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NEEDS ANALYSIS
Lecture notes and summary.
Last updated 7 December 2009

Definitions

1. **Target Situation Analysis.** A study of the situations in which the language is used. This provides a guide as to what language to teach.

2. **Present situation analysis.** What are the students like at the beginning of the course? What is their learning background? For those in institutions this may be known, and very similar. For other classes the background may vary widely.

3. **Lacks analysis (deficiency analysis).** This means what it says. Students are evaluated to see what language they lack. Commonly, a diagnostic test is used in the analysis.

4. **Learning needs analysis (strategy analysis)** in terms of language, learning skills such as autonomy etc

5. **Constraints analysis (means analysis).** The limitations in the actual teaching context are identified.

6. **Pedagogic needs analysis.** A term which groups together ie Lacks analysis, Learning needs analysis, and Constraints analysis (3, 4, and 5 above)

7. **Wants analysis (subjective needs analysis).** The teacher finds out what the learners think they want to learn.

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A. Introduction

1. **EGP,** English for General Purposes, traditionally does not specify needs. There is always an identifiable need of sorts.

   ESP is distinguished by its high <u>awareness</u> of needs. On the surface, ESP is distinguished by content (science etc), but this is a secondary consequence of the felt needs. The opposite is TENOR, Teaching English for No Obvious (immediate) Reason.

2. There are many different types of 'Needs Analysis'. For simplicity, the main types have been defined above. They do seem to overlap somewhat and sometimes the needs may be contradictory. It is part of the skill of the teacher to balance the various needs. In the final analysis it may well be the employer who is the most important influence. There is an old English proverb: "He who pays the piper calls the tune" from the story of the pied piper of Hamelin who attracted away the rats from the town by playing his pipe, then when the town refused to pay him, played his pipe again and the children followed him.

B. Before you start

1. **Questions**. The starting point. Your initial opinions become the starting point for the questions you ask.
   a. **Why** is the analysis being done? Is it:
      1) to determine the syllabus and content?
      2) to decide on materials selection?
      3) in order to look good and please others?
   b. **Whose** needs are to be analysed?
      1) the student's
      2) the sponsor's, eg the institution, the country, the employer
      3) the specialist department? If you ever get the subject teachers asking you to teach English, and showing you what they want, this is extremely useful.
   c. **Who** is to collect and analyse the data?
   d. **Who** decides what the language needs are? (sponsor, employer, teacher, student, researcher/consultant). Beware unstated expectations and different perspectives. Therefore make expectations explicit and negotiate them when you can.
   e. **What** is to be analysed?
      1) the target situation
      2) deficiencies
      3) strategies
      4) means
      5) constraints
      6) necessities
      7) lacks
      8) wants
   f. **When** is the analysis to be done? (before, at the beginning, or the middle, or the end of course)
   g. **How much time do you have?** This can range from a few hours, to a year of work full time, as for instance in the ideas of Munby - see below.

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2. **Steps** (Expanded from Jordan 1997:23)
   What this series of steps essentially does is shows that there should be continuous analysis
   and revision of materials in the light of experience.
   a. Decide the purpose of the analysis. Who is to ask? What is to be asked?
   b. Delimit (specify) the student population
   c. Decide on the approaches
   d. Determine, and decide to work within, the constraints/limitations
   e. Select methods of collecting data
   f. Collect data
   g. Analyse and interpret results
   h. Decide on your syllabus objectives
   i. Results analysis leads to syllabus objectives and principles, and then a syllabus,
      content, materials, methods, etc. This is where a great amount of creativity and hard
      work is needed, to go out and collect lesson material and turn it into lessons. It can
      happen that material is developed, then rejected and other material sought.

NB j. **Evaluate**
   1) the needs analysis procedure itself ie be self critical of the methods used
   2) the results of the course.
   k. Repeat one or more of the previous steps:
   1) there might be new purposes to analyse
   2) new tools for needs analysis might be needed
   3) syllabus objectives might need changing
   4) probably, syllabus content, materials, methods, etc, will need revising.

C. John Munby's "Communicative Syllabus Design" CUP. 1978.

1. Munby in 1978 really set the ball rolling with this influential book. It is a highly detailed
   set of procedures for determining target situation needs. The procedures, he called, the
   'Communication Needs Processor' (CNP). At last, ESP had the machinery for identifying
   needs. His book has useful data banks of eg micro- skills, and attitudes. Using his
   guidelines, the end product is a detailed profile of the students' language needs.

2. Modern needs analysis includes areas specifically excluded by Munby, eg practicalities
   and constraints, teaching methods, learning strategies, and recently, materials selection.
   This is a major limitation of Munby.

