

# Communicating with Survey Respondents at the UK Office for National Statistics

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## **Abstract**

The mission of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is to improve understanding of life in the UK and enable informed decisions through trusted, relevant, and independent statistics and analysis. ONS is therefore responsible for conducting, analysing and disseminating a broad range of social surveys, business surveys and the decennial census. Respondent communication is regarded as one of the central elements to facilitating participation in our surveys.

This paper reviews, compares and discusses social and business survey respondent communication at the ONS. The paper provides an overview of the types, modes, visual design and content themes of our respondent communication. It then progresses from a content analysis approach to look at the discourses used in our respondent communication.

**Key Words:** Respondent Communication, Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis

## **1. An Overview of ONS Respondent Communication**

Like many other National Statistical Institutes, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses respondent communication to make contact with respondents, introduce the survey, gain cooperation and additionally for social surveys to introduce the interviewer and for business surveys, to validate data and take enforcement action. To provide an overview of ONS respondent communication, communication has been sorted into three distinct survey phases: (1) pre-survey communication, (2) survey field period communication, and (3) post survey communication.

### **1.1 Pre-survey communication**

Paper remains the key mode for ONS pre-survey respondent communication. Pre-survey communication is focused on making contact with the respondents, introducing the survey to respondents and seeking cooperation. The intended outcome of pre-survey communication is to increase the likelihood of respondent cooperation during the survey field period. The range of pre-survey respondent communication for social and business surveys is shown in figure 1.

#### *1.1.1. Introducing the survey and seeking cooperation*

For social surveys there is a variety of survey specific, pre-survey respondent communication. Interviewers follow headquarter guidance (Woodland, 2008) to decide which communication to use. ONS headquarter staff initially attempt to make contact with respondents, introduce the survey to respondents, announce that an interviewer will be calling, and seek cooperation by sending out advance letters, which are accompanied by a generic ONS information leaflet. Additionally, for longitudinal social surveys, prior to the start of wave 2 fieldwork a KITE (Keep-In-Touch) exercise is undertaken. Three months prior to the commencement of fieldwork a telephone unit interviewer will contact respondents from the previous wave, check their details and inform them of the upcoming round of interviews.

The respondent communication available to interviewers during the pre-survey communication phase builds on the information sent out by ONS headquarters and includes survey specific interviewer introductory letters (one which requests best day and time of day to be returned in a stamped addressed envelope and another which requests information on the occupancy of the address eg. empty, holiday accommodation, normal address etc. plus best day and time to make contact), and letters of introduction where concealed multi-occupancy is found by the interviewer at a selected address. The type of pre-survey communication used, besides the headquarters advance letter, varies from

household to household. Interviewers use their experience of the area they are working in to tailor their approach according to their knowledge of the area.

In business surveys the survey is introduced and cooperation sought by ONS headquarters sending letters to newly selected respondents (no letters are sent for newly selected respondents to the Annual Business Inquiry Part 2 (ABI/2), Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and the Business Register Survey (BRS)). Existing respondents are not sent an advance letter.

Pre-survey communication is also sent to new and existing respondents when alternative modes of data collection are offered. Three alternative modes are offered for some business surveys: (1) Telephone Data Entry (TDE) is offered for some business surveys that collect nine or less data items (eg. Monthly Inquiry into Distribution and Service Sector (MIDSS), Vacancies Survey, and Quarterly Stocks). Respondents are sent a TDE letter specifying the data requested and informing respondents how to respond via the TDE system; (2) some business respondents are offered the option to collate and return their data via special arrangements, which is an ONS created spreadsheet with paper documents specifying the data requested. Special arrangements are generally offered to large businesses that have many local units or employees that they have to respond for; and (3) Secure Electronic File Transfer (SEFT) has been developed to collect data via spreadsheet and for it to be returned via a secure website. It is currently used for Foreign Direct Investment, Foreign Affiliated Trade in Services, Senior Civil Service Pay and Annual Civil Service Employment Survey. There are also plans to roll SEFT out to three additional surveys that is Business Register Survey, Government Research and Development, and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. Respondents using SEFT are sent a standard information leaflet, a user ID letter, and a password letter.

