



## Professional Business Vocabulary in the Television Series Succession: A Character-Based Lexical Analysis

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### Abstract

*This study explores how professional business language is used in the television series Succession and how it helps create realism, shape characters, and construct power relationships. Drawing on research in English for Specific Purposes, Business English, and media discourse, it examines how scripted dialogue mirrors real corporate communication while also advancing the story and developing character identities. The analysis is based on a 19,485-word corpus compiled from the first three episodes of Season One, from which 505 business-related lexical items were manually identified and categorised using an adapted semantic framework. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to track patterns across episodes and to examine how particular terms operate within interactions. The findings show that the focus of business language shifts as the narrative develops, moving from leadership and succession issues toward finance and operations. Characters also display distinct ways of speaking: Kendall uses the widest range of business terms, Gerri relies heavily on legal language, Roman adopts strategic vocabulary, Shiv favours HR-related discourse, and Logan speaks less but with clear authority. Overall, the study shows that business language in Succession actively builds power, identity, and hierarchy rather than simply reflecting corporate settings.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As scripted television increasingly strives to portray professional environments with linguistic authenticity, business-oriented dramas have become a fertile site for the study of specialized language use. One such example is *Succession*, an HBO television series centered on the power struggles within Waystar Royco, a global media conglomerate. The series is characterized by dense, fast-paced dialogue in which professional business vocabulary is embedded not only in formal decision-making but also in interpersonal conflict, persuasion, and identity construction. This study investigates the use of professional business vocabulary in *Succession*, focusing on how such language functions as both a marker of corporate realism and a narrative device. By examining business-related lexical choices in scripted dialogue, the study contributes to broader discussions on how fictional media shapes cultural perceptions of leadership, professionalism, and institutional power. Unlike naturally occurring corporate discourse, scripted television dialogue is deliberately crafted; nevertheless, it draws heavily on real-world professional registers to maintain credibility and audience engagement.

The analysis adopts a character-based lexical approach, examining the first three episodes of Season 1. This early segment of the series is particularly significant, as it establishes both the corporate hierarchy and the linguistic identities of the main characters. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant categories of professional business vocabulary in the selected episodes, and how frequently do they occur?

2. How frequently do individual characters use business-related vocabulary?
3. What similarities and differences can be observed in the lexical characteristics of business vocabulary used by key characters?

The analytical framework is grounded in semantic categorization, drawing on established business vocabulary models (Nelson, 2000, 2006; Horrod & Robbins, 2003). These frameworks were adapted to reflect the specific communicative environment of *Succession*, resulting in eight functional semantic categories: Leadership, Corporate Strategy, Marketing and Sales, Finance and Accounting, Legal and Compliance, Human Resources and Employment, Business Performance and Operations, and General Business Terms. Each lexical item was analyzed in its narrative context and attributed to the speaking character. Five central characters—Logan Roy, Kendall Roy, Roman Roy, Shiv Roy, and Gerri Kellman—were selected due to their prominent roles and consistent engagement in corporate discourse. By combining lexical analysis with character-focused interpretation, this study demonstrates how professional business vocabulary contributes to character construction and reinforces power dynamics within fictional corporate settings.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Telecinematic Discourse and Professional Realism

Telecinematic discourse refers to the language and interactional patterns of film and television dialogue, operating at the intersection of scripted narrative and spoken conversation (Piazza et al., 2011). It is widely described as a hybrid register: neither fully spontaneous nor purely written, but shaped by conventions of realism, narrative economy, and audience expectations (Bednarek, 2010, 2018). Research on contemporary television drama shows that dialogue often approximates natural spoken English through features such as contractions, discourse markers, hedging, overlaps, and informal turn-taking, thereby producing an effect of conversational authenticity (Quaglio, 2009; Forchini, 2013).

At the same time, telecinematic discourse is constrained by media-specific pressures. Scripted dialogue must condense meaning, advance plot, and establish character relationships within limited screen time, resulting in heightened lexical density and pragmatic efficiency (Quaglio, 2009; Bednarek, 2018). Bednarek (2018) characterises such dialogue as “artificial but naturalistic”: carefully designed to sound authentic while remaining rhetorically intensified, quotable, and narratively functional. Rather than viewing this as a deficit, recent scholarship treats telecinematic speech as a distinct and legitimate register worthy of linguistic analysis in its own right.

Professional realism has become particularly salient as television narratives increasingly centre on institutional and corporate environments. Studies of organisational discourse show that professional communication is genre-driven, hierarchical, and regulated by institutional norms, often realised through specialised lexis, euphemism, metaphor, and strategic ambiguity (Gunnarsson, 2009; Jaworska, 2020). When these discourse practices are recontextualised in fictional media, they contribute to perceptions of authenticity while remaining stylised for dramatic effect (Bednarek, 2018). Fictional representations thus selectively amplify recognisable features of workplace language, foregrounding those most salient to conflict, authority, and identity.

