orientations of the communicators. For Participant 3, using very simple business language when communicating to the average consumer was a standard practice. Participant 3 also noted that terminology could be universal internationally, but the application of an action which related to a specific term used, might differ from country to country:

> **Participant 3:** *It definitely does come down to terminology because if you just look from a VAT and a TAX point of view, we re-explain certain things. A lot of our principles are the same internationally and here but sometimes the way you apply it is quite different and that's where we've struggled and sometimes you don't know the right people to have on the conference call because they're* ***looking at it from their maybe legal perspective****.*
> **Participant 3:** *We try and use very simple business language.* ***We try not to use complex language when it comes to TAX legislation or accounting legislation, unless we are writing to that technical department then that would be different****. Sometimes our clients ask for a technical accounting opinion and then we will refer to specific technical accounting wording.*

4.4.3.3 Physical barriers

Barriers that are brought about by the communicators external environment are termed physical barriers that could include noise levels during communication, uncomfortable heat on a summer's day, information overload, writing that is too small to read, and even a speaker's untidy appearance or irritating mannerisms (Cleary 2014).

a) Consumer lifestyle

Participants 1 and 2 identified busy lifestyles as a reason why consumers did not read messages properly, which hindered interpretation and their understanding of messages.

> **Participant 1:** *I think it's also because of* ***people getting too busy****. If I take my own environment, you just get more and more things to do, so you read but you don't actually take in what you read, you just take certain pointers.*

> **Participant 2:** *A lot of times the* ***consumers don't read*** *but a lot of times we don't point it out to the consumer. We might be busy, though it's there in fine print, we don't always take time to explain to customers, which is very important because if you are signing a long contract, you're kind of just going to glimpse over it because you feel under pressure.*

> **Participant 1:** *I think it's* ***busy lifestyles and people don't read anymore****, it's more television ... it's all visually things.*

b) Preference for visual stimulation and technology

A preference for visual stimulation was a further factor identified as a reason why consumers might not read messages adequately. In addition, the external environment, and especially the environment in which business communication took place was changing with technological advancement. As a result, electronic and social media were utilised by many business concerns to communicate with consumers. The message structures that are dictated by users as well as by these media, are transforming how language is applied and could impact on message comprehensibility. Participant 2 raised this point by pointing out that social media, for example, was transforming the English language into a language that was not understandable by everyone:

> **Participant 2:** *Because of everything, the* ***social media****, the English language is transforming into a language that not everybody understands.*

c) Information overload

Participant 3 referred to information overload as a physical factor that influenced effective reading skills which, in turn, influenced understanding, and, therefore, also impacted on communication success.

> **Participant 3:** *We find a lot of people read an audit report but don't understand what it is. They think they're getting assurance and an opinion but they're actually not and they don't read what is actually happening in the actual wording, they just scan it, and I think it's because* ***we are bombarded with too much information all the time****, and I think certainly what clients want, is more that one page executive summary and maybe later on if they want specific detail then they will look at it.*

> **Participant 3:** *I think the bottom line is that we* ***are bombarded with way too much information and I think our diaries are so busy****.*

> **Participant 3:** *I think sometimes maybe* ***people don't read*** *reports, maybe scan right to the end and try and read what the conclusion is.*

4.4.3.4 Education and literacy levels

Reisberg (2006) states that education can expand the number of words a person knows and understands through the large amount of reading required, which improves information processing and interpretation of messages. Although adult literacy levels in South Africa seem high at 89% (South African Fact File 2013), organisations who rely on a consumer base aged 20 years and older, need to seriously consider the use of plain and comprehensible language, as this target audience often still has limited education (8,6% had no schooling, 12,3% had some primary education, 4,6% had completed primary education and 33,9% had some secondary education) (Census 2011 Methodology and Highlights of Key Results 2011). Participants' insights on the matter of education and literary competence, and its impact on business communication, concurred with literature on the matter (Plain Language Legislation in SA 2013):

> **Researcher:** *Do you think education can affect business from a communication point of view?*
>
> **Participant 1:** *Ja, definitely.*

a) Varying education and literacy levels

It was evident that the participant companies communicated with a variety of audiences with varying levels of education and literary proficiencies, many of whom were uneducated. This necessitated the use of varying communication strategies such as utilising the vernacular to communicate with consumers in their first languages. Participant 2 identified that educational levels and language of their consumers were important considerations:

> **Participant 2:** *It's very important how we communicate to these people because you are looking at a lot of* ***uneducated people, people that are very rural, very far away from anything****. So there we are particularly very sensitive to using vernacular and talking to people in their own languages.*

Varying education levels occurred at all levels of society and within the consumer pool. Some small business owners, for example, although successful in business, might have secondary level schooling but might not possess any post-matric qualifications. This might hinder their comprehension of certain specialised functional content and, in this case, would require the assistance of a specialist to "break down" the communication to ensure comprehensibility:

> **Researcher:** *Do you have, on the other side, any with lower levels of education?*
>
> **Participant 3:** *Yes we do have that in like owner manager business … I find when we have a meeting with him, I ensure that his financial manager's with him so that when I*

*speak to the owner of the business, **he's very successful but he doesn't have a higher education, I have to break it down in very, very simple format** because I need to know that his agenda at the end of the day, how can he make more money come out of the business.*

b) High education levels and technical competence

On the opposite end of the educational scale, it would seem that even high levels of education could also pose difficulties in a communicative context. Engineers, financial and legal experts, for example, all possess intensive educational backgrounds. However, it might not be easy for an engineer to comprehend a financial analogy, or for a financial or legal professional to comprehend highly-technical messages that was communicated to them by an engineer. These instances would require the communicators to find a middle ground and attempt to use plain language principles to communicate their messages effectively to one another, as was pointed out by Participant 3:

Participant 3: *I've got a client who does product catalytic converters as part of a supplier to the motor industry but basically the generally manager is a chemical engineer. **He will draw equations and ratios on the board and I can't understand it for the life of me, so he's highly educated, but in a very different way from myself where it's more accounting.** So when I speak to him about an accounting principle on fixed assets. I'll explain to him that: the asset that you use, Germany tells you to write it off over five years but you and I know you will use it for eight years, the standard says you must write it off over eight years and not over five years so then, I have to explain that to his financial manager and I can do that within five minutes and I can refer to the standards. When I explain it to the general manager, who is a scientist, then I have to explain it in a much better way and I find that when you walk through the factory then I can explain that better.*

Researcher: *That's actually an interesting point because it counters what you would expect. **Somebody with a seemly higher education level - you always expect it to be easier to explain and even that becomes complicated**.*

Participant 3: *It depends because for sure, **a technical accounting matter you are not going to expect a scientist to understand**, just like when he mixes his rhodium solutions to make a reaction, there's no way I will understand that. He can talk to me for hours about that.*

c) Education systems

Participant insights indicated a possible breakdown in the education system as it related to language teaching. Participant 2 pointed out that the language sections dealing with sentence construction and the rules of English, punctuation of her children's education was being neglected in her opinion. This posed a concern for language skill and communicative competence of future generations, which might lead to severe communication breakdowns having disastrous consequences for business functionality and success. Participant 2 described this as follows:

> **Participant 2:** *The other day I was saying to my daughter, who is now in Matric, "Let me have a look at your three English papers", so I did. I looked at all three of them and I said to her, "Where is the language part? I can understand the set work and the comprehension, and the comprehension, and the comprehension but where's the actual language structure part of it?" "No mom, it's in there." Well goodness, I had to search for it and I promise you it's a little piece like this,* ***it's not the way we were taught, sentence construction and what are the actual rules of English language****. So that's what I mean with old English: properly written, punctuation and all of that.*

4.4.3.5 Rhetorical sensitivity

Rhetorical sensitivity as identified by Littlejohn (1999) indicates a sensitivity to the audience which is communicated to and also includes adjusting messages to the audience as required. Audience centeredness would contribute to better understanding and easier acceptance of ideas that are communicated by adapting what is said to the level, mood and beliefs of the audience at whom the communication is directed (A Customer Landscape that is not Plain n.d.).

a) Target audience focus

Participant 2 pointed out that messages needed to be adapted to the audiences for which they were intended. Participant 2 also identified certain audience features that needed to be taken into account when messages were constructed, for example, LSM levels of consumers, education levels, geographic location and, language pertinence and ability:

> **Participant 2:** *In our region, if you look at it and you take this map, you've got Transkei, lower LSM type of customer, we've got medium...we've actually got a good kind of mix here, lower-medium-high and down in the George area you've got probably medium to high more.* ***Very different strategies for different areas within the same province****. So what works here, doesn't work here because our largest geographical representation is here (pointed to Transkei region), in terms of people, it's very important how we communicate to these people because you are looking at a lot of uneducated people, people that are very rural, very far away from anything. So there we are particularly very sensitive to using vernacular and talking to people in their own languages.*

Business writing in a plain and simple manner that would be understandable to most audiences, was identified by Participant 1 as important requirement of their small business communication effectiveness, with specific reference to advertising communication:

> **Participant 1:** *Yes, that's why your* ***advertising must be as plain and simple as can be so even if it goes to the wrong target market****, it lands in somebody else's post box or cafe, that that person understands what that advert is actually about.*

The interview data transcripts, revealed further examples where target audience sensitivity was important for a successful communicative outcome. Data revealed that an understanding of to whom it was communicating, determined the strategies which a business could employ to ensure successful communication.

b) Message clarification

Clarification of communication where audience misunderstanding was a possibility, was highlighted by Participant 3 as an important strategy:

> **Participant 3:** *We've had with this one client many conference calls across* ***difficult communication barriers when you're dealing with Germans that have got a legal background and others that have got a TAX background from a German perspective then we try and explain things from South Africa****, and this particular scenario has gone back three or four times where we've had conference calls and the MD here has gone overseas twice to try and* ***ensure we're all on the same page****. So it's difficult.*

c) Technical competence

Communicating the message to the relevant, technically-skilled audience when required, was highlighted by Participant 3 as another consideration for business communication success:

> **Participant 3:** *Next week we've got a more technical person coming down to explain the importance of complying with legislations, specifically being POPI and how it integrates with the IT system. So what we've learnt is speaking with the CEO is good because they're the decision maker but it's a waste of time if their IT person is not there. So we've learnt to bring those people in, even if it's an outsourced resource.*

d) Flexible communication strategies

Different target audiences require different communicative strategies to ensure effective communicative acts. The data revealed that it took time for businesses to learn about their consumers, their consumers' needs and the most effective way to communicate with them to achieve their business goals. Awareness of consumer communication needs and listening to understand them was identified by Participant 3 as key contributors to successful business communication with consumers.