### 1.1.2 Envelopes

Both social and business surveys use a range of envelope sizes. Business surveys use white envelopes with a ‘window’ to display the pre-printed address. Social surveys use white and brown envelopes with no ‘window’. The address is therefore written/printed onto the envelope.

**Figure 1**

Overview of ONS social and business, pre-survey respondent communication

Objective	Mode	Social Surveys	Business Surveys
Introducing: survey, (interviewer); and requesting cooperation	Paper	Advance letter Interviewer introductory letter (1) Interviewer introductory letter (2) Interviewer introductory letter (3)	New respondent information leaflet
	Card	Interviewer introductory card	---
	Telephone	Keep-In-Touch exercise	---
Introducing mode and requesting cooperation	Paper	---	Special arrangements letters TDE letters SEFT letters

Interviewer introductory letters: (1) requests occupancy status; (2) requests best times to call; and (3) is for use where multi-occupancy is found.

## 1.2 Survey field period communication

Respondent communication in this phase of the survey process is undertaken by a variety of modes (paper, web, face-to-face and telephone) and has the objective of making contact, gaining cooperation (through persuasion and information), and response chasing. Although for business surveys, some data validation (post survey phase) may also take place as the majority of completed questionnaires are returned during the survey field period. The range of survey field period respondent communication for social and business surveys is shown in figure 2.

### 1.2.1. Making contact and seeking cooperation

Social survey household interviewers have a variety of written respondent communication to assist them in making contact and seeking cooperation (called today cards, message pad, appointment cards, ‘why me’ information sheet, ‘asking the people’ booklet, survey specific purpose leaflets etc.). Individual interviewers decide which information to

use but in adherence to ONS headquarter guidance (Woodland, 2008). When making face-to-face or telephone contact with respondents, interviewers use verbal communication to elicit cooperation. They are trained to optimise the doorstep interaction to increase the likelihood of respondent cooperation.

For business surveys there is no initial face-to-face or telephone dialogue with respondents. For existing business survey respondents, and new respondents for the ABI2, ASHE and BRS, the first interaction with ONS respondent communication is via the front page of the business survey questionnaires. This contains communication that you might expect to see in an advance letter eg. assurance of confidentiality, why the businesses has been selected, and what to do if respondents require additional information. Depending on the survey there can be up to four different types of front pages. For example (1) an Osmotherly<sup>1</sup> sterling front page, for small businesses covered under the Osmotherly guarantee and where data is requested in sterling, (2) a non-Osmotherly sterling front page, for businesses with over 10 employees and where data is requested in sterling, (3) an Osmotherly euro front page, for businesses with the Osmotherly guarantee and where data is requested in euros, and (4) non-Osmotherly euro, businesses with more than 10 employees and where data is requested in euros.

### 1.2.2. Response chasing

Social survey interviewers have two types of memory jog letters to leave at noncontact addresses, these start with either 'you may remember' or 'you may recall'. Where respondents have refused to participate in the survey, interviewers also have a refusal conversion letter that they can leave. There is also the opportunity to leave a personalised letter, hand-written on a message pad. This can be tailored in order to address the specific concerns of the respondent that are leading to their non-participation. Interviewers are provided with guidance on the type of information that might be contained in such a letter.

If respondents fail to respond to a business survey they are sent one paper reminder for monthly surveys, two for quarterly surveys and up to three reminders for annual surveys. For annual surveys, non-responding businesses with 1,000+ employment will be sent a paper letter to the chief executive of the business. They will also be response chased via the telephone by staff in the Business Data Division (BDD). Failure to respond results in legal enforcement action being taken under the 1947 Statistics of Trade Act. This occurs in the post survey field period.