Research on *Succession* demonstrates how this process operates in practice. Studies highlight the series’ dense use of corporate jargon, financial metaphors, creative profanity, and linguistic aggression as resources for competition, humiliation, and status negotiation (Hirsch, 2020; Schmidt, 2024). Business-related vocabulary is tightly bound to character positioning: fluency and command index competence and authority, while hesitation or misuse signals vulnerability. Building on this work, the present study examines how business-specific lexis is

distributed across characters and interactional contexts, treating language not merely as background realism but as a central mechanism through which power and character are enacted.

### **2.1.1. The "Scripted vs. Natural" Debate**

A central debate concerns the extent to which scripted dialogue reflects natural speech. Corpus studies comparing fictional and real conversation suggest considerable linguistic overlap. Quaglio (2009), for instance, demonstrated through a comparison of *Friends* with the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English that sitcom discourse shares core grammatical and pragmatic features with everyday American conversation. Rather than viewing television dialogue as an inferior substitute for spontaneous talk, Quaglio (2009) argues that it should be understood as a distinct register shaped by media constraints. Due to limited screen time and the need for immediate viewer comprehension, scripted dialogue exhibits a high degree of lexical economy and informational density, condensing meanings that would typically unfold across longer conversational interactions. While *Friends* replicates the “flavour” of natural conversation through features such as personal pronouns and stance markers, it remains more lexically concentrated overall (Quaglio, 2009).

Supporting this perspective, Forchini (2012, 2013) found that film dialogue approximates everyday spoken English closely enough to be classified as a near-natural spoken variety. Such findings position telecinematic speech as a valuable resource for linguistic inquiry into discourse features otherwise observable only in spontaneous conversation. However, research also stress that fictional dialogue is “natural-sounding” rather than genuinely spontaneous. It is intentionally crafted to appear authentic while simultaneously meeting narrative, pacing, and entertainment demands (Bednarek, 2010, 2018). Bednarek (2018) characterizes scripted dialogue as “artificial but naturalistic,” highlighting its strategic intensification, humor, and quotability, which distinguish it from everyday speech.

Regarding *Succession* TV series, research indicates that despite its polished scripting, it relies heavily on structures of authentic conversation—turn-taking, negotiation sequences, interruptions, and evaluative stance—to dramatize shifts in authority within corporate and familial hierarchies (Hirsch, 2020; Schmidt, 2024). The scripted-natural tension is essential in analyzing how business vocabulary functions within character power dynamics.

This “scripted vs. natural” debate is particularly relevant for *Succession*, whose rapid-fire, profanity-laden business exchanges blend satirical exaggeration with recognisably authentic corporate discourse. Hirsch (2020) demonstrates that power in the series is not static but continually renegotiated in interaction, as characters strategically deploy linguistic resources—such as swearing, selective uptake, and argumentative positioning—to claim, resist, or reposition authority. Through conversation analysis, Hirsch (2020) shows how shifts in power often occur mid-interaction, influenced by speakers’ use of turn-taking advantages and the professional or personal implications embedded in their utterances. In this way, *Succession* illustrates how scripted dialogue can simulate the dynamics of real conversation, using crafted linguistic choices to stage power struggles that feel interactionally plausible. Hirsch’s (2020) findings thus reinforce the view that telecinematic discourse may be meticulously scripted yet still achieve a naturalistic effect by mirroring the negotiation of power observed in authentic communicative encounters.

### **2.2. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Business English in Media**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) provides a crucial theoretical framework for analysing the business vocabulary used in *Succession*. ESP is commonly defined as an approach to language study centred on the communicative needs and discourse practices of specific

professional or academic communities, rather than on general language competence (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Core principles of ESP include attention to domain-specific lexis, genre, and the social and institutional contexts in which communication takes place (Belcher, 2006; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Within this framework, Business English has emerged as one of the most extensively researched subdomains, reflecting the global prominence of English in corporate life.

Corpus-based research has been instrumental in establishing Business English as a distinct register rather than a contextual variant of general English. Nelson's (2000, 2006) Business English Corpus demonstrates that business lexis clusters around recurrent semantic domains such as corporate entities, financial processes, evaluation, and strategic action, with characteristic collocational patterns that differentiate it from everyday usage. Pedagogical resources, including Horrod and Robbins's (2003): *Collins COBUILD Business Vocabulary in Practice*, similarly organise business lexis into thematic and functional categories, reflecting the conceptual architecture of professional communication.

ESP scholarship has also emphasised the role of specialised language in constructing professional identities and projecting imagined futures in worlds of work (Belcher, 2006). Business English is closely associated with practices of leadership, negotiation, decision-making, and value projection (Nelson, 2006; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Traditionally, ESP research has privileged "authentic" workplace texts and interactions; however, media representations of professional settings constitute influential sites where specialised discourse is stylised, circulated, and globally disseminated.

From this perspective, fictional television dialogue does not merely illustrate Business English but invites theoretical reflection on ESP itself. Telecinematic Business English occupies a liminal space between authenticity and stylisation: it draws on recognisable professional lexis and genres while intensifying them for narrative and ideological effect. Analysing such data can therefore extend ESP theory by highlighting how specialised language functions beyond workplaces—as a cultural resource that shapes popular understandings of corporate power, competence, and legitimacy. Rather than challenging ESP's descriptive models outright, this approach broadens their scope, demonstrating how professional discourse circulates across media and participates in the social construction of expertise.