> **Participant 3:** *We've got a new client at the moment in the IT business, very experienced, but* ***we still are learning what the best way is to communicate with them****. So I would say it takes at least six to eight months to know how they want to be communicated, what's important to them.*

> **Participant 3:** *If we look at our main clients that* ***we deal with at a board level, director's level, that's ultimately the decision-makers****, they don't have time to go through a 30/40 page document.* ***They want the executive summary, they want the bottom line and I think we've learnt that that is the best way to communicate it, is to***

> ***do it exactly what they want.*** *We always say you've got two ears, one mouth so we must listen to what your clients are wanting from us.*

4.4.4 Perceptions of plain language regulations' impact on business communication

The researcher assumed that the participant organisations' level of support for the plain language regulations in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), could indicate their commitment to plain language communication in their own organisations. This support could also indicate their level of commitment towards its application.

a) Regulatory awareness

The data pointed out that participants were aware of possible consequences to the organisation and consumers if the CPA regulations were not followed. In one case specifically, the perceived benefit of protection the Act provided to both the organisations and the consumers was mentioned by Participant 1:

> **Participant 1:** ***It could be vast if we are not abiding to the rules*** *because it is to protect you, as a customer, so if I, as a company, do not abide by the rules then it could be anything. It could be that I advertise a vehicle as safe and it will protect you in an accident in certain circumstances, but you should specify those type of circumstances and if it doesn't happen, it could be that the complications could be vast, so we must always make sure that what we say is true.*

b) Trust

Participant 2 pointed out that implementing plain language as it was required in the CPA, suggested to consumers that the organisation could be trusted and that consumer needs were important to the organisation:

> **Participant 2:** *Well obviously for us our customers are very important so it's very important that we support what the Act says and that we respect our customers, and through that,* ***you form a trust relationship*** *because if you don't adopt the policy then you are immediately saying well then I don't trust what the consumer wants or I'll dictate what the consumer wants, which is not necessarily that what the consumer wants.*

c) Challenge of oversimplification

Oversimplification of complex business processes and arrangements were highlighted as a concern in terms of plain language application. Although Participant 3 agreed that clear communication was necessary in business, it was felt that some cases warranted more complex communication methods, and that, in these cases, not covering all the complexities in the message could lead to inappropriate business decisions. It might be important to note that the participant spoke from within a complex, highly-technical and professional business environment (see excerpts in bold):

> **Participant 3:** *I think hopefully an implication is that it is more clear. I think the only* ***practical concern*** *I would maybe raise is that, you know,* ***sometimes business arrangements are not simple****, if I can put it that way, and* ***sometimes they are complex*** *and you can write it in a simple way to explain it but I think* ***we have to be careful not to simplify certain things to get to the wrong business decision****. So there might be very complex things that need to be understood so* ***your wording of it must be clear*** *but I don't think we must water down a complex scenario to simplify it because we have seen that that can definitely lead to incorrect business decisions being made.*

> **Participant 3:** *In this economic environment a lot of entities may reorganise themselves so the group might have many subsidiaries or many parts of the group or maybe there's companies they don't use or maybe there's two companies doing the same business that they want to amalgamate so we do that.* ***Now that's a complex transaction from an accounting point of view, just from daily business operational point of view.*** *There are employee implications, you might have to retrench through that programme, there's a lot of TAX implications, there's VAT implications so it impacts nearly everything in your business.* ***So I'm saying that's a complex transaction, I think a lot of clients will come to us and say, "Just give me a two pager of what is the process of how we go about doing this amalgamation", we can do that and that's where we try and write it in plain language but we have to make sure that we cover all the complexities****, if I put it that way. So* ***you can still make it clear****, you can still clearly explain what are the HR matters you have to deal with, what is TAX, what is VAT, what are the normal business operations, maybe complex accounting transactions you need to deal or comply with* ***but you put it in, like us accountants, point format in clear language.*** *So I think that's what I'm saying. I understand the clear language, the importance of that and that it's regulated through the CPA but I think* ***we mustn't not deal with complex transactions****.*

An observation the researcher made was that participants were vague about what the exact legal consequences or implications would be if CPA regulations were not followed. This allowed the researcher to conclude that the true legal ramifications of non-compliance of the CPA's plain language regulations might not be known to communication practitioners and employees who were responsible for business communication.

4.4.5 Plain language application in written business communication

The application of plain language in the business communication of participant organisations were considered from a predominantly qualitative mode of enquiry.

4.4.5.1 Likert-scale survey results

In this portion of the study (see Appendix 2), participants were asked to rate, in their own opinion, statements concerning their company's business communication. These statements were directly related to the requirements of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations and aimed at providing an indication of plain language application within the participant organisations. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the survey results as it was indicated on the Likert scale, to illustrate plain language application within the participant organisations.

Table 4.3 Likert-scale results for qualitative study of plain language application in participant organisations

Likert-Scale Measures = 1 Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Sometimes, 4 Frequently, 5 At all times

Desired Level	Category	R 1	R 2	R 3
	Message Content			
High	Audience focussed	4	4	5
High	Clarity	5	2	4
High	Conciseness	5	2	4
Low	Vagueness	1	2	2
Low	Jargon	5	2	3
Low	Highly Technical	2	2	4
High	Plain Language	4	4	4
High	Accurate	5	4	5
	Message Construction			
High	Suitable language for audience	5	4	4
High	Plain sentences (short & clear)	5	3	4
High	Correct punctuation	5	5	4
	Message Accuracy			
High	Audience focussed	5	5	4
High	Truthfulness	5	5	5
High	Suitable distribution channels for audience	5	5	4
	Audience Focus			
High	Literacy levels	5	5	4
High	Language proficiency	5	5	4
High	CPA compliant communication	5	5	5
High	Ethical communication	5	5	5

Table 4.3 illustrates the respective participant's opinions of their organisation's plain language application as it related to the plain language practices identified in the literature (see Chapter

2, Sections 2.6 and 2.7). For example, plain language application was audience-focussed communication, emphasising clarity and conciseness but avoiding vagueness, jargon and highly-technical language. The questions that were asked included four overarching categories, namely, message content, message construction, message accuracy and audience focus. Categories marked in orange all related to audience-specific communication, whereas the items marked in yellow, indicated areas that were contradictory to the desired level of application in the organisations, which could indicate possible areas for improvement within their business communication.

Although the majority of the plain language categories seemed to be adequately addressed or applied by the participating organisations, the researcher observed that participants selected quite a number of 5s on the rating scale, which translated to these aspects being applied “At all times” within their organisations. The researcher observed that these statements needed closer consideration by the organisations, especially as the communication was not particularly regulated in these organisations and, therefore, these statements might have been lacking accuracy.

An evaluation of the Likert-scale responses gathered during the interviews, indicated the various language-use practices relevant to message content in the participating organisations. These practices were rated on a scale of 1-5 by the participants and the results are as follows:

- **Message content:** 2/3 of participants believed that their company’s business communication was frequently constructed with the target audience in mind, while 1/3 stated that the target audience was considered at all times.
- **Clarity:** diverse ratings with 1/3 of participants stated that business communication was clear at all times, 1/3 stated that communication was clear frequently and 1/3 maintained that communication was rarely clear.
- **Conciseness:** participants rated similarly to that of clarity with 1/3 stating that communication was concise at all times, 1/3 frequently and 1/3 rarely.
- **Vagueness:** 2/3 of participants stated that communication was rarely vague and 1/3 indicated that communication was never vague.
- **Jargon use:** evoked diverse opinions in the responses. 1/3 of the participants indicated that communication was rarely filled with jargon, 1/3 stated that communication was filled with jargon sometimes, and 1/3 indicated that communication was filled with jargon at all times.

- **Highly-technical language use:** 2/3 of the participants rated highly-technical language as rarely being part of the company's business communication while 1/3 stated that technical language was used in communication frequently.

- **Plain language use:** All participants indicated that communication was written in plain language.

- **Accuracy:** 2/3 of the participants regarded their company's business communication as being accurate at all times, and 1/3 as frequently accurate.

An evaluation of the language-use responses gathered during the interviews, also indicated the following aspects about message construction in the participant organisations:

- **Target audience:** 2/3 of the participants indicated that their business used suitable language for the target audience frequently and 1/3 indicated this was done at all times.

- **Clarity and conciseness:** Short and clear (plain) sentences were used by 1/3 of the businesses at all times, 1/3 businesses, frequently and 1/3 businesses, sometimes.

- **Punctuation:** 2/3 of the participants noted the correct use of punctuation at all times, with 1/3 indicating this as frequently done.

- **Accuracy:** Participants indicated that message accuracy in their respective organisations was indicated by a) being written with the intended target audiences in mind at all times (2/3) or frequently (1/3), b) because it was truthful at all times (3/3) and because communication was shared using suitable channels for the target audience frequently (1/3) or at all times (2/3).