**Figure 2**

Overview of ONS social and business, survey field period respondent communication

Objective	Mode	Social Surveys	Business Surveys
Contact/cooperation	Card	"Called today" cards Appointment cards "All you need to know" leaflets Survey specific purpose leaflets	---
	Paper	"Why me?" information sheet Message Pad	Front page of questionnaire
	Glossy paper	"Asking the people" booklet	---
	Verbal	Doorstep/Telephone dialogue	---
	Web	Information pages	Information pages
Response chasing	Paper	"You may recall" letter "You may remember" letter Refusal conversion letter	Reminder letters Chief executive letters
	Telephone	---	Follow-up calls

### 1.3. Post survey field period communication

For ONS social surveys post survey communication centres on thanking respondents which is particularly important for panel surveys where respondent cooperation is required in future waves of the survey. There are two different types of

<sup>1</sup> An Osmotherly guarantee is given to small businesses (less than 10 employees). The guarantees are that they will only remain in a monthly survey sample for 15 months, a quarterly survey for five quarters, and an annual survey and two years.

thank you cards: (1) a thank you card to use when respondents will not be recontacted, and (2) a thank you card to use when respondents will be contacted in future waves.

For ONS business surveys communication in this phase is concerned with continued response chasing through enforcement action and data validation. The range of post survey respondent communication for social and business surveys is shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3**

Overview of ONS social and business, survey post field period respondent communication

Objective	Mode	Social Surveys	Business Surveys
Thank you	Card	Thank you and no future waves Thank you and future waves	---
	Telephone	---	Follow up calls
Enforcement	Paper	---	Chief executive letters
		---	Legal action

## 2. Research Methodology

The research objectives were to analyse ONS social and business survey respondent communication from the perspectives of ‘visual’, ‘content’ and ‘process’ (discourse analysis), therefore moving beyond a content approach to an ethnography of survey communication (Tesch, 1990). Complete suites of respondent communication from one social survey (Labour Force Survey) and one business survey (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings) were selected for the research.

Both the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) collect labour market and earnings data. The LFS is based on a random sample of households that are selected for five waves. The first wave is conducted using face-to-face interviews with telephone interviews predominately used during subsequent waves. In contrast ASHE is an employee based survey in which employees are selected via the last two digits of their national insurance number. Paper self-completion questionnaires are sent to businesses for the business to complete on behalf of the selected employees.

All paper based written respondent communication used in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) were sorted into pre-survey, survey field period, and post survey field period communication. Three distinct analytical stages were then undertaken: (1) a visual comparison, (2) thematic content analysis, and (3) discourse analysis. It must be noted that a single researcher carried out all elements of the research, and results could be subject to researcher bias.

The visual comparison was undertaken by ‘eye balling’ and describing first and more in-depth impressions. Obviously, these are the researchers’ perceptions of the material and could be subject to bias through personal choice.

The thematic content analysis was undertaken by identifying and selecting textual subject matter patterns and condensing these into themes; presenting these themes; and drawing conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The approach adopted for the discourse analysis focussed on an ethnography of communication, that is unlocking the knowledge, rules and linguistic codes used in written survey respondent communication. This approach acknowledges that there is a connection between language and ways of thinking (Schiffrin, 1994). Discourse analysis has been previously undertaken in relation to particular professions. For example, in relation to legal discourse as a language:

*‘Of property, of rights, of the protection of the self and one’s goods, of entitlement, of facts and truth. Legal labels for wrongs, such as ‘harrasment’, ‘assault’, ‘breach of’, and ‘contract’, ‘malicious damage’, and ‘trespass’ and concepts such as property and contract constitute its core’. (Merry, 1990, p. 112)*

However, it has not been used in ONS as an approach to evaluating and designing respondent communication.

### 3. Visual Comparison of LFS and ASHE Written Respondent Communication

#### 3.1. First Impressions

Compared to ASHE material, LFS written respondent communication is more visually attractive. LFS material also includes three different types of supplementary information for respondents ('why me?' sheet, 'asking the people' information booklet, and 'all you need to know about the survey' information card). Both ASHE and LFS material are designed to present a standard corporate image to respondents, although the image varies between social and business surveys.