Within this framework, *Succession* can be understood as a linguistically informed representation of Anglophone corporate discourse. Its dialogue features a high concentration of business-related vocabulary linked to leadership, finance, strategy, and organisational behaviour, frequently interwoven with evaluative language and profanity. Drawing on semantic classifications proposed by Nelson (2000, 2006) and thematic groupings from Horrod and Robbins (2003), the present study conceptualises this lexis as "telecinematic Business English" and examines how it functions as both a professional register and a narrative tool for characterisation and power.

### 2.3. Language, Characterisation, and Power

Language in television drama functions as a central semiotic resource for constructing character identities and negotiating power relations. Research on televisual characterisation demonstrates that recurring linguistic patterns—such as lexical choices, stance markers, discourse markers, pragmatic strategies, and register—differentiate characters and signal social attributes including class, gender, age, and professional status (Bednarek, 2010, 2018, 2023; Reichelt, 2018). Character identities are built cumulatively across episodes through repeated linguistic behaviours, allowing viewers to associate particular speech styles with authority, insecurity, competence, or moral positioning (Bednarek, 2018, 2023).

This process aligns closely with findings from workplace and organisational discourse studies, which emphasise that professional identities and hierarchies are discursively

constructed rather than inherent. Corporate communication research shows that specialised vocabulary, metaphor, humour, and swearing are routinely used to claim expertise, assert authority, build solidarity, or resist control (Gunnarsson, 2009; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Jaworska, 2020; Mansoor et al., 2023). From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, language is a primary site where institutional power is enacted, normalised, and contested (Fairclough, 1989, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Television dialogue operates under what Lorenzo-Dus (2009) terms *double articulation*: interaction simultaneously functions within the fictional world and addresses viewers as interpreters. Characters are therefore not only conversational participants but semiotic constructs designed to guide audience alignment and evaluation. Linguistic personas draw on socially recognisable norms to establish credibility and familiarity (Bednarek, 2010), while audience engagement varies depending on interpretive position, ranging from surface recognition to deep empathetic involvement (Jucker & Locher, 2021). Access to characters' inner worlds—often mediated through evaluative lexis and interactional stance—plays a crucial role in shaping viewer allegiance (Bednarek, 2023).

Serial television is particularly well suited to this form of character construction. As Bednarek (2023) notes, characterisation relies on trait recurrence, relational negotiation, and the potential for transformation over time, allowing identities and power relations to stabilise while remaining dynamic. In *Succession*, business-related language becomes a key resource in this process: specialised lexis indexes professional competence and authority, while its strategic deployment within interaction reflects shifting alliances and contested hierarchies. Language thus functions not only as a marker of realism but as an active mechanism through which character and power are continuously produced and renegotiated.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study examines the use of business vocabulary in the television series *Succession* through a mixed-method text analytical approach. The methodology combines quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation to investigate how specialised business language is distributed across characters and how it functions within interactional contexts. This design enables the study to address both lexical patterns and communicative roles of business language in telecinematic discourse.

#### 3.1. Analytical Framework

The analysis is grounded in semantic categorisation of business vocabulary. Two key frameworks inform the classification process: Nelson's (2000, 2006) semantic groupings of Business English and Horrod and Robbins's (2003) thematic categories. Nelson's corpus-based model identifies major semantic domains including business people, business activities, actions, descriptions, and institutional entities, while Horrod and Robbins (2003) provide practical lexical fields such as finance, marketing, human resources, employment, and legal terminology. These frameworks together offer a comprehensive foundation for identifying, grouping, and interpreting business-related lexis. Given the hybrid nature of language in *Succession*—where formal business terminology intersects with colloquial and character-driven dialogue—minor adaptations were made to align existing categories with the communicative environment of the series. A preliminary data scan informed the development of eight refined functional categories used in this study: *Leadership*, *Corporate Strategy*, *Marketing & Sales*, *Finance & Accounting*, *Legal & Compliance*, *General Business Terms*, *HR & Employment*, and *Business Performance & Operations*. These categories consolidate overlapping domains (e.g., finance and accounting) and introduce distinctions relevant to corporate interaction in the narrative context. Table 3.1 presents the adapted categories

alongside their correspondence with source frameworks, including examples from the transcript.

*Table 3.1 Adapted semantic categories of business vocabulary in Succession and their correspondence with existing frameworks*