- **Literacy levels:** Communication of 2/3 businesses were constructed to be consistent with the target audience's literacy levels and language proficiency at all times and frequently in 1/3.

- **CPA complaint and Ethical:** All participants indicated that their business communication was CPA compliant as well as ethical.

The analysis of the interview transcript data provided the researcher with valuable insights concerning the participating organisation's awareness of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). It became apparent that although most participants were aware of the CPA and its plain language regulations, these participants were not certain what the specific plain language regulations required of them. The interview transcript data confirmed that the participants were applying plain language principles in their company's written business communications. However, it also confirmed that most participating companies had no means of checking whether these plain language principles were used correctly or consistently in all written communications disseminated by the organisations. In addition, data revealed a number of plain language best practices being used by organisations to facilitate plain language communication. Various challenges (barriers) in plain language application were also identified by the participants. Furthermore, the analysis of the Likert-scale survey provided the researcher with a measureable understanding of how participants perceived plain language application within their organisations.

4.4.5.2 Content analysis of documents supplied by participating organisations

In addition to the primary investigation, a qualitative content analysis of documents that were obtained from the participating organisations was also conducted. The researcher utilised systematic content analysis methods to identify suitable and / or inadequate plain language use that were evident in the supplied documents and summarised message content related to the study of plain language application in business writing within businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole (Maree 2007). The documents were reviewed to provide general commentary on the plain language application, supported with excerpts from each to validate the researcher's findings.

Documents in Figures 4.3 to 4.7 were supplied by the organisations for review (also see Appendix 5). These documents were analysed based on the focus areas that were also included in the Likert-scale survey discussed (see Chapter 3, Table 3.4). Table 4.4 illustrates the analysis guidelines for plain language application in terms of message content, message construction, message accuracy and audience focus.

Table 4.4 Analysis guidelines for plain language application in documents supplied by participant organisations

Message Content
Audience focussed
Clarity
Conciseness
Vagueness
Jargon
Highly Technical
Plain Language
Accurate
Message Construction
Suitable language for audience
Plain sentences (short & clear)

Correct punctuation
Message Accuracy
Audience focussed
Truthfulness
Suitable distribution channels for audience
Audience Focus
Literacy levels
Language proficiency
CPA compliant communication
Ethical communication

Using the analysis guidelines in Table 4.4, the researcher made observations concerning each of the documents supplied.

Figure 4.3 illustrates an excerpt from a product flyer, directed at, for example, motor vehicle mechanics, to promote Economy Parts for the manufacturer's motor vehicles (the name of the motor vehicle manufacturer has been replaced with an alphabetical marker to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the data). The areas identified for discussion were highlighted in bold in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Excerpt from a product flyer supplied by Participant 1 for plain language analysis

Economy Parts

To maintain the Company A quality standard in Company A vehicles that are out of warranty and five years or older, Economy Parts offer an economical alternative to Genuine Parts. Since they are specifically adapted for older Company A's, these parts are more cost effective to make to specification and have increased performance capabilities. Although **they are on average 25% more affordable** than Genuine Parts, there is **no compromise on safety**, performance, or durability. Customers are therefore able to maintain their Company A's for longer, while also enjoying improved value.

Prices are recommended retail, exclusive of VAT and are subject to change without notification. Part applicability to model is dependent on the chassis/vin number. For further information, contact your nearest participating Dealership. Please note that these prices are valid from <date> and parts are available while stocks last.

The Benefits of Economy Parts

Manufactured in accordance with stringent Company A standards, each step of the Company A Economy Parts process, including research, development and manufacture, is performed directly or indirectly by Company A itself. Tested and approved by the Company A Group Development Department, **time-value modifications allow for a 25% saving**, with **no compromise on safety** or quality. Carrying a **one-year legal guarantee**, their precise fit enables improved repairs and shorter installation times, offering an improved competitiveness. **Customised options relative to the age of the Company A increases penetration into segment II & III, while consolidation of the product range reduces logistical costs.**

Economy Parts Quality Assurance

For parts that **guarantee to meet the utmost level of international standards**, Economy Parts are put through thorough and intensive testing. This rigorous development and testing programme is conducted exclusively by Company A engineers to ensure the outstanding quality of all Economy Parts that leave our factory.

From the excerpt in Figure 4.3, the researcher could clearly identify the intended target audience as consumers who were in the market for ***Economy Parts*** for their motor vehicles that were out of warranty and five years or older as an alternative to ***Genuine Parts***, for example motor vehicle mechanics. The target audience seemed to include parts retailers as the copy refers to **"prices are recommended retail, exclusive of VAT"**. The flyer seemed to be "information heavy" and some repetition of information was identified which might have increased the document's length unnecessarily, for example, **"they are on average 25% more affordable"** and **"allow for a 25% saving"** as well as numerous references to **"no compromise on safety"**.

Therefore, the researcher identified the product flyer to be lacking conciseness. Ambiguous sales language, for example, **"guarantee to meet the utmost level of international standards"** and technical jargon, such as **"time-value modifications"** were also used to facilitate the message's persuasion levels. As a result, it could be assumed that the average consumer might be unclear about what was meant by the phrase **"time-value modifications allow for a 25% saving"**. In addition, the phrase **"a one year legal guarantee"** was also identified as an example of ambiguous communication as it is unclear what a legal guarantee would entail. The sentence, **"Customised options relative to the age of the … increases penetration into segment II & III, while consolidation of the product range reduces logistical costs"** was particularly vague, as the reader would not necessarily know what segment II & III included, while the use of words such as **"penetration"** and **"logistical costs"** might also be problematic to certain target audiences' understanding. However, punctuation was used correctly.

Aspects of accuracy, truthfulness and ethics could not be established by the researcher purely by examining the flyer. The distribution channels used to disseminate the flyer was not specified and, therefore, no comment could be made in this regard. Although the overall target audience was clearly identifiable, specifics related to the educational levels, literacy levels and language proficiency of the target audience was not available and, therefore, it was unclear whether the flyer accommodated these aspects for the intended target audience sufficiently.

Figure 4.4 illustrates an excerpt of a campaign identified by Participant 2 for plain language analysis. The campaign discouraged texting while driving and illustrated the use of social media text conventions in a message.

Figure 4.4 Campaign was referred to by Participant 2 for plain language analysis

Source: http://www.w82send.co.za/

From the excerpt in Figure 4.4, the researcher identified the intended target audience as consumers who utilised text messaging as a communication tool. The message in the excerpt was clear and identified what the campaign was about, for example, indicating "Driver Safety Awareness". The campaign strapline or heading, **W8_2send**, translated as "wait to send", made use of a typical social media text convention. The researcher found this strapline to be catchy and memorable. However, this text convention might not be understood by average consumers who were not up to date with SMS or social media text conventions. Some ambiguity could also be found in the strapline. For example, W8_2send could be interpreted that it is fine to text while driving as long as the message is not sent.

Aspects of accuracy, truthfulness and ethics were implied by the nature of the campaign. The distribution channels of the campaign were not specified and, therefore, no comment could be made in this regard. Although the overall target audience was clearly identifiable, specifics related to the educational levels, literacy levels and language proficiency of the intended target audience was not available and, therefore, it was unclear whether the campaign accommodated these aspects for the intended target audience sufficiently.

Figure 4.5 illustrate excerpts of a taxation e-mailer provided by Participant 3 for plain language analysis. The e-mailer provided information about Special Economic Zones that have been identified by the Department of Trade and Industry that could provide the participant's clients with various tax benefits.

Figure 4.5 Taxation e-mailer supplied by Participant 3 for plain language analysis

The **Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Bill** was gazetted on 1 March 2013 with the aim of driving economic growth and job creation. A memorandum was released by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in June 2013.

Some of the **Key Features** are listed below:

A SEZ for each province and an opportunity to lobby for additional SEZ's.

The DTI has indicated that studies will be conducted on the following areas to determine their viability as SEZ's:

Province	Area	SEZ activity areas
Limpopo	Tubatse & Mesina	Tubatse: platinum-group metals Mesina: petrochemicals, agro-processing and logistics
Mpumalanga	Nkomati	agro-processing
North West	Rustenburg	platinum hub
Western Cape	Atlantis	renewable energy
Northern Cape	Upington	solar power
Eastern Cape	Wild Coast	agro-processing
KwaZulu – Natal	Dube Trade Port	agro-processing
Free State	Harrismith	agro-processing and logistics
Gauteng	Nasrec	agro-processing and logistics

The SEZ regime will have a 10 year lifespan and may be extended. One of the requirements for entities to participate in the SEZ regime is that **not less than 90%** of the income of that company should be derived from the carrying on of business or provision of services within the respective SEZ.

An important feature is that the Section 12i (brownfield and Greenfield) tax incentive will be amended to cater for SEZ's in addition to existing Industrial Development Zones. This means that the **Section 12i tax incentive can be claimed in addition to the SEZ benefits** listed above, which is an attractive proposition to clients.

The SEZ Bill is currently awaiting approval by Parliament and is likely to be promulgated by the end of this year. This is an **opportunity** to start **engaging** with **existing** and **potential** clients both in the private and public sector.

The above areas are ***not the final SEZs and*** municipalities, public entities and Public Private Partnerships (PPP) **may still apply for a specified area to be designated as a SEZ.**

BENEFITS

- **15%** **reduced corporate tax rate**
- ACCELERATED WRITE OFF **for buildings over a 10 years period**
- WAGE SUBSIDY
- VAT & CUSTOMS BENEFITS
- Creation of a ONE-STOP-SHOP to **help facilitate investors** with access to required permits, authorizations, licenses to operate and after care.