#### 3.2. Visual design

##### 3.2.1. Paper

Both LFS and ASHE use white paper. For LFS the paper is thicker than standard weight paper and card and glossy paper are also used. In contrast, ASHE written respondent communication is on standard weight paper; card and glossy paper are not used.

##### 3.2.2. Print colour

With the exception of the glossy 'asking the people' information booklet LFS respondent communication contains three print colours (black, green and blue). All letters have a printed green and blue vertical banner (from top to bottom) down the left hand side of the page that is embossed with the ONS logo and has a reverse print confidentiality statement and statement about ONS at the bottom of the banner. The banner is approximately three cms wide. The ONS logo is in the corporate colours of green and blue. All other text is in black. The 'asking the people' information booklet uses five colours.

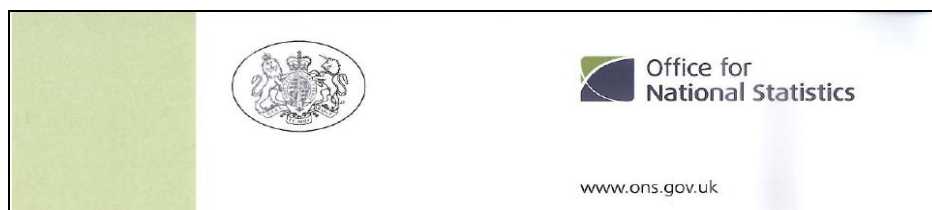
Due to scanning, printing and cost constraints only black and red ink are used for ASHE written respondent communication, as well as the questionnaires. The use of red has been reduced over the past few years and is now predominately used for reminder letters and drop-out areas on the questionnaires. With these ink colour restrictions the ONS logo is only printed in black and not the corporate ONS colours.

##### 3.2.3. Use of logos

On virtually all LFS written respondent communication the ONS logo is printed in the top right hand corner and the crown logo (encased in a black circle) to the left, adjacent to the vertical banner. The only exception to this is on the glossy 'asking the people' information booklet which does not have the crown logo and the ONS logo is in the top left hand corner.

#### Figure 4

Use of logos on LFS written respondent communication

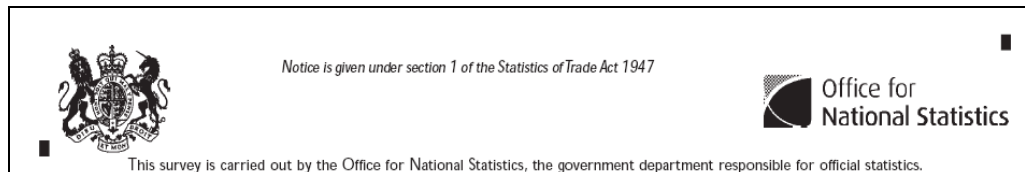


None of the envelopes used for the LFS have the crown logo printed on them. Some have the ONS logo printed in the top left hand corner (in black not the corporate green and blue colours) whilst others have no logo but have ‘On Her Majesty’s Service’ printed in bold and centred at the top of the envelope.

All ASHE written respondent communication has the ONS logo, printed in black, in the top right hand corner and the crown, in filled with black, in the top left hand corner.

### Figure 5

Use of logos on ASHE written respondent communication



Envelopes used for ASHE are all white and have the ONS logo, printed in black in the top left hand corner, ‘On Her Majesty’s Service’ printed in black, centred at the top of the envelope and a pre-paid second class postage rectangle (approximately 2 inches by 1 inch) printed in the top left hand corner. The crown logo, with ONS address, for use if undelivered, is centred on the back flap of the envelope. The crown is encased in a circle (like it is on the LFS material) and is not in filled with black (as it is on ASHE written respondent communication). The inside of all the envelopes used for ASHE has ONSONSONSONSONS (in blue ink) printed in continual diagonal lines.

#### 3.2.4. Layout

All LFS respondent letters conform to a standard letter format. With the exception of the refusal conversion letter (which states ‘Dear’ and interviewers write in the respondent name or resident), they have ‘Dear Resident(s)’ printed at the top of the letter. They all have paragraphs and ‘Yours faithfully’ printed at the bottom of the letter. The initial advance letter, sent out by ONS headquarters is signed by the National Statistician. All other letters are signed in person by individual interviewers.