<i>Adapted Category</i>	<i>Mapped Source Categories</i>	<i>Example Terms from Succession</i>
<i>Leadership</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>People in business</i> ; Horrod and Robbins (2003): <i>Management</i>	<i>vote, board, chairman, step up, CEO, boss</i>
<i>Corporate Strategy</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>Business activities</i> ; Horrod and Robbins (2003): <i>Increasing Sales, Business performance</i>	<i>deal, bid, announcement, sweeten the offer, corporate strategy, lockdown</i>
<i>Marketing &amp; Sales</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>Business events</i> ; Horrod and Robbins (2003): <i>Sales, Marketing</i>	<i>brand name, press release, proposition, digital video content, shareholder, growth</i>
<i>Finance &amp; Accounting</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>Business activities</i> ; Horrod and Robbins (2003): <i>Finance</i>	<i>stock market, bottom line, volatility, costs, non-voting shares, average price</i>
<i>Legal &amp; Compliance</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>Business activities</i>	<i>non-disclosure agreement, talk to my lawyer, rights, signed, see you in court</i>
<i>General Business Terms</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>Business actions and descriptions</i>	<i>competition, conflict, to handle, to deal with, corporate, to throw in another million</i>
<i>HR &amp; Employment</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>People in business</i> ; Horrod and Robbins (2003): <i>Employees</i>	<i>role, duties, management training, intern, incentivized, bad fit</i>
<i>Business Performance &amp; Ops.</i>	Nelson (2000; 2006): <i>Business events</i> ; Horrod and Robbins (2003): <i>Business performance, Operations</i>	<i>to tank, to go through, deadline, office, email, handover</i>

*Note: Adapted categories used in this study, mapped to semantic fields from Nelson (2000; 2006) and Horrod and Robbins (2003), with illustrative examples from the series.*

### **3.2.Data collection**

The data for this study consists of transcripts from the first three episodes from Season One of *Succession*. Episode 1 contains 6,752 words, Episode 2 contains 6,628 words, and Episode 3 contains 6,105 words, resulting in a total corpus of 19,485 words. The analysis was conducted manually through a close reading of each transcript, with the aim of identifying and extracting instances of business-related vocabulary. Each identified term was then categorized according to the adapted semantic framework developed for this study, which builds on the classifications by Nelson (2000, 2006) and Horrod and Robbins (2003). The framework includes the following eight domains: Leadership, Corporate Strategy, Marketing & Sales, Finance & Accounting, Legal & Compliance, HR & Employment, Business Performance & Operations, and General Business Terms. These categories were designed to reflect both the structure of existing business vocabulary frameworks and the specific thematic and linguistic patterns observed in *Succession*. When the meaning or usage of a word or phrase was ambiguous, the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary was consulted to ensure accurate categorization (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Following the classification process, the frequency and distribution of business vocabulary were analyzed both across episodes and among key characters. This allowed for the identification of usage patterns, domain-specific tendencies, and character-specific language choices, providing the foundation for addressing the study's research questions.

### **3.3.Coding and categorization procedure**

The coding process involved systematically reviewing the transcripts of the three selected episodes to identify words and phrases related to business contexts. Each instance of business vocabulary was highlighted and tagged with one of the eight predefined semantic categories: *Leadership, Corporate Strategy, Marketing & Sales, Finance & Accounting, Legal & Compliance, HR & Employment, Business Performance & Operations, and General Business Terms*. Coding was done manually to ensure that each term was classified based on how it was used in the dialogue. When a word could reasonably fit into more than one category, its meaning was determined by considering the surrounding lines and the speaker's intent. This approach ensured accurate and consistent categorization throughout the dataset.

### **3.4.Procedure and Analysis**

After coding, analysis proceeded through two complementary analytical components:

#### **a) Quantitative Frequency Analysis**

- The frequency of business vocabulary was calculated per episode and character.
- Results respond to RQ1 (dominant vocabulary domains) and RQ2 (character-level frequency).

This stage provides a structural overview of the linguistic landscape of *Succession*, revealing shifts in thematic focus across episodes and identifying which characters drive corporate discourse.

#### **b) Qualitative Contextual Interpretation**

- Selected extracts were analysed to examine vocabulary in situ.
- Focus points included pragmatic function (authority, persuasion, resistance, evaluation), narrative context, and power moves.
- This component answers **RQ3** by comparing how characters differ lexically and strategically.

Here, business vocabulary is treated not simply as categorical data but as an interactional resource used to perform power, identity, and expertise.

### 3.5. Frequency analysis and character mapping

Following the categorization of business-related vocabulary, the frequency of each semantic domain was calculated across the three selected episodes. This quantitative analysis identified which business domains were most prominently represented in the series and laid the foundation for character-level comparisons. To support the study’s focus on individual language use, the distribution of business vocabulary was mapped by character. Five central figures—Kendall Roy, Roman Roy, Gerri Kellman, Logan Roy, and Shiv Roy—were selected for detailed analysis due to their senior roles within the company and frequent engagement in business-related dialogue. These characters are both linguistically and thematically significant, offering insight into how professional discourse is used in different narrative and corporate contexts. To visualize patterns, domain-specific vocabulary counts were compiled in frequency tables for each character, highlighting speaker-specific usage and stylistic variation. Because the total number of business terms varied between characters, normalized frequencies were also calculated. For each character, the proportion of terms from each business domain was expressed relative to their total categorized business vocabulary (excluding *General Business Terms* when not domain-specific).

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Dominant categories of business vocabulary (RQ1)

Across the three analysed episodes, 505 instances of business vocabulary were identified and manually categorised using the adapted semantic framework developed in Section 3. A small number of ambiguous terms were grouped under General Business Terms. Distribution patterns reveal a notable rise in business vocabulary frequency across episodes, increasing from 146 items in Episode 1, to 165 in Episode 2, and 194 in Episode 3, reflecting the narrative escalation of succession conflict, legal risk, and financial maneuvering.