Figure 4.5 illustrates the taxation e-mailer supplied by Participant 3 for plain language analysis. The researcher could not clearly identify the intended target audience. However, it was interpreted that the content was aimed individuals in business, whose businesses were related to one or more of the SEZ activities mentioned and, who might wish to invest in a business opportunity related to the SEZ activities to receive SEZ benefits mentioned in the e-mailer. The e-mailer, although dealing with a complex issue, was mostly written in plain language and constructed by using short sentences and included information in tables and in point form, to assist clarity and comprehension. The aim of the communication was clarified in the first few paragraphs of the e-mailer and acronyms such as ***"SEZ"*** and ***"DTI"*** were explained to the reader from the start.

Although the e-mailer included much textual information, the communication was easy to read owing to the short paragraphs and other visual communication aspects that were used. For example, the use of different coloured words to highlight words or phrases of importance, the use of a table and bullet points to aid clarity and comprehension. The use of words such as ***"regime"*** and ***"promulgated"*** could be simplified for the reader to assist understanding by replacing it with more common words ***"system"*** and ***"published"*** respectively. The communication is of a technical nature but should be understood by people that work within the financial environment. Terms such as ***"corporate tax rate"***, ***"accelerated write off"***, ***"wage subsidy"***, and ***"VAT & custom benefits"*** seemed to be appropriate terminology for the identified target audience.

Aspects of accuracy, truthfulness and ethics could not be established by the researcher purely by examining the e-mailer, however, the information seemed to be derived from a government regulated document which would, in itself imply a high measure of accuracy. The distribution channel for this document was e-mail, which seemed suitable to the intended target audience the organisation was communicating with. Although the overall target audience was identifiable, specifics related to variety of the educational levels, literacy levels and language proficiency of the target audience that received the communication was not attainable and, therefore, it was unclear whether the e-mailer accommodated these aspects for the entire spectrum of the intended target audience sufficiently.

Figures 4.3 to 4.5 provided an overview of documents and an awareness campaign that were obtained for the purpose of the content analysis of this study. The analysed documents were obtained from each of the study's participant organisations. The content analysis followed an inductive and iterative process as the researcher was looking for plain language practices in the texts that would corroborate or disconfirm the theory (Maree 2007). The documents were reviewed in order to provide general commentary on the plain language use, supported with excerpts from each to validate the researcher's findings. The researcher utilised systematic content analysis methods to identify suitable and/or inadequate plain language use that was evident in each of the supplied documents.

4.5 Content analysis of Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009)

Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) (see Figure 4.6) in itself warranted an analysis of plain language application, as it would be assumed that the document should be comprehensible for the defined target market indicated in Section 22(2) of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). The researcher observed the following with regard to the Section's plain language application:

Figure 4.6 Analysis of plain language application in Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009)

"Right to information in plain and understandable language" (1) The producer of a notice, document or visual representation that is required, in terms of this Act or any other law, to be produced, provided or displayed to a consumer, must produce, provide or display that notice, document or visual representation— *(a)* **in the form prescribed in terms of this Act or any other legislation**, if any, for that notice, document or visual representation; or *(b)* in plain language, if no form has been prescribed for that notice, document or visual representation. (2) For the purposes of this Act, a notice, document or visual representation is in plain language if it is **reasonable** to conclude that an **ordinary consumer** of the **class of persons** for whom the notice, document or	Sentences were quite long and seemed to explain too many concepts at once. In this case proper punctuation did not assist understanding adequately; It is unclear what is meant by "in the form prescribed in terms of this Act or any other legislation"; <u>The following phrases, terms or concepts are ambiguous</u>: "reasonable"

visual representation is intended, with **average** literacy skills and **minimal experience** as a consumer of the relevant goods or services, could be expected to understand the content, significance, and **import** of the notice, document or visual representation without **undue effort**, **having regard to**— *(a)* the context, comprehensiveness and consistency of the notice, document or visual representation; *(b)* the organisation, form and style of the notice, document or visual representation; *(c)* the vocabulary, usage and sentence structure of the notice, document or visual representation; and *(d)* the use of any illustrations, examples, headings, or other aids to reading and understanding."	"ordinary consumer" and "class of persons" "average" "minimal experience" "import" "undue effort" and "having regard to"

Figure 4.6 illustrates the content of Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and, indicates a number of plain language challenges that exist in the content of the Act as it is currently written. For example, the researcher identified the use of long sentences to describe a variety of concepts, as well as the use of ambiguous terminology that could inhibit understanding of the Act. These challenges would cause the consumer a fair amount of effort to unravel the requirements of the Act to ensure understanding. This in itself, contradicted the statement in Section 22 that communication needed to be constructed in a manner which would allow consumers to "understand the content, significance, and import of the notice, document or visual representation without undue effort".

4.6 Conclusions

Chapter 4 presented the empirical findings attained from the data analysis that was completed by the researcher. Chapter 4 also highlighted the demographics of the participants in the study and then described the data analysis themes that were identified as nodes and child nodes using NVivo10 qualitative software. A number of key aspects or practice-based themes that needed careful consideration in the application of business communication principles were identified by the researcher. These key aspects were identified by calculating the number of references that were made to each aspect in the coding sections. These included, for example, ***Effective Written Business Communication Practices*** as the most relevant practice with 176 references (26%), ***Target Audience Focus*** as the second most relevant practice with 86 references (13%) and CPA and ***Plain Language Awareness*** as well as ***Communicative Norms*** as the third most relevant practice with 73 references (11%) respectively.

The interview transcript data also revealed, for example, that all participants identified comprehensibility, clarity and truthfulness as important considerations which could affect effective written business communication practices. These facets that were identified, correlated with both the communication theory on communicative competence and plain language as set out in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1). Evaluation of the participants' insights during the study exposed a number of communication barriers which were believed to impact on the practitioners day-to-day business communication practices. For example, perceptual, language and physical barriers, education and literacy levels, and rhetorical sensitivity (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2).

Plain language application in participant organisations were assessed by evaluating the results of the Likert-scale survey completed by each of the participants, as well as analysing the content of documents that participating organisations supplied for review of their plain language practices. The analysis revealed that, although the participants were mostly confident in their plain language application, certain shortcomings in terms of plain language application could still be identified in their documents. The researcher decided to add an analysis of Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) to evaluate the application of plain language in its content. In this instance, the researcher observed a number of deviations in the Act which contradicted plain language use and that could affect the interpretation and understanding of this section of the Act.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, provides a broad overview of the study and highlights the most important findings revealed by the data. Chapter 5 also includes recommendations proposed by the researcher, based on the research results. Finally, the chapter discusses contributions and limitations of the study as well as identifies future research possibilities that might exist related to the research topic.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the results of the investigation undertaken to determine three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses' awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), and its application within the selected small to large-scale businesses were presented and discussed.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, provides a broad overview of the study and highlights the most important conclusions revealed by the data. In Chapter 5, the researcher also proposes recommendations based on the research results. Finally, contributions and limitations of the study are discussed and future research possibilities are identified.

5.2 Research overview

Businesses communicate a wide variety of messages to diverse audiences using a number of different communication types and channels daily. For example, business communication includes business reports, documents (booklets, leaflets, and official communiqués), notices, agreements, web copy and advertisements that are produced continually to address a variety of business communication needs. Through these various communication types, consumers are informed about products, services and deals, contracts are formulated to communicate the conditions of purchase requirements and/or to establish service-level agreements. Finally, companies also inform stakeholders about changes in company policy or financial performance through business communiqués.

Writing for these business communication types are perpetually complicated by a number of variables, such as the audience (at whom the message is aimed), message purpose (what it must accomplish), message construction and clarity (tone, ease of correct interpretation and understanding), message accuracy (truthful and trustworthy content) and message delivery (channels used to distribute it). These factors all contribute to and determine the effectiveness, adequacy and success of the business communication process.

As a result of the need for accurate, unambiguous and clear business messages, an initiative termed the plain language movement increased its momentum during the 1990s as campaigners drove the belief that clear and reader-friendly communication could at the same time be accurate, certain and precise. In addition, the need for plain language use in government, legal, financial and other business communications would produce large scale benefits for organisations (Balmford n.d.). Since the inception of the plain language ideology, the application thereof has been mainly enforced through statutory regulations in countries that recognised the need for it. Subsequently, plain language regulations have been written into numerous statutory laws worldwide.

In commerce and marketing specifically, communication largely determines whether or not an organisation will achieve its internal and external business objectives. Internally, management and employees must communicate effectively to create products and services that meet consumer needs (Rafiq and Ahmed 2000). Externally, consumers must be made aware of, and be persuaded to purchase these products and services through marketing communication (Shimp 2007). Through the management of communication, organisations adapt to, alter or maintain their environment to achieve their organisational goals (Steyn and Puth 2000).

Business communication creates consumer expectations, which if not met by the business and its products and services, could lead to consumer dissatisfaction and, relatedly, also a decline in consumer support and income which could have detrimental effects on business success. A key consideration in effective business communication is the impact that plain language and clear legal and related communications could have on business decision-making and success (Balmford n.d.). The importance of constructing business messages accurately and concisely has also been a topic of legislative and educational debate globally for many years (Greer 2012). As a result, plain language is a concept that has been adopted worldwide to ensure that business communication is constructed clearly for the ease of correct interpretation and understanding by stakeholders, in particular, the consumer.

In the South African context, the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) not only regulates the use of plain language, but also defines the concept and refers to the consumer's **"Right to information in plain and understandable language"**. The CPA stipulates that communicators must "display notices, documents or visual representations *(a)* in the form prescribed in terms of this Act or any other legislation, if any exists; and *(b)* in plain language, if no form has been prescribed for that notice, document or visual representation" (Consumer Protection Act 2008 2009). For the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), a notice, document or visual representation is using plain language if it can be reasonably concluded that an ordinary consumer with average literary competency and minimal experience as a consumer to would need to understand the intention of the notice, document or visual representation "without undue effort" with regard to:

> (a) the context, comprehensiveness and consistency of the notice, document or visual representation; *(b)* the organisation, form and style of the notice, document or visual representation; *(c)* the vocabulary, usage and sentence structure of the notice, document or visual representation; and *(d)* the use of any illustrations, examples, headings, or other aids to reading and understanding.