3. Munby's model is performance related, and neglects underlying competence.

4. In my view, it has largely been superceded by the development of the Common European
   Framework of Reference.
   www.scientificlanguage.com/linguistics/commoneuropeanframework.pdf

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D. Critique of Munby (West 1994:9-10)

1. Complexity
Long and complicated, therefore unlikely to be used more than once. All subsequent systems have striven for simplicity.

2. Learner centredness
Munby's tool collects data about the learner, but not FROM the learner.

3. Constraints
Munby studied these afterwards, when what is desirable is balanced against what is feasible. Many would argue that these constraints should be considered at the beginning!

4. Language
Munby provided detailed procedures for describing the learner, but gave no guidance on how to take the next step - of developing a syllabus.

E. Target Situation Analysis To establish what the language is used for.

What are the Target Needs? (What the learner needs to do in the target situation for instance the workplace)

1. **Necessities.** (target-situation analysis).
   What the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. eg, a businessman may need to know about letters, know how to speak at sales conferences, be able to read catalogues, etc. Study the situations, identify parts, and relate to language. "Survival English" would be one example.

   But, most courses are 'interim'. **Therefore intermediate goals need to be set**. The needs analysis procedure becomes an exercise in specification of goals/aims.

2. **Gathering information about target needs**
   a. **Various techniques:**
      Questionnaires
      Interviews, with students, and administrators
      Observation
      Data collection eg gathering texts => target profile of language skills.
      ONGOING, eg regular class discussions.

   b. **questions to ask**
      Why is the language needed? (Hutchinson & Waters 1987:59) How will it be used?
      What content, (subject, level)
      Who will the learner use the language with?
      Where will the language be used?
      When will the language be used?
      => compromise.

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F. Lacks. (Deficiency Analysis)

1. What does the learner know already? Need to carefully define this, through both consideration of courses they have taken, to actual contact with students. The analysis is complicated when there are a wide range of abilities in one class. Diagnostic tests are available, and these can be used to determine group and individual lacks.

2. What are the targets? => gap.

3. **establish priorities.** (another subject)

G. Wants. (Subjective Needs Analysis)

1. By whom? Employer? Student? Teacher opinion?
    a. Learner perceived needs are a VERY important factor in motivation. They must not be ignored. Hutchinson & Waters 1987:56-7 has three examples. Usually these needs are very personal, therefore they are sometimes called 'subjective'. In fact, these wants are very real, and may conflict with the necessities as perceived by the employer. Therefore ways must be found to accommodate them. Obviously the wants of individuals cannot all be accounted for. But, as a minimum, the wants of the majority can be discussed and partly met. Expectations need negotiation.
    b. Sometimes there is a 'deferred needs' problem.
    c. The student wants are usually discovered by a short, anonymous questionnaire
    d. How realistic are the wants?

2. **The importance of discussing the student 'wants' with the students**
    Where the student is in an institution, the wants of the students may be viewed as irrelevant. Where the students are paying for the English teaching, they may be paramount. Either way, if there is a clash of expectation between the teacher and the class, then the efficiency of learning will be reduced. Students who do not have their expectations met will often feel frustrated, and may well resist the teaching - both the content, and the learning methods.

    In some cultures, a teacher explaining themselves is felt as humiliating by the teachers and seen as humiliating by the students. In these cultures the teacher is viewed as the authority figure who knows everything, and showing that they do not know is a humiliating sign of weakness.

    A possible answer to this dilemma is for the teacher to consciously change their self-perception towards that of a language coordinator. In any situation requiring a coordinator, the person does not have to be an expert in everything, but they do have to be good at linking the different parts together. In the classroom it is the responsibility and place of the teacher to set the limits, to lay down the guidelines and to lead the students to learn.

    I believe that teachers need to make a decision that the learning of the students is more important than teacher identity or face. Teachers themselves must define their professionalism in such a way that they are willing to explain and justify what they are

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doing, if in doing so this helps students to learn. It is part of the role of the teacher, and is in the power of the teacher to choose how to justify themselves. The teacher is perfectly free to choose culturally appropriate ways, and to choose ways which minimise any sense of humiliation. The teacher is NOT free to avoid this question. If it is not addressed, then the resistance will build up, and may well explode into public aggressive questions which can be even more humiliating. Even if the resistance never comes to the surface, it will still be there.

For instance, in some cultures, there is a felt need for grammar. Therefore students expect a lot of formal explanation and practice of grammar. Yet, as students get more advanced, the need for formal grammar training decreases. I looked recently at a level B2 book for learners of French, and there is hardly any formal grammar in it. But if the students are expecting a lot of grammar and you provide very little, then there is a clash of expectations.