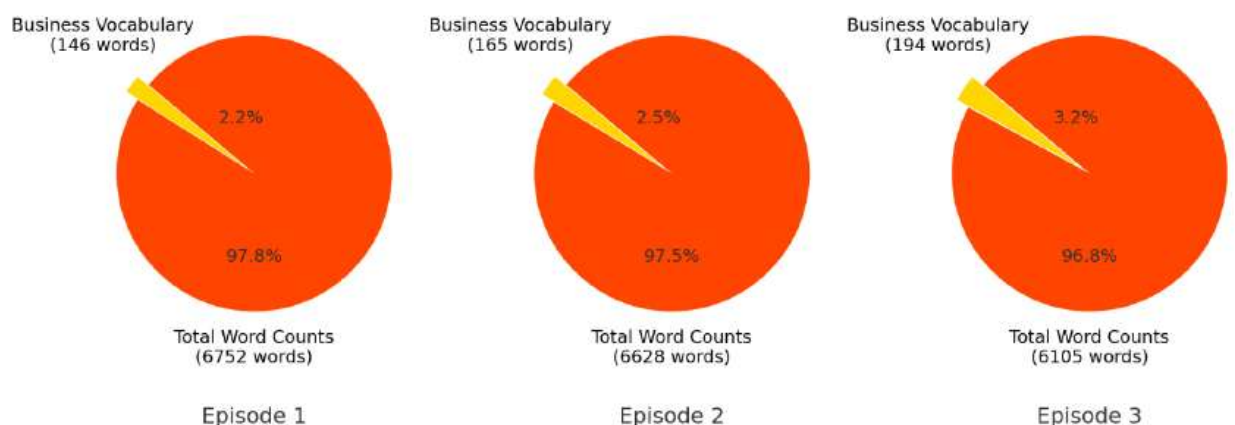
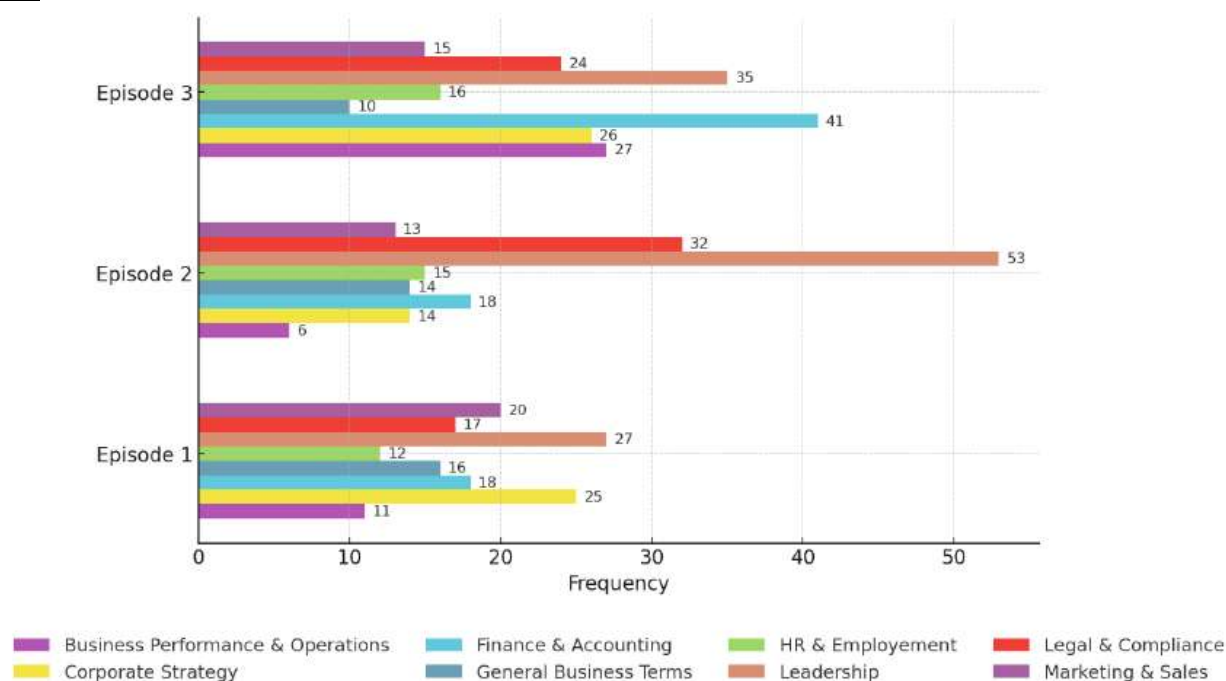


Figure 4.1. Frequency of business vocabulary by episode (N=505)

Domain-level analysis further demonstrates how lexical focus evolves as the storyline progresses (Figure 4.2). In Episode 1, Leadership terms dominate (27 items), supported by Corporate Strategy (25), Marketing & Sales (20), Finance & Accounting (18), and Legal & Compliance (17). This pattern aligns with the episode’s central themes of executive uncertainty, leadership transition, and early strategic framing.