In contrast ASHE respondent letters have two styles: (1) standard letter format, and (2) information sections. Letters for special arrangements, and chief executives (enforcement) follow the standard letter format. They all start with ‘Dear’ with newly selected respondent and special arrangement respondents being referred to as ‘Dear Respondent’ and chief executives being referred to as ‘Dear Sir/Madam. All other written ASHE respondent communication (eg. front page of questionnaires and reminders) are addressed to a named individual in the following format:

Mr A.N.Other  
Business Name  
Business Address  
Postcode

This pre-printed name and address is then used in the ‘window’ of the envelope for postage delivery.

Unlike the LFS letters which are all signed by someone, either the interviewer or in the case of the advance letter the National Statistician, only standard business survey format letters contain signatures, letters with information sections have no signatures but do contain a survey contact name and telephone number.

#### 3.2.5. Mode of emphasis

In LFS written respondent communication, bold is used sparingly to emphasis key points. It is nearly always used when the respondent is thanked. For example, the advance letter sent out by ONS headquarters ‘**Thank you for your help**’ and the ‘you may recall letter’ ‘**Many thanks for your help**’. However, it is not used when respondents are thanked in the ‘you may remember letter’.

Bold is also used to emphasis requested respondent action. For example, on slip at the bottom of the interviewer introduction letter and ‘you may recall letter’ ‘**I/we can be contacted on the following day(s). Please mark as appropriate:**’. Bold is also used on the section headings in the information leaflets. In the ‘asking the people’ information booklet the section headings are in bold and in a different colour.

In ASHE standard letter format communication the survey title is typed in bold and all capital letters, for example:

Dear Respondent

**2007 ANNUAL SURVEY OF HOURS AND EARNINGS**

Bold is also used in standard letter format communication for key dates.

For ASHE communication formatted in information sections bold is used for section headings, and to thank the respondent at the bottom of the page ‘**Thank you for your co-operation**’. In comparison to LFS written respondent communication, ASHE communication formatted in information sections, makes more use of bold as a mode of emphasis. For example, on the front page of the ASHE questionnaire it is used to highlight the bullet point ‘**You may wish to keep a copy of the completed questionnaire(s) to assist you with any possible queries;** and on reminders it is used to highlight the same bullet point plus the statement ‘**Our records show your questionnaire is now overdue. It should have been returned by...**’. With regard to the overall visual impression this may have the effect of reducing the impact of bold, to draw key points to the attention of the respondent.

Like LFS written respondent communication, ASHE communication does not use italics.

## 4. Thematic Content Analysis of LFS and ASHE Respondent Letters

### 4.1. Paragraphs, Sentences and Words per Sentence

As part of a content analysis of advance letters from Expenditure Surveys of seven countries Luppés (1995) looked at general characteristics such as the number of paragraphs, sentences and words per sentence. From this he found that the advance letter from the British Expenditure Survey had 6 paragraphs, 13 sentences and on average 27 words per sentence. A study by White and Freeth (1997) of the characteristics of seven advance letters from continuous ONS surveys found that the number of paragraphs ranged from 6 to 8, sentences ranged from 13 to 17, and words per sentence ranged from 19 to 23 across the seven surveys. The number of paragraphs, sentences and average words per sentence were looked at for some of the LFS letters, the findings, with findings from previous studies, are presented below in Figure 6. When compared with the findings from previous studies the LFS advance letter has a comparable number of paragraphs, slightly less sentences and a lower average number of words per sentence. However, the range of words per sentence for the LFS advance letter was from 4 to 33.

The number of paragraphs, sentences and average number of words per sentence was also looked at for some ASHE respondent communication (see Figure 6 below). The indication from the analysis is that for respondent communication written in a letter format there is a slightly higher average number of words per sentence than for communication written in a section format. The range of words per sentence for communication written in a letter format is 7 to 38 (chief executive letter) compared to a range of 1 to 18 for the Osmotherly sterling front page.