3. **The importance of asking ALL the students in the class**
   It is all too easy to rely on the expressed opinion of a vocal few. A few short questions in a questionnaire, answered anonymously in first language will mean that everyone gets a chance to express their opinion. When thee results are counted it sometimes happens that the class is divided. Some like 'group work' and others do not. Possibly, the students expressing strong preference were not aware that others had equally strong opposite preferences! Therefore, the teacher in this case can present the results to the class, and then explain the plans of the teacher - which usually means using a range of activities, some of which will be disliked by some of the class.

4. **Evidence from 'the good language learner' research and learner styles**
   We know as linguists that one profitable line of research has been to identify what makes a good language learner. Frankly, there has been a lot of waffle written on this subject. I was heartened to read the authoritative reviews by Coffield et al 2004, Stahl 1999, and Peacock & Ho 2003 which firmly assesses learner styles as a very minor element in learning. On the other hand, what is clear is that motivation to learn is extremely important. Students will, largely, achieve the level they want to achieve. If they do not have the level they want, that is evidence that they do not really want this level badly enough to do something about their ability, and to make the sacrifices needed to make the progress they want. Motivation is far more important than preferred learner style. Teachers are largely free therefore from the pressure to discover the preferred learning styles of students and teach accordingly.

The other conclusion is that the good learner is able to use a wide variety of learning skills or styles whereas a weak learner is restricted to only a few. The best learners have a wide variety of skills and are adept in choosing the most efficient skill and in changing skill as needed. The clearest example of this comes from the research into what makes a good reader. Poor readers tend to rely on 'bottom up' strategies - constantly focusing on the meaning of individual words. The skilled reader alternates between top-down global reading strategies and bottom-up word identification strategies.

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5. A common student perception: they need to understand every word in a text

Since one of the tasks of the ESP teacher is to expand the skills repertoire of students, and they may well meet resistance when they do because the students have different ideas, then the teacher may well have to directly address the resistance. One particular area I have noticed in my work is the resistance students have to a) reading quickly and b) reading without necessarily understanding every word. It is part of general knowledge in the academic world, that unless you can read quicker than 200 words per minute, your comprehension skills will be reduced. But most of my students are unconvinced, and persist in reading slowly, seeking en route to understand each word and each sentence. Therefore, students may need convincing that reading faster is possible, and that reading without complete understanding is possible and desirable. To achieve this they may need to do a reading course designed to increase their reading speed.

I have also argued in the section on Adult First Language acquisition on this site that even subject specialists when they read in their speciality do not necessarily expect to understand every word. Skilled native speakers first ignore the words, then guess them - then seek out information in the text which might give the explanation, for instance in a footnote, and finally, only if necessary, only if the word is central to the understanding of the text and probably repeats often enough to be important, do they make the effort to look up the meaning of the word. Subject specialists can tolerate not knowing the meaning, or not knowing the precise meaning of a word, because the content clues in the text carry them and because they are selective in their desire for comprehension.

Often, it is not necessary to know every word in a text. Even someone with a low language ability can often pick out the main points in a text, and write a reasonable summary. Often specialists read only to identify the information that interests them. Therefore, an authentic skill we need to train our students in, is to read difficult texts and summarise them. In the course objectives we should explicitly state the expectation that we do NOT expect our students to understand every word. We will need to explain this to our students and justify why we have this expectation.

This change of expectation may well be frightening, and may well not be understood by people stuck in the old '*explication de texte*' mode. When writing a course, you may want to state this 'non-expectation' explicitly in your aims, and in the introduction to the students, so that there is less misunderstanding. But actually, this 'non-expectation' is liberating. It will free you to use longer texts, more difficult texts, and all this will be far more authentic both in content, genre, and task. The teacher will be free to take a specialised topic presented in a formal specialised way at a level of difficulty appropriate to the students in their strong language, and to use authentic tasks such as speed reading for just a few pieces of desired information.

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H. Learning Needs Analysis / Strategy Analysis

1. In the 1980's, the focus of needs analysis turned more towards the methodology employed to implement the language programs, which involved, not just the teaching methods, but also the methods of learning.

2. Why are the learners taking the course?
eg for enjoyment, fulfillment, sense of achievement. <u>Hutchinson & Waters 198762-3</u>

3. **Learner styles and expectations** may be different to preferred teaching methods. The typical clash is between 'rote learning' and participation. Rote learning is regarded by most teachers as inefficient. Previous school learning experience influences both proficiency and learning style.

4. Learning skills, such as reading skills, or the skills to pick up vocabulary, are, sadly, sometimes weak even in L1, therefore the language teacher has to develop them. Even when the skills are strong, they need practice in a second language.