With the CPA's plain language regulations in mind, the primary purpose of the study was to investigate Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses' awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). The study also intended to obtain insights with regard to its application within the selected small to large-scale business concerns in the Port Elizabeth Metropole, with specific reference to their written business communication. Finally, the study aimed to identify communication best practice guidelines and possible challenges which might derive from plain language application within these organisations.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted on communication theory, business language use, consumer behaviour, marketing and business management to provide a theoretical foundation from which the study could be approached (see Chapter 2). Chapter 2 also focussed on the definitions and relevance of business communication and language use in business, and further identified barriers that could affect communication efficiency. The chapter also offered an extended explanation of the term plain language and, in doing so, identified facets that determined communication success in written business communication. These facets included language that reflected the interests and needs of the consumer, clarity, straightforward expression, the use of only the necessary number of words, avoidance of obscurity and inflated vocabulary as well as complex sentence structures. As a result these language considerations were all identified as essential requirements in plain language application and effective business communication.

Communication theory also points towards communicative competence as a relevant departure point for plain language application and how it could be measured. Celce-Murcia et al (1996) identify the following competence areas as facets that could impact on the communication success between senders and receivers of messages:

- Grammatical competence, which relate to grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling

- Sociolinguistic competence, such as the appropriate use of vocabulary, register, politeness and communicative style in a particular context
- Discourse competence, which relates to one's ability to combine language structures into different types of organised texts such as political speech and poetry
- Strategic competence, which is the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication tactics that improve the effectiveness of communication.

In addition, Habermas's (1984) conditions for competent communication, namely, the norms of truthfulness, sincerity, comprehensibility and legitimacy correlated with the plain language principles of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). For example, the Act refers to the consumer's "right to information in plain and understandable language" (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2).

Effective business communication was seen to be complicated by communication barriers that hindered the flow, and interpretation of messages as the sender intended it. These communication barriers include perceptual, language, physical, physiological and psychological barriers (Cleary 2014) as well as vague language, education, literacy levels and rhetorical sensitivity (or audience focus).

Chapter 2 included a discussion about Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) to explain the plain language requirements as it is set out in the Act. Section 2.8 of Chapter 2 attempts to define the target audience of a plain language communication, and indicates which aspects of message construction are relevant in plain language application. These aspects were identified as focussing on message context, comprehensiveness and consistency, organisation, form and style of the notice, document or visual representation, vocabulary usage and sentence structure of the notice, document or visual representation. Finally, the use of any illustrations, examples, headings, or other aids to reading and understanding also impacted on plain language use.

Furthermore, Chapter 2 highlighted the reasons why plain language application was necessary for business success (see Chapter 2, Section 2.9) and also made reference to how plain language, or the lack thereof, could impact on customer satisfaction, consumer attitude and behaviour. Chapter 2 concluded by discussing the ethical considerations related to the use of plain language in written business communication, or the lack thereof, and described that business communication that was vague, unclear, incorrect, false, deliberately evasive or written without considering the audience's capacity to communicate, could be considered as unethical practice against consumers because it placed the consumer in a vulnerable and uncertain position of decision-making that could impact on consumer behaviour negatively.

The research methodology of the study was discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter explained how a predominantly qualitative mode of enquiry was combined with limited quantitative measures to assist with data triangulation (Swanson & Holton 1997 in Maree, 2007). Both a phenomenological (descriptive and interpretive), and somewhat positivistic methodology was required to provide the researcher with a rich data set, and, therefore, these two approaches where incorporated into the study's research design. The phenomenological approach was relevant to the research methodology because of the study's social reliance (Neville 2007) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1). In addition, the positivistic approach to this research assisted the researcher to "identify, measure and evaluate" any dominant elements (variables), and provided a sensible explanation for code selection by establishing causal links and relationships between the different elements (or variables) and relating them to the theory or practice of communication.

The population of the study was made up of three participants who were in management positions and who were involved with communication practices in either a small, medium or large organisation within the Port Elizabeth Metropole. Participants for the study were selected by using a convenient, stratified and purposeful sampling method with no pretence of being fully-representative. Primary data-collection was done by administering semi-structured, audio recorded, face-to-face interviews with all three participants who indicated a willingness to participate in the study. To guide and provide some structure to the interviewing process, a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was prepared based on the research topic's theoretical framework. A minor portion of the study required the collection of quantitative data by means of a Likert-scale (rating-scale) survey which the participants completed individually after the interview (see Appendix 2, Section 2). This survey intended to rate the participants' current business communication, and to determine if they considered their communication to be predominantly clear and understandable for the target audiences with whom they communicated.

Finally, Chapter 3 included a description of the secondary data collection, which included a content analysis of documents that were obtained from the selected organisations. The content analysis followed an inductive and iterative process.

For the study, NVivo 10 qualitative research software was used to streamline the analysis of the study's interview transcripts. For the analysis, concepts were identified as descriptive anchors or dominant themes in the data, called *nodes*. Nodes were used to order the collected data, and also to group related data that was identified in the interview data transcripts, in a descriptive manner. The interview transcript data were classified according to the nodes identified, and the meaning thereof unpacked during analysis. For the coding process, the transcribed qualitative raw data from the interview recordings were uploaded onto NVivo 10 qualitative research software to map or code data themes. Dominant themes were identified from the coded data, which were then labelled as parent and child nodes to group concepts and ideas in a logical manner (see Chapter 3, Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Validity and reliability was achieved by implementing triangulation, for example, the researcher used more than one data source such as interview transcripts, a rating scale survey as well as document content analysis to corroborate findings and ensure its validity and reliability. In addition, the researcher also made use of member validation to ensure that data was viable and reliable, by requesting the interview participants to check and verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts.

Chapter 4 presented the empirical results or findings of the study. Chapter 4 described the data analysis themes that were identified from the interview-transcript data as nodes and child nodes using NVivo 10 qualitative software. From the interview transcript data, it was found that the participants were aware of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), but were unsure or even unaware of the plain language requirements set out in the Act. Although the participants indicated that their organisations knew about the CPA, they did not know all the details (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3). In addition, a number of key aspects or practice-based themes that needed consideration in the application of business communication principles were identified by the researcher (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1). These were quantified by establishing the number of references the participants made to each practice-based theme during the interviews. These included, for example, *Effective Written Business Communication Practices* as the most relevant consideration with 176 references, *Target Audience Focus* as the second most relevant with 86 references and *CPA and Plain Language Awareness* as well as *Communicative Norms* as the third most relevant considerations with 73 references respectively. The dominant themes and considerations initially identified and coded, were ranked from highest to lowest and included:

- communication effectiveness (26%)
- target audience focus (13%)
- CPA and plain language awareness (11%)
- communicative norms (11%)
- message content and frequency (8%)
- business communication types (media used to communicate for example e-mail) (7%)
- organisational requirements (6%)
- business communication best practice (4%)
- language challenges and considerations (4%)
- consumer behaviour (3%)
- communication barriers (3%)
- ineffective written business communication (3%) and
- consequences of ineffective written business communication (2%)

Interview transcript data also revealed, for example, that all participants identified comprehensibility, clarity and truthfulness as important considerations which could affect effective written business communication practices. These facets that were identified correlated with the communication theory on communicative competence and plain language in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1).

Evaluation of the participants' insights during the study revealed a number of language challenges and considerations which highlighted certain communication barriers which impacted on the practitioners' day-to-day business communication practices. For example, perceptual barriers, language barriers, physical barriers, education and literacy levels, and rhetorical sensitivity (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3). The plain language application in participant organisations was also assessed by evaluating the results of the Likert-scale survey completed by each of the participants, as well as analysing the content of documents that participating organisations supplied for review. The documents were reviewed to provide a general commentary on plain language use in its content, supported with excerpts from each to validate the researcher's findings (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5). The analysis of both the Likert-scale survey data as well as the analysis of document content, revealed that although the participants were mostly confident that their business communication was written in plain language, certain plain language shortcomings could still be identified in their documents, for example, technical jargon and ambiguous language use, as well as the use of acronyms without explanation.

The researcher also decided to add a content analysis of Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) to evaluate the application of plain language in its content. In this instance, the researcher observed a number of plain language errors that could have affected the interpretation and understanding of this section of the Act as well. For example, the sentences were quite long and explained too many concepts in one sentence, and punctuation use did not assist understanding adequately. In addition, the Act included ambiguous language complicated understanding of phrases such as "in the form prescribed in terms of this Act or any other legislation".

Section 5.3 of the study presents the researcher's findings, conclusions and recommendations.

5.3 Main empirical findings, conclusions and recommendations

Chapter 5, Section 5.2 highlighted various aspects that have been identified during the study as having a significant impact on plain language application in participating organisations within the Port Elizabeth Metropole. The dominant themes identified in the data were evaluated by, firstly, assessing the interview data transcripts in terms of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and plain language awareness within the three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses. Secondly, the dominant themes were evaluated by assessing plain language application within the three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses as it related to the research focus of the level of awareness that Port Elizabeth businesses have of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations. Finally, using these two mechanisms, the plain language application in the businesses was investigated.

5.3.1 South African CPA and plain language awareness within three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses

The interview transcripts revealed that the participants, who were all managers and, were to some degree responsible for written business communication in their respective organisations, were aware of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009). However, they were unsure or even unaware of the plain language requirements set out in the Act. Although participants indicated that their organisations knew about the CPA, they did not know all the details it involved. On the other hand, participant feedback also indicated that they believed the plain language regulations were to ensure truthfulness, conciseness, transparency and clarity, as well as comprehensibility, avoid ambiguity, and honour promises made to the consumer. Their responses, therefore, indicated a reasonable level of understanding of the term plain language, as it related to the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009).