**Figure 4.2.** Distribution of business vocabulary by semantic domain and episode (N=505)

In Episode 2, Leadership rises sharply to 53 items, reflecting intensified competition for control, including terms such as acting COO, board member, and approval. Legal & Compliance increases to 32 items, marking legal tension as a driving narrative force, while Corporate Strategy decreases slightly to 14, suggesting momentary strategic recalibration.

In Episode 3, vocabulary shifts toward financial discourse, with Finance & Accounting emerging as the most prominent domain (41 items), indicating growing focus on liquidity, takeover financing, and shareholder leverage. Leadership (35) and Corporate Strategy (26) remain central, while Business Performance & Operations (27) and Marketing & Sales (15) reflect operational volatility and external positioning.

Business vocabulary becomes both more frequent and more domain-focused across episodes. Early dialogue foregrounds succession and leadership legitimacy, Episode 2 intensifies governance and legal maneuvering, and Episode 3 centres financial strategy and operational risk. Lexical trends mirror narrative escalation, suggesting that business vocabulary is used strategically to narrativise corporate tension.

#### **4.2. Use of business vocabulary by characters (RQ2)**

Character-level frequency analysis shows clear hierarchical patterns of business vocabulary use (Figure 4.3). Kendall Roy dominates quantitatively with 210 instances (~41% of all terms), followed by Gerri (83), Roman (79), Logan (50) and Shiv (23). The remaining 63 items are distributed across secondary characters, indicating their functional but peripheral linguistic contribution.

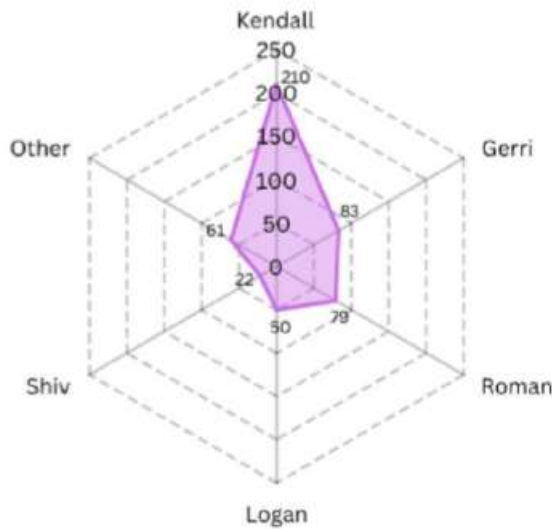


Figure 4.3. Frequency of business vocabulary by character, N=505

Kendall’s extensive vocabulary spans leadership, finance, and strategy, reflecting his central executive role. His increased use in Episode 3 (96 terms) corresponds to his growing operational authority. Examples such as “sweeten the offer”, “investment” and “game plan” highlight his orientation toward deal-making and valuation. Gerri’s usage peaks in Episode 2 (56 items), aligning with heightened governance and legal activity. Her vocabulary is legal-strategic in nature (e.g., “board approval”, “due diligence”), reinforcing her function as General Counsel. Roman’s vocabulary steadily increases across episodes (13 → 27 → 39), indicating his rising engagement in corporate decision-making. His technical terms (COO, acquisitions, refinance) coexist with informal tone, signalling an emergent but unstable professional identity. Logan’s declining use (38 → 9 → 3) reflects deteriorating capability and narrative shift. While infrequent, his lexis (CEO, chairman, trust) is authoritative and role-anchored, privileging directive power. Shiv uses the fewest terms overall, consistent with her outsider-insider position early in the series. Her vocabulary centres on legal and advisory contexts (e.g., “lawyer”, “to strategize”), signalling interpretive distance from executive operations.

### 4.3. Cross-Character Lexical Patterns (RQ3)

This section examines how the five key characters in *Succession*—Kendall Roy, Roman Roy, Gerri Kellman, Logan Roy, and Shiv Roy—differ in their use of professional business vocabulary across domains. Rather than focusing solely on raw frequency, the analysis below highlights the proportional distribution of vocabulary by domain for each character. This approach enables a clearer comparison of linguistic preferences, communicative roles, and discursive identities. Table 4.1 summarizes the relative use (as a proportion of each character’s total categorized vocabulary) across six core business domains.

Table 4.1 Normalized distribution of business vocabulary by domain and character

Character	Kendall	Gerri	Roman	Logan	Shiv
Business domain					

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<i>Business Performance</i>	&	0.1	0.02	0.13	0.04	0.05
<i>Operations Corporate Strategy</i>		0.14	0.12	0.09	0.14	0.09
<i>Finance Accounting</i>	&	0.18	0.08	0.15	0.08	0.09
<i>HR Employment</i>	&	0.05	0.16	0.08	0.1	0.18
<i>Leadership</i>		0.21	0.29	0.25	0.24	0.14
<i>Legal Compliance</i>	&	0.15	0.14	0.11	0.16	0.36
<i>Marketing Sales</i>	&	0.12	0.1	0.08	0.12	0
<i>General Business Terms</i>		0.06	0.08	0.11	0.12	0.09

*Note: Values represent proportions of categorized vocabulary per character. 0.21 = 21%.*

Table 4.1 presents a normalized distribution of professional business vocabulary employed by five main characters—*Kendall Roy*, *Gerri Kellman*, *Roman Roy*, *Logan Roy*, and *Shiv Roy*—across seven semantic business domains. These figures reflect each character’s proportional use of categorized business language based on their total usage of business-relevant terms, rather than raw frequency. This normalization enables a clearer cross-character comparison of discursive behavior and domain-specific emphasis in early episodes of *Succession* (Episodes 1–3).