**Figure 6**

The number of paragraphs, sentences and words per sentence found in previous research (Luppés, and White & Freeth) and in examples of LFS and ASHE written respondent communication

	Paragraphs (n)	sentences (mean n)	Words per sentence (mean n)	Total word index (n)
Luppés study	6	13	27	351
White & Freeth study*	7	15	22	330
ASHE Special arrangements letter	6	15	18	270
ASHE Chief executive letter	6	14	19	266
ASHE Reminder 1 non-Osmotherly**	8	20	12	240
LFS advances letter	7	11	19	209
ASHE Osmotherly sterling front page**	9	16	12	192
LFS you may recall letter	4	7	15	105
LFS you may remember letter	3	7	14	98
LFS interview intro letter	3	4	16	64

\* mean of seven surveys

\*\* only contains information sections

## 4.2. Content analysis

Content analysis of advance letters by Luppés (1995) was categorised by a classification given by Emans (1990) which was felt to cover most of the previously identified classifications (Groves, 1989; Sobal, 1984; and Anderson, 1992). This approach has subsequently been used by other survey methodologists (for example, White and Freeth, 1997). Emans' classification identified three high level themes with three to five sub-themes in each, see figure 7. Although Emans' classification may be appropriate for classifying the contents of advance letters it needs to be extended when (1) classifying the contents of a complete suite of survey respondent communication (pre-survey, survey field period and post survey), and (2) undertaking research to improve respondent communication.

**Figure 7**

Emans (1990) classification of survey introductory information

Themes	
General	Specific
<b>Background information</b>	1. the objectives of the survey
	2. the responsible survey organisation
	3. the selection process through which the notified person was chosen
	4. the way the name and address of the notified person was obtained
	5. the reason for conducting the survey at this moment (and place)
<b>Benefits of the survey</b>	6. the publication of the results of the survey
	7. the influence of results on public debate and decision making
	8. the direct benefits for the respondent eg. money or small gifts
<b>Costs of the survey</b>	9. the kind of information requested from the respondent
	10. the burden of the interview eg. the duration of the interview
	11. the proposed use of and access to the information provided and the assurance of data anonymity or confidentiality
	12. the direct costs to the respondent eg. telephone costs or costs for stamps on reply cards or the amount of time needed to complete the questionnaire

Content analysis of the suite of LFS and ASHE written respondent communication was undertaken by analysing the text and identifying emerging themes rather than categorising according to previously identified themes. The analysis was undertaken at the sentence level. The content analysis identified three high level themes (information, requests and appreciation) with three levels of sub-themes. Figures 8 to 10 shows the complete list of LFS and ASHE themes identified at the sub-theme 1 level with examples of identified themes at the sub-theme 2 level.



**Figure 8**

Information theme, sub-themes

<b>Sub-theme 1</b>	<b>Sub-theme 2 example</b>
Reference:	to organisation to survey to advance letters to interviewers  to ONS website
Survey information	
Attempt to make contact or get response	
Interviewer or ONS contact	
Costs	
Survey results	
About ONS	

**Figure 9**

Requests theme, sub-themes

<b>Sub-theme 1</b>	<b>Sub-theme 2 example</b>
Written action	respondent information complete and return survey queries interested in joining us?
Telephone action	
Web action	
When responding	
Time	
Help	

**Figure 10**

Appreciation theme, sub-themes

<b>Sub-theme 1</b>	<b>Sub-theme 2 example</b>
Of participation	thank you for your help thank you for taking part thank you for your co-operation

The sub-theme 3 level is more detailed and often consists of actual extracts of text (which assisted the discourse analysis). Figure 11 below is an example of sub-themes in the high level 'information' theme, down to the sub-theme 3 level.