However, the participants responses lacked reference to other important aspects highlighted in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), such as the significance of literacy skills and consumer experience as well as message context and consistency, message organisation, form and style, vocabulary, usage and sentence structure. A more thorough knowledge of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations and what plain language entails, could assist organisations to implement plain language principles more systematically within their organisations. This understanding of plain language, in turn, could meet the requirements of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) more adequately.

To implement these plain language practices implementation recommendations for organisations are suggested.

5.3.1.1 South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) knowledge

Organisations should study the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and other legislation which include plain language regulations in their requirements, and provide training on these requirements to all employees who deal with consumer communication. If the plain language regulations are too complicated to understand and unpack, organisations should request the assistance of a legal and/or plain language consultant to assist with this.

5.3.1.2 Plain language communication plan

Organisations should appoint a department who could develop and champion the implementation of a plain language communication plan. This plan should include a plain language style guide for all written business communication in their organisation, based on the respective legislative plain language requirements. All staff who deal with consumer communication should be trained to implement the style guide and use it as a checking mechanism for plain language application.

5.3.1.3 Organisational support for plain language use

Organisations should encourage organisational "buy-in" into the plain language principles of the CPA as a mechanism to ensure plain language application and transparency in the business's communication. This was also a suggestion of one of the study's participants (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2).

5.3.2 Plain language application within three Port Elizabeth Metropole businesses

The study evaluated the application of plain language communication principles in businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole to draw meaningful and helpful conclusions and recommendations from the primary and secondary data analysis.

5.3.2.1 Primary data analysis

It was evident from participants' feedback during the qualitative portion of the study that, within their respective areas of responsibility, they were not always in control of all business communication that was disseminated from within their organisations. As a result, they merely took responsibility for communication for their departments and the staff they managed directly. Also, not all communication was or could be checked before it was sent to consumers which could have caused a lack of plain language application. Consequently, possible misrepresentation as well as misunderstanding were possible in their consumer communication to various audiences. As a result of the findings, various recommendations are suggested to improve plain language application in these organisations.

a) Plain language support staff

Organisations should appoint a department, with the appropriate knowledge and competency, who could champion and support plain language application in the organisation, and, by doing so, also assist the writers of communications to proofread and oversee the communication sent to consumers. As it would be challenging for a department to check all disseminated communication, it is suggested that random communication checks are implemented throughout the organisation to detect any misapplication of plain language principles and rectify these situations with the appropriate action, for example, providing further communication training.

b) Staff communication competence assessment

Organisations should implement a battery of tests that could identify staff members who possess high levels of communication competence as well as those who possess low levels of communicative competence. Staff who possess high level communication competence should be responsible for the organisations' written business communication. Furthermore, organisations should each establish their own level of acceptability for communication competence. Staff members identified as possessing low levels of communicative competence should be continuously trained until acceptable levels of communicative competence are reached.

c) Larger organisations

Organisations who were responsible for the regional business activities of their respective organisations received the majority of their communication directives from their head offices based nationally and internationally. These organisations were responsible for coordinating the international guidelines on how to deal with business communication within these companies. These organisations seemed to have more stringent communication processes in place to guide their staff in terms of consumer communication.

d) Smaller organisations

For smaller concerns, it seemed that there were less formalised regulations, checks and templates in place to assist staff with effective "plain" language practices and that training was implemented as a reactive measure mostly when issues arose (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1.1). Participant 1 identified:

> **Participant 1:** *When things come about, they do offer people communication skills or business writing skills or that type of thing but there's nobody that's really policing it.*

In these cases, the researcher would recommend that smaller concerns should implement similar plain language communication principles to their larger counterparts. For example, providing staff with continuous training as well as plain language checklists or templates for communication, to ensure that plain language regulations were followed within their organisations.

e) Template support

An important observation from the interview data transcripts was that most of the template support and intense communication training which participants identified within their organisations, were provided to staff on senior and mid-management level. These managers were then responsible to share the knowledge and practices for the expected communication standards with their teams. This practice posed concerns regarding the communicative support available to, and the communication competence of staff on the ground level of the organisations. For this reason, the researcher recommends that organisations should allocate more responsibility for communication management at different levels within their respective organisations. In this way, the knowledge, skills and tools could be provided to all staff within the organisation so that the ultimate responsibility for plain language application does not fall on management alone.

f) Plain language features

The interview data transcripts further revealed that participant companies acknowledge the features associated with plain language and communicative competence as it was described in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6.1) of the study. The most prominent of these features mentioned by all three participants during the face-to-face interviews associated with communication effectiveness and communication competence, were comprehensibility (30%), audience specific communication (23%), and clarity (16%). The aspects that received the least attention related to the number of references included grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction (6%), conciseness (4%) and sincerity (2%). Related to these findings, the researcher recommends that the organisations' plain language training and suggested style guides should include a strong emphasis on the importance and application of appropriate grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence construction as well as conciseness and sincerity within written business communication.

g) Target audience focus

All participants identified the importance of message comprehensibility as a factor which determined effective communication. The most prominent finding related to comprehensibility was the importance of the target audience, and target audience focus (also referred to as rhetorical sensitivity) for which the communication was developed. Aspects related to target-audience focus which were highlighted in the participants' responses included, target audience needs, education, literacy levels and language proficiency which also related to communicative competence, and, finally, vernacular language use.

As a result of these findings, the researcher recommends that best practice guidelines should be developed. For example, organisations should establish a list of communication best practices, as identified by this study, such as adapting the language of the communication to the level of the audience (including their educational level, level of language proficiency, literacy level and consumer experience level). These practices also related to being flexible when communicating to different audiences such as the youth market and consumers of varying cultures, using descriptive language as well as point-form or visual communication. For example, pictures tables and flow charts to communicate a concept or process more clearly and finally, steering away from or adequately explaining technical jargon. Staff in the organisation should be trained to apply these best practices in their day-to-day communication practices and communication should be randomly checked or audited to ensure compliance with plain language principles.

h) Truthful and accurate communication

The concept of truthfulness and legitimacy of business communication is an important factor as it relates strongly to consumer attitude, customer satisfaction levels and, ultimately, to consumer behaviour impacting either positively or negatively on the organisation. Therefore, it is recommended that organisations should clearly communicate their brand and business philosophy with their staff members on a regular basis. These communications should encourage staff members to be truthful and accurate in both business and communication processes.

i) Communication barriers

Communication barriers, which included perceptual, physical and language barriers, as well as education and literacy level considerations and rhetorical sensitivity, were identified by the study's participants as posing challenges to effective written business communication. For this reason, the researcher recommends that organisations should identify the communication barriers that are relevant to their communicative environment, and utilise this list to sensitise staff continuously to these barriers as well as propose methods to overcome or eliminate them. For example, if a potential barrier is identified to be a multi-cultural consumer base who all possess different educational and literacy levels, then different communication strategies should be implemented for each target audience to ensure communication efficiency. By identifying potential communication barriers within the organisations' written business communication processes, the organisation could safeguard itself against possible misinterpretations or misunderstandings by consumers that could potentially lead to legal action taken against the organisation and, ultimately, financial loss.

In the quantitative portion of the study (see Appendix 2, Section 2), participants were asked to rate, in their own opinion, statements concerning their company's business communication. These statements were directly related to the requirements of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations and aimed at providing an indication of plain language application within the participant organisations. Although the majority of the plain language categories seemed to be adequately addressed or applied by the participating organisations, the researcher observed that participants selected quite a number of 5s on the rating scale, which indicated that these aspects were being applied "At all times" within their organisations. The researcher recommends that these statements need closer consideration by the organisations, especially as communications were not particularly regulated within these organisations and, therefore, these statements might have been lacking accuracy.

5.3.2.2 Secondary data analysis

A qualitative content analysis of documents that were obtained from the participating organisations, identified suitable and/or inadequate plain language application that was evident in the supplied documents of the participating Port Elizabeth Metropole organisations. The researcher, therefore, recommends various plain language principles or guidelines to address communication practices in the organisations

a) Content analysis of organisations' documents

Organisations should utilise Table 4.4 in Chapter 4 (Analysis guidelines for plain language application in documents supplied by participant organisations), to assess their written business communication for plain language application. Table 4.4 provides analysis guidelines which organisations could use to determine whether, for example, their website, product brochure, flyer, advertisement or e-mailer was written for the appropriate target audience with plain language principles in mind. These guidelines could assist the communicator to ask the appropriate questions related to the message's content and construction as well as message accuracy and level of audience appropriateness. By reviewing the organisation's written business communication using the guidelines provided, the writer of the communication would be reminded of the plain language principles that assist effective communication and help identify, for example, ambiguities, unexplained technical jargon, long sentences, and grammatical errors that could be corrected before the messages were disseminated.

b) Content analysis of Section 22 of the South African CPA

The content analysis of Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) indicated a number of plain language challenges that existed in the content of the Act as it is currently written. For example, the researcher identified the use of long sentences to describe a variety of concepts, as well as the use of ambiguous terminology that could inhibit understanding of the Act (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5). These challenges would cause the consumer or organisation a fair amount of effort to unravel the requirements of the Act to ensure understanding. This in itself, contradicted the statement in Section 22 that communication needed to be constructed in a manner which would allow consumers to "understand the content, significance, and import of the notice, document or visual representation without undue effort". Therefore, the researcher recommends that Parliament should analyse the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), and specifically Section 22 thereof, according to the guidelines in Table 4.4 to test its plain language compliance.