*Kendall Roy*, as evident from the data, demonstrates a pronounced engagement with *Leadership* (21%), *Finance & Accounting* (18%), and *Corporate Strategy* (14%). This pattern reflects his active role in corporate decision-making and strategic planning within the firm. For instance, in Episode 1, he asserts, ‘Boom. Acquisition.’, highlighting his strategic assertiveness through acquisition-focused language. Similarly, *Kendall’s* reference to ‘a portfolio of online brands and digital video content’ aligns with financial jargon related to upstream investment strategy, reinforcing his association with the *Finance & Accounting* domain.

*Gerri Kellman*, the company’s legal counsel, exhibits the highest relative use of *Leadership*-related vocabulary (29%), indicating her centrality in organizational transitions and executive deliberations. Her statement, ‘You’ll become acting CEO, Frank stays on as COO.’, exemplifies her function as a mediator of executive decisions and board-level negotiations. Gerri also uses a high proportion of vocabulary from the *HR & Employment* domain (16%), as reflected in her comment, ‘To come back, I’d want the top job.’.

*Roman Roy* displays a more even distribution across multiple domains, with *Leadership* (25%) and *Corporate Strategy* (9%) as his dominant categories. Although less disciplined in communication, *Roman* frequently engages with strategic and operational discourse, such as in ‘Dad made me COO. I don’t think so, dude.’, revealing his entanglement with corporate hierarchy and executive role transitions. His frequent references to COO, board, and boss also reinforce this trend.

*Logan Roy*, as the founder and CEO, predictably shows a strong association with *Leadership* vocabulary (24%). Statements such as ‘As chairman, CEO, head of the firm.’ affirm his central role in the governance of the organization. Additionally, *Logan’s* proportionally

high use of *Corporate Strategy* terms (14%) includes lines like ‘So you've ripped up months of corporate strategy?’, underscoring his influence over long-term vision and structural control.

*Shiv Roy*, with comparatively less business-oriented dialogue overall, exhibits a sharp emphasis on the *Legal & Compliance* domain (36%), suggesting her emergent but critical role in contractual and governance matters. This is supported by utterances such as ‘I'm gonna have to talk to my lawyers.’, indicating her focus on legal ramifications rather than day-to-day operational vocabulary. Her second-most represented category, *HR & Employment* (18%), includes lines like ‘*Gerri* just turned down the top job.’, linking her discourse to leadership appointments and executive *HR* decisions.

The *Business Performance & Operations* domain—often marked by references to logistics, deliverables, or operational metrics—is particularly prominent for *Roman* (13%) and *Kendall* (10%). *Kendall*'s recurrent use of operational terms, including ‘All our graphs go down.’ and ‘to go through’, situates him in detailed, day-to-day business scenarios.

In contrast, the *Marketing & Sales* domain receives moderate attention across the board, with *Kendall* (12%) and *Logan* (12%) leading. *Kendall*'s comment, ‘Bit of content and a brand name?’, exemplifies his focus on brand valuation and content-driven growth. *Gerri*'s lower share of *Marketing & Sales* vocabulary (10%) suggests a more strategy-oriented and less product-driven communicative stance.

Lastly, the *General Business Terms* domain serves as a catch-all for commonly used phrases that span across roles and topics. *Logan* and *Roman* both exhibit modest yet consistent use of such terms (10% and 11%, respectively), including phrases like ‘Do you think Tom can handle the competition?’ and ‘I'll keep you posted.’

Overall, Table 4.1 illustrates the distinctive discursive profiles of each character, underscoring their roles and priorities within the narrative structure. The strategic and financial language of *Kendall* contrasts with *Gerri*'s legal-formal lexicon, while *Shiv*'s legal focus and *Logan*'s executive dominance offer insight into their respective institutional positions.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Succession* employs business vocabulary in a systematic and narratively motivated way, confirming that telecinematic dialogue can operate as a form of semi-naturalistic professional discourse. This aligns with previous research arguing that scripted series simulate real communicative settings while selectively intensifying linguistic features for dramatic effect (Bednarek, 2010, 2018; Forchini, 2012; Quaglio, 2009). In line with the “scripted vs. natural” debate, the progressive increase in business terminology across episodes (RQ1) reflects not randomness but deliberate linguistic staging: as organisational tension escalates, the lexicon becomes denser and more domain-specific. Rather than imitating natural business communication passively, *Succession* constructs a heightened corporate reality that remains recognisable to viewers but rhetorically intensified for narrative impact—echoing Bednarek's (2018) classification of TV dialogue as “artificial but naturalistic.”