**Figure 11**

Information theme, sub-themes example

<b>Sub-themes 1</b>	<b>Sub-themes 2</b>	<b>Sub-themes 3</b>
Survey information	Methods	How address/business was selected Osmotherly guarantee Cannot replace you Survey topics Detailed data specifications Any voluntary questions Reference period Expressed interest in mode Frequency of surveys

The sub-themes provide useful information to assist with making improvements to respondent communication, for example identifying topics that should and are not covered and looking at differences between LFS and ASHE communication.

*4.2.1 Common LFS and ASHE themes*

The high level themes (information, requests and appreciation); and the sub-theme 1 level themes for ‘information’ and ‘appreciation’, were common to both the LFS and ASHE respondent communication. However, ‘request’ sub-themes were not always common to LFS and ASHE. This was due to data collection differences between the surveys. The ‘request’ sub-themes were associated with the actions required to co-operate and respond, so you would expect some differences between surveys that use different modes of data collection.

**5. Discourse Analysis of LFS and ASHE Respondent Letters**

**5.1 Discourse analysis**

The approach adopted for the discourse analysis focussed on an ethnography of communication, that is unlocking the knowledge, rules and linguistic codes used in written survey respondent communication. This approach acknowledges that there is a connection between language and ways of thinking (Schiffrin). Content analysis to the sub-theme 3 level assisted with identifying different discourses. Initial analysis suggests that there are several types of discourses within the suites of LFS and ASHE written respondent communication. For example, authority, persuasion and survey discourses. This section provides a brief overview of the linguistics used within the discourse of authority,

*5.1.1 The discourse of authority*

In both LFS and ASHE written respondent communication authority is conveyed by the linguistics describing ONS and its relationship to government; the type and use of ONS statistics; and the legitimation of the survey. Figure 12 shows the linguistics used in LFS and/or ASHE written respondent communication that relate to authority.

**Figure 12**

Linguistics used that relate to authority

ONS	ONS Statistics	ONS survey
UK's largest producer of statistics	European, National, local significance	Participation is important
Not linked to political parties	Official statistics	Official survey/study
Non-ministerial department	Produce high quality statistics	Non-political survey
Independent of ministers		Government survey
Government department		Support is valuable/vital
		Statistics of Trade Act
		Compulsory survey
		Statutory survey
		Required by law

Within the ‘ONS survey’ column the shaded area relates to LFS linguistics and the unshaded area ASHE linguistics.

It is evident from Figure 12 that there are differences between the linguistics used to indicate the voluntary or statutory nature of the survey. As there are no legislative grounds to undertake the LFS there is reference to ‘important’, ‘official’ and ‘government’ to legitimise the survey. In contrast ASHE is carried out under the Statistics of Trade Act and there is reference to the legislative requirement of the survey. For example ‘compulsory’ and ‘required by law’.

Identifying discourses and related linguistics enables consideration to be given to the language that a survey organisation wishes to use. In most survey organisations this is not an approach that has been commonly used. It also enables identification of similarities and differences across surveys and can be a useful tool for linguistic harmonisation which may assist with corporate identity. From the respondent perspective when discourses and associated linguistics have been identified research with respondents could be undertaken to look at the connection between linguistic and ways of thinking. For surveys this could be linked with respondent decision making in relation to social action (response or nonresponse).

## 6. Summary

This paper provides an overview of a useful analytical approach to the analysis of written survey respondent communication. The pre-survey, survey field period and post survey framework was a useful tool for analysing complete suites of written respondent communication from the perspective of communication objectives and modes; as well as making comparison with regard to visual design, content and discourses.

The analytical approach of visual design, content analysis and then discourse analysis enabled a thorough evaluation of written respondent communication. The high level themes (information, requests and appreciation) provided a thematic framework for emerging sub-themes. Further thematic analysis within these high level themes, identified up to three sub-theme levels, which assisted with the discourse analysis. The discourse analysis identified several types of discourses (for example: authority, persuasion and survey discourses) and identified the linguistic terms used in specific types of discourses.

In terms of application, the identified content themes and discourses could be considered in terms of their relevance to each type of written respondent communication. If a survey organisation identified and agreed up front the content themes and linguistics that they wished to include, then this may provide improvement to the development of written respondent communication.

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