Specifically, it is recommended that Parliament should:

- revise the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), and specifically Section 22 thereof, so that the content of the Act is brought in line with the requirements of Section 22 itself. This would mean that content needs to be re-written with the intended audience in mind, which, in this case, would be the average consumer. Therefore, the languages need to be more concise, grammatically correct, incorporate shorter sentences, and be more understandable with no undue effort on the part of the consumer.
- provide a practical guide for plain language application, which businesses could use in their day-to-day business communication practices as a tool to measure their application and compliance with the Act.

5.4 Contributions of the study

This study has contributed to the body of social science research, particularly in the field of business language and communication. The study has identified areas of possible neglect within organisations, where there were reasonable levels of awareness of the plain language regulations stipulated in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), as well as where specific knowledge and skills to apply and improve plain language use within businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole were lacking.

The measuring instruments, for example, the semi-structured interview questionnaire, Likert-scale survey and measurement guidelines for the content analysis which were developed for this study, proved to be reliable and valid, and could be used as a basis for developing future measurement instruments in related studies. The development of the solid theoretical foundation related to communicative competence and need for plain language, assisted the researcher to code and organise the interview transcript data into theoretical based themes to deduct meaningful findings, conclusions and recommendations which could greatly assist future research on the topic of plain language use or facets thereof.

As a result this study presents a rich set of recommendations to assist organisations in the Port Elizabeth Metropole with the practical application of plain language in their written business communication, to facilitate positive consumer experiences, customer satisfaction and, ultimately, positive consumer behaviour that would be of benefit to the organisation’s profitability and sustainability.

5.5 Study limitations and recommendations for future research

This study attempted to make significant contributions to the body of knowledge concerning business language and communication as it related to the application of plain language in written business communication within businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole. Although this study investigated and established a more in-depth understanding of the level of awareness that existed about the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) within the three selected businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole, as well as the application of plain language in these organisations, the study encountered a number of limitations. Through the identification of the limitations of the study, possible future research opportunities were discovered. The following limitations and possibilities for future research were identified and discussed.

5.5.1 Sample size

In this study, the small population and sample size resulted in the survey data being sample specific, linking to only the three participating organisations and their respective industries, and was, therefore, not entirely representative of the larger population of businesses within the Port Elizabeth Metropole or South Africa. Future research should attempt to reach a more inclusive population and could include broader studies within the Port Elizabeth Metropole or within the broader South Africa to make the study inclusive of organisations in South Africa. A larger sample size would also be advisable.

5.5.2 Organisation demographics

Demographical limitations also did not allow the researcher to correlate the data with any data from the participant organisation’s larger organisations. Although assumed, it was impossible to say whether the findings of this study would correlate with similar studies that could be conducted with the staff of the organisation that were not on management levels or even in the participant organisation’s head offices, both on a national and international level. Demographic limitations also existed in terms of the organisation types (industries) that were included in this study. Results of a study that include a broader spectrum of industries might provide different findings. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies also include a wider industrial demographic.

5.5.3 Consumer feedback

This study has also not allowed for a comparative analysis between data obtained from within businesses within the Port Elizabeth Metropole versus that of consumers with whom these businesses communicate. Therefore, the opinions that were expressed by the participants regarding their organisational business communication might differ substantially from how the consumers of these businesses experienced the communication processes that were practiced.

Future research opportunities were also available to probe consumer feedback regarding plain language use in business communication practices.

5.5.4 Consumer comprehension

Future studies could attempt to investigate communication barriers that inhibit or challenge comprehension in consumer communication. This could be achieved by developing a testing battery and implementing a long-term investigation on the consumers' comprehension of various types of business communication. A suitable population for such a study would include consumers with different literacy levels and different socio-economic classes.

However, despite these research limitations, the results of this study make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge related to business language and communication practices as well as the application of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language requirements in written business communication within Port Elizabeth Metropole business organisations.

5.6 Concluding remarks

This study to determine the level of awareness of the South African CPA's 68 of 2008 (2009) plain language regulations in selected Port Elizabeth Metropole organisations, and the related investigation into the application of plain language in written business communication within these businesses, has brought about interesting findings, meaningful conclusions and practical recommendations that add to the body of knowledge concerning business language and communication practices in the social sciences.

The conclusions and recommendations highlighted in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.3) aim to assist businesses with their understanding of plain language gaps in their written business communication, and provide guidance in terms of their compliance with the regulations set out in Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009).

Although this study investigated and established a more in-depth understanding of the plain language regulations set out in Section 22 of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009), and the application of plain language within three businesses of the Port Elizabeth Metropole, as well as the application of plain language in these organisations, certain demographic and size limitations to the study have been highlighted and further research opportunities on this topic have been suggested.

The application of the study's recommendations might lead to organisations having a better understanding of the plain language regulation in the South African CPA 68 of 2008 (2009) and also contribute to organisations improving the application of plain language in their written business communication practices and, ultimately, establishing more effective written business communication with their consumers.

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APPENDIX 1

ETHICS CLEARANCE

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Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
for tomorrow

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Ref: H/14/ART/JMS-003

07 October 2014

Mrs R Van Jaarsveld
25 Elliodor Street
Kamma Heights
PORT ELIZABETH
6070

Dear Mrs Van Jaarsveld

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (2008) AND PLAIN LANGUAGE APPLICATION AT SELECTED BUSINESSES IN THE PORT ELIZABETH METROPOLE

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval served at the FPGSC Higher Degrees sub-committee of the Faculty of Arts Faculty Postgraduate Studies Committee.

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The Ethics clearance reference number is **H/14/ART/JMS-003**, and is valid for three years, from 01 OCTOBER 2014 – 01 OCTOBER 2017. Please inform the FPGSC, via your supervisor, if any changes (particularly in the methodology) occur during this time. An annual affirmation to the effect that the protocols in use are still those for which approval was granted, will be required from you. You will be reminded timeously of this responsibility.

We wish you well with the project.

Yours sincerely

Mrs N Mngonyama
FACULTY ADMINISTRATOR

cc: Promoter/Supervisor
HoD
School Representative: Faculty FPGSC

APPENDIX 2
QUESTIONNAIRE

For the purposes of this interview, business communication will be defined as a universal form of communication (both professional and technical) applicable to almost all areas of business such as marketing, branding, customer relations with the emphasis on the promotion of an organisation, service and product, and imparting information to stakeholders. The focus will be on **written business communications** via tools such as business e-mails, websites, social media sites, product and service brochures, user manuals, promotions and print advertisements, contracts, service level agreements, corporate portfolios, financial reviews and so forth.

The interview will be semi-structured so please feel free to add any comments or opinions on related to the questions asked.

Your participation in the interview is voluntary basis and conducted on the basis of organisational consent. You may withdraw from the interview at any stage of the process. In relation to privacy and confidentiality, no business or participant will be identified by name in the research results. The origin of the results will remain strictly confidential

The interview should take approximately 1 hour to complete.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Section A

1. What is your designation?

2. What is your role with regard to communication practices in your organisation?

3. How would you define an effective written business communication?

4. In your opinion, what are the 5 main considerations or elements of an effective written business communication?

5. Are you aware of the plain language regulations which are stipulated in the South African Consumer Protection Act (CPA) 68 of 2008?

5.1 If yes, can you please explain what you understand these regulations to include?

If no, move to question 6

6. What do you believe the impact of these regulations on your business communication practices to be?

7. Have these regulations been adopted into your business communication and processes yet?

7.1 If yes, please state when these guidelines were adopted and why?

7.2 If no, please elaborate why?

8. How do you go about implementing plain language in your business communication (which steps do you follow to ensure audience friendly / appropriate communication)?

9. Do you have a checklist in place to test your business communication against the plain language guidelines of the South African CPA 68 of 2008 before it is disseminated?

9.1 If yes, which components are evaluated in the assessment of a business communication?

10. Do you have any examples of business communication tools that you have adapted to be more audience friendly / appropriate (before and after)?

11. Have you ever had any complaints, disputes or disagreements which resulted from a stakeholder misunderstanding or misinterpreting any of your business communications?

11.1 If yes, please provide an example.

12. Who is responsible for the implementation of plain language use in your business communication?

13. What lessons have you learnt in your attempts to implement plain language in your business communication?

14. In your opinion, what are the two main reasons why audiences fail to understand or struggle to interpret written business communications?

15. What challenges have you experienced in your attempts to implement plain language in your business communication?

16. Can you identify any communication practices which you would define as being best practice for plain language implementation in written business communication?

17. In your opinion, do businesses have an ethical responsibility towards their stakeholders for implementing plain language principles in their business communications?