From an ESP perspective, the dominance of vocabulary related to leadership, corporate strategy, legal processes and finance demonstrates that the series draws from genuine domains of Business English. The results strongly support the applicability of ESP categorisation models (Nelson, 2000; Horrod and Robbins, 2003) to media dialogue, showing that business lexis is not scattered, but structurally patterned according to semantic domains. The lexical progression observed across episodes—from leadership and succession concerns in Episode 1, toward legal contestation in Episode 2, and financial manoeuvring in Episode 3—suggests that professional vocabulary in *Succession* performs not only referential work but also narrative scaffolding. In other words, business language functions as a device that structures corporate conflict, marks shifts in organisational focus, and directs the viewer's perception of unfolding power struggles.

In relation to character discourse patterns (RQ2), a clear hierarchy emerges, with Kendall functioning as the linguistic nucleus of corporate communication. His dominance in business vocabulary corroborates his narrative positioning as the most active corporate actor, reflecting how language indexes authority, competence, and ambition. Gerri's legal-governance profile confirms the role of specialised lexis as institutional legitimacy, while Roman's gradual increase in vocabulary supports his storyline as an unpredictable but increasingly influential executive. Logan's sparse but authoritative language reflects a leadership style grounded in power through brevity, consistent with Hirsch's (2020) observation that power in *Succession* is enacted through conversational dominance rather than verbosity. Shiv's selective legal-strategic usage illustrates her liminal role as insider-advisor, reinforcing how language can locate characters socially even without formal corporate authority. These patterns reinforce the claims of workplace discourse research that language is a resource for claiming, negotiating, and resisting power (Fairclough, 2013; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015), as characters' vocabulary choices reflect their agency, access, and status.

Cross-character lexical comparison (RQ3) further demonstrates that business vocabulary in *Succession* functions as a tool of characterisation. Each character displays a distinct lexical fingerprint—Kendall strategic-financial, Gerri legal-procedural, Roman opportunistically executive, Logan command-centric, Shiv advisory-legal—which directly aligns with findings in telecinematic character studies that linguistic patterns shape audience perception of identity (Bednarek, 2023; Reichelt, 2018). Lorenzo-Dus' (2009) concept of double articulation is reflected here: characters speak to one another within the narrative, but simultaneously communicate identity cues to viewers through vocabulary, tone, and domain choice. Business language thus becomes a semiotic channel through which the audience recognises ambition, insecurity, allegiance and conflict. The lexical evidence shows that authority in *Succession* is not merely written into plot—it is performed linguistically.

Taken together, the findings reveal that *Succession* uses business vocabulary not only to simulate corporate realism, but to stage power, identity and succession anxiety linguistically. Vocabulary distribution maps directly onto narrative arcs, organisational stakes, and character hierarchies. In doing so, the series exemplifies a form of televisual ESP discourse, where professional lexis is both functionally meaningful and dramaturgically symbolic. Business English in *Succession* is therefore not background detail—it is the medium through which power is communicated, contested and understood.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the function of business vocabulary within a fictional corporate environment through an analysis of the first three episodes of *Succession*. Positioned at the intersection of telecinematic discourse, Business English, and character construction, the findings show that scripted television dialogue can simulate professional interaction by drawing on patterned and context-sensitive business lexis. Business vocabulary emerges as a central linguistic resource through which realism, character identity, and power relations are constructed and negotiated.

The analysis identified 505 business-related lexical items, organised into semantic domains. These domains were distributed unevenly across episodes, reflecting shifts in narrative focus and institutional pressure. Leadership-related vocabulary dominated the first two episodes, corresponding to struggles over authority and succession, while the third episode showed increased use of financial and operational terminology as shareholder conflict intensified. This progression demonstrates that business vocabulary functions dynamically, aligning with narrative development rather than remaining static or decorative.

At the character level, patterns of business vocabulary use contributed to the construction of hierarchical positioning and professional identity. Kendall's extensive and varied use of business lexis positioned him as the primary linguistic actor within corporate discourse. Gerri's

legal and governance-oriented vocabulary reinforced her role as an institutional stabiliser, while Roman's increasing use of strategic terminology indexed growing corporate involvement. Shiv's advisory lexis reflected her insider–outsider status, and Logan's minimal but decisive use of business language exemplified authority enacted through linguistic economy.

Beyond individual characters, the prevalence of jargon, collocations, and strategy-oriented buzzwords contributed to a stylised corporate voice that indexed professional authenticity while also dramatizing ambition, hierarchy, and uncertainty. Furthermore, the findings confirm that business vocabulary in *Succession* functions not merely as referential content but as a structural narrative device, organising institutional domains, guiding audience interpretation, and signalling shifting power relations.

Future research could extend this analysis by examining later seasons to capture longitudinal changes in business vocabulary use alongside character development and organisational transformation. Comparative analyses with other corporate dramas could further distinguish genre-wide features of telecinematic Business English from those specific to *Succession*. Additionally, audience-focused research could explore how viewers interpret business vocabulary and how it shapes perceptions of realism, expertise, and corporate culture.

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