5. Discussion point
***How can style clashes be resolved?
***What can teachers do to improve the learning strategies of students?
***Who should find it easier to understand the other, when there is a clash? Should the student be obliged to follow the teacher, or vice-versa?

Example 1: tense and case names in English
There are at least two systems for naming the tenses in English. When I started teaching English I found that my students had all learned a different system to the one I knew. So who had the responsibility to change? Clearly it was my responsibility as the teacher to conform to the usage in the current textbooks - the usage known to the students.

Similarly, I learned Latin at school, hence learned the terminology for declining nouns: nominative, accusative and genitive, for Subject, Object, and Indirect Object. My students know the latter, I know the former. Which system should I as the teacher use?

Example 2: form numbers in Arabic
The dictionaries in Arabic for foreigners, such as that by Hans Wehr, use a system of form numbers, from one to ten, to classify the different types of verb in Arabic. It so happens that a similar system exists in Arabic, but no number is provided, so that each time someone wants to refer to the model, they have to give the root pattern. The number system is incredibly useful and easy to use. In fact, through reading the introduction to the Hans Wehr dictionary I taught its basics to myself in the first three months of learning Arabic, and I could not have survived without it. The numbers serve as an incredibly useful shorthand.

Arabs manage quite happily without form numbers. But dictionaries and other, mainly

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western textbooks on Arabic, use the numbers extensively. Therefore, I ask, when Arabs are teaching foreigners, who has to change? Who has to do the adapting? I submit that it should be the Arab teachers. This usually faces a lot of resistance from my Arab students. Arabic has been taught and explained for centuries using ways they know well: surely the foreigner must adapt to the Arabs? Well, in this case, I think not. It is very easy for an Arab to adapt to the Oriental classification and numbering, for the only thing that changes is small changes in the order, and the addition of numbers instead of pattern roots.

8. **Clashes of preferred learning styles and clashes of expectations**
   These require negotiation. The teacher may need to change, and so too may the students.

9. **Training of learner autonomy becomes important.** Especially in ESP.
   In the time available your lessons will be but the tip of the iceberg. Very little from a lesson will be remembered. Therefore, perhaps the goal of ESP courses should be <skills rather than content>. Compare the situation of vocabulary. The first 2000 word families and the academic list need teaching. Beyond this, the need for vocabulary is very individualistic, so that one person' s common word is another person's rare word. It is widely agreed that rare words require a different approach.

   a. Recognising word structure, and deriving meaning -- eg by teaching the various meanings (plural - sometimes there is more than one meaning) of affixes. Eg by teaching how to guess from the context.

   b. Using the rare words found in texts as a 'case in point', a teaching illustration, useful for skill development, not just learning the individual word.

   > **Affixes.** See Crystal D *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* chapter 9. In the first edition 1995 page 128 Crystal lists the 57 most common prefixes, and he lists some of them more than once. He gives the example of unexpected, where un- means 'not', whereas in unwrap it means 'reversing a previous action'.

10. **Tips**
    a. Find out what are the preferred strategies
    b. Ask students to <try out> a new way
    c. Be willing to explain something in <u>more than one way</u>. Spiral. A variety of exercises.
    d. It is easier for you to change than for the students to change.

I. Constraints/means analysis This was not in Munby.
1. **Questions to ask**
   a. What resources are available?
   b. Who are the learners?
   c. Where will the course take place?
   d. When?

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J. When?

1. Before one starts
2. The first day
3. On-going. The perceptions learners have of their needs will change in the course, especially as they learn more what is expected of them, and what their own shortcomings are.

K. Who decides?

1. The needs analysis triangle: teacher, student, institution/employer
2. Informants
    a. former students
    b. existing teachers in the target situation
    c. experts
3. Important principle: triangulation. Aim to confirm your evidence and conclusions.
4. Advantages of involving the learners (participatory needs analysis)
    a. learners become more realistic
    b. learners increase in sensitivity to their role, etc.

L. How?

1. **The crucial step: selecting the information gathering instruments.**
2. Possible techniques include
    a. entry test on arrival
    b. self-reporting/assessment. Some students will exaggerate. But, useful for learning what students think of their own abilities, and their own priorities.
    c. observation of classes. Especially useful for deficiency analysis.
    d. surveys based on questionnaires. Very common.
    e. structured interviews.
    f. learner diaries, teacher diaries.
    g. case studies.
    h. final evaluation/feedback.
    i. consideration of previous research.

M.   Final Notes

There is still a big gap between needs analysis and materials selection. The jump is usually considered to be a subjective matter.

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