17.1 If yes, what do you believe these ethical considerations to be?

17.2 If no, please elaborate why?

Section B

18. In your opinion, please rate the following statements honestly as either 1 Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Sometimes, 4, Frequently, or 5 At all times

18.1 Message content is:

18.1.1 Constructed with the target audience in mind

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

18.1.2 Clear

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

18.1.3 Concise

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

18.1.4 Vague

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

18.1.5 Filled with jargon

1	2	3	4	5

18.1.6 Highly technical

1	2	3	4	5

18.1.7 Written in plain language

1	2	3	4	5

18.1.8 Accurate

1	2	3	4	5

18.2 Messages are constructed by using:

18.2.1 Suitable language for the target audience

1	2	3	4	5

18.2.2 Short and clear (plain) sentences

1	2	3	4	5

18.2.3 Correct punctuation

1	2	3	4	5

18.3 Messages are considered accurate because:

18.3.1 It is written with intended target audience in mind

1	2	3	4	5

18.3.2 It is truthful

1	2	3	4	5

18.3.3 It is shared using suitable channels for the target audience

1	2	3	4	5

18.4 Messages are consistent with the target audience's:

18.4.1 Literacy levels

1	2	3	4	5

18.4.2 Language proficiency

1	2	3	4	5

18.5 Our business communication is CPA compliant

1	2	3	4	5

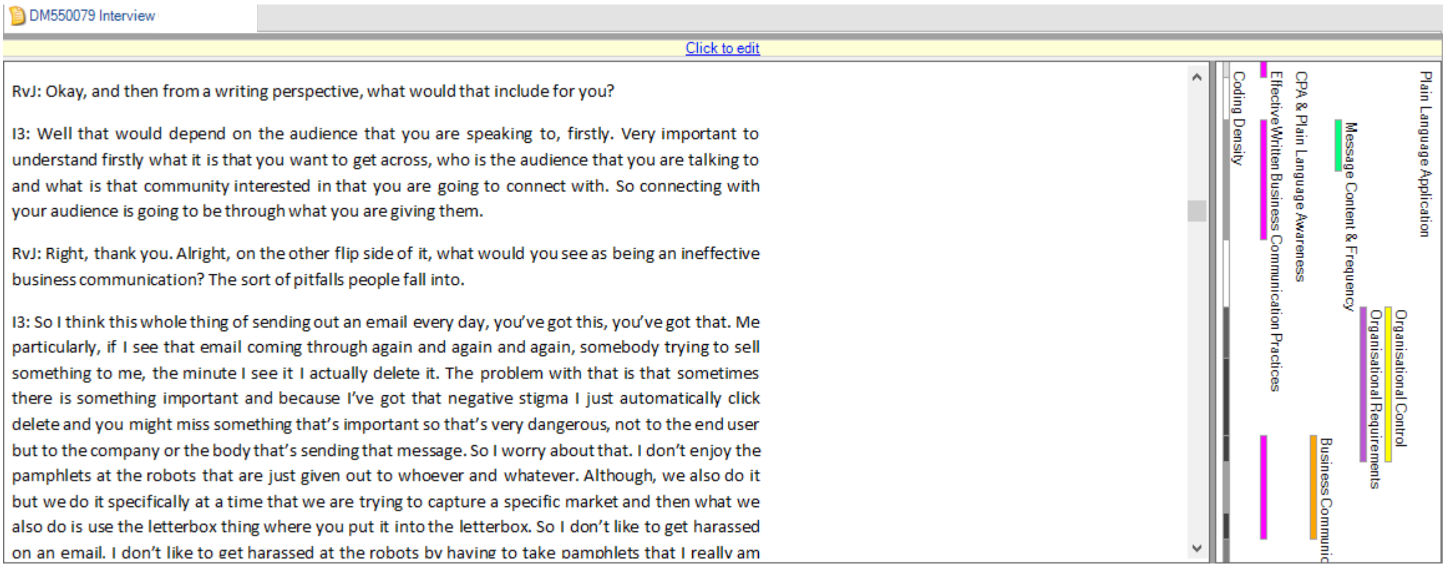
18.6 Our business communication is ethical

1	2	3	4	5

Thank you

APPENDIX 3

EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS AND CODING

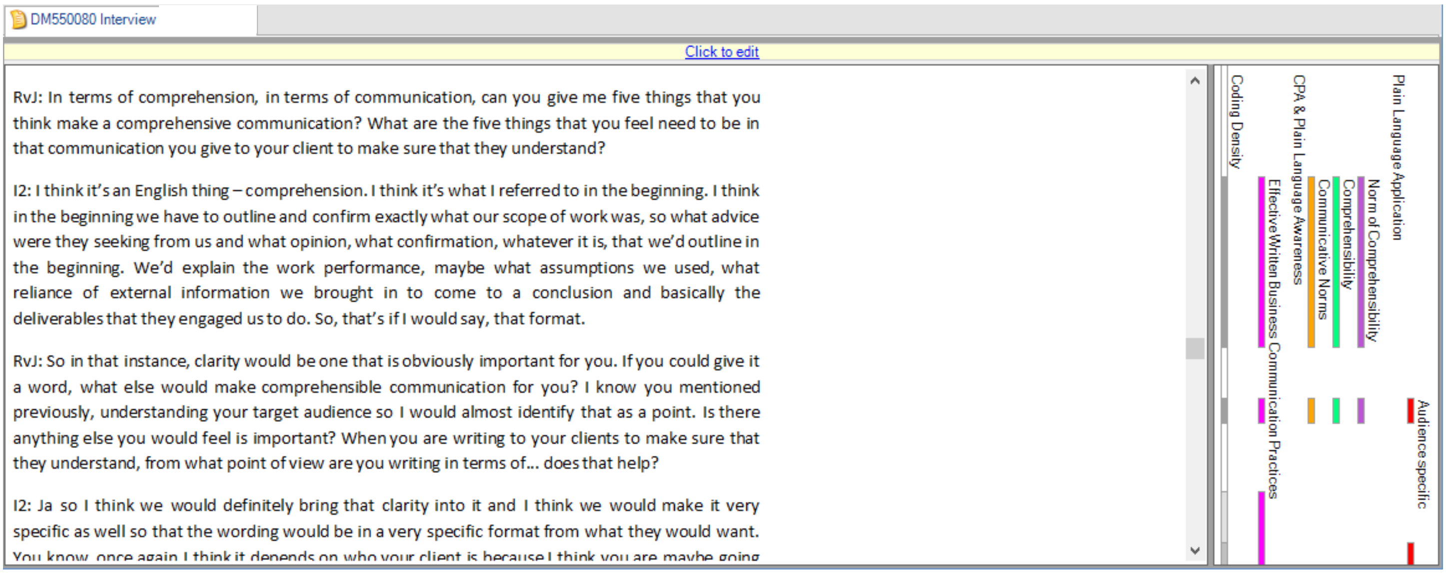


RvJ: Okay, and then from a writing perspective, what would that include for you?

I3: Well that would depend on the audience that you are speaking to, firstly. Very important to understand firstly what it is that you want to get across, who is the audience that you are talking to and what is that community interested in that you are going to connect with. So connecting with your audience is going to be through what you are giving them.

RvJ: Right, thank you. Alright, on the other flip side of it, what would you see as being an ineffective business communication? The sort of pitfalls people fall into.

I3: So I think this whole thing of sending out an email every day, you've got this, you've got that. Me particularly, if I see that email coming through again and again and again, somebody trying to sell something to me, the minute I see it I actually delete it. The problem with that is that sometimes there is something important and because I've got that negative stigma I just automatically click delete and you might miss something that's important so that's very dangerous, not to the end user but to the company or the body that's sending that message. So I worry about that. I don't enjoy the pamphlets at the robots that are just given out to whoever and whatever. Although, we also do it but we do it specifically at a time that we are trying to capture a specific market and then what we also do is use the letterbox thing where you put it into the letterbox. So I don't like to get harassed on an email. I don't like to get harassed at the robots by having to take pamphlets that I really am



RvJ: In terms of comprehension, in terms of communication, can you give me five things that you think make a comprehensive communication? What are the five things that you feel need to be in that communication you give to your client to make sure that they understand?

I2: I think it's an English thing – comprehension. I think it's what I referred to in the beginning. I think in the beginning we have to outline and confirm exactly what our scope of work was, so what advice were they seeking from us and what opinion, what confirmation, whatever it is, that we'd outline in the beginning. We'd explain the work performance, maybe what assumptions we used, what reliance of external information we brought in to come to a conclusion and basically the deliverables that they engaged us to do. So, that's if I would say, that format.

RvJ: So in that instance, clarity would be one that is obviously important for you. If you could give it a word, what else would make comprehensible communication for you? I know you mentioned previously, understanding your target audience so I would almost identify that as a point. Is there anything else you would feel is important? When you are writing to your clients to make sure that they understand, from what point of view are you writing in terms of... does that help?

I2: Ja so I think we would definitely bring that clarity into it and I think we would make it very specific as well so that the wording would be in a very specific format from what they would want. You know, once again I think it depends on who your client is because I think you are maybe going

APPENDIX 4

EXAMPLE OF DOCUMENT PRESENTED FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

The **Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Bill** was gazetted on 1 March 2013 with the aim of driving economic growth and job creation. A memorandum was released by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in June 2013.

Some of the **Key Features** are listed below:

A SEZ for each province and an opportunity to lobby for additional SEZ's.

The DTI has indicated that studies will be conducted on the following areas to determine their viability as SEZ's:

Province	Area	SEZ activity areas
Limpopo	Tubatse & Mesina	Tubatse: platinum-group metals Mesina: petrochemicals, agro-processing and logistics
Mpumalanga	Nkomati	agro-processing
North West	Rustenburg	platinum hub
Western Cape	Atlantis	renewable energy
Northern Cape	Upington	solar power
Eastern Cape	Wild Coast	agro-processing
KwaZulu – Natal	Dube Trade Port	agro-processing
Free State	Harrismith	agro-processing and logistics
Gauteng	Nasrec	agro-processing and logistics

The above areas are ***not the final SEZs and*** municipalities, public entities and Public Private Partnerships (PPP) **may still apply for a specified area to be designated as a SEZ.**

BENEFITS

- **15%** **reduced corporate tax rate**
- **ACCELERATED WRITE OFF** **for buildings over a 10 years period**
- **WAGE SUBSIDY**
- **VAT & CUSTOMS BENEFITS**
- Creation of a **ONE-STOP-SHOP** to **help facilitate investors** with **access** to required permits, authorizations, licenses to operate and after care.

The SEZ regime will have a 10 year lifespan and may be extended. One of the requirements for entities to participate in the SEZ regime is that **not less than 90%** of the income of that company should be derived from the carrying on of business or provision of services within the respective SEZ.

An important feature is that the Section 12i (brownfield and Greenfield) tax incentive will be amended to cater for SEZ's in addition to existing Industrial Development Zones. This means that the **Section 12i tax incentive can be claimed in addition to the SEZ benefits** listed above, which is an attractive proposition to clients.