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NEEDS ANALYSIS AND ITS MODELS



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Abstract: Needs analysis procedure in the field of language teaching was first used by Michael West in a survey report published in 1926 (White, 1988). In the following decades, however, little if any attention was given to needs analysis. This can be explained largely by the influence that the traditional structural view of the language continued to exert on the field of English language teaching (ELT), which resulted in the belief that the goal of second and foreign language learning was the mastery of these structurally related elements of language, i.e. phonological units, grammatical units, grammatical operations and lexical items (Richards and Rodgers, 1986: 17). What language learners needed to acquire these structural elements, it was widely believed, was adequate knowledge of the language. The belief that all learners more or less acquired this knowledge in the same way argued against the concept of individual learner needs.

Key words: Needs analysis, traditional structural, grammatical operations, phonological units.

INTRODUCTION :

The term “need analysis” re-emerged during the 1970s as a result of intensive studies conducted by the Council of Europe team. The team was responsible for developing a new approach towards teaching the major European languages to European adults. Research and studies conducted by the Council of Europe team resulted in the emergence of the communicative approach to language learning which replaced the situational approach dominant in language teaching and learning at that time.

The Council of Europe team felt that successful language learning resulted not from mastering linguistic elements, but from determining exactly what the learner needed to do with the target language. One of the terms, which the team came up with, was the “Common Core”. The common core suggests that language learners share certain interests despite their different goals in learning foreign languages. The team recognized that there will be areas of interest common to all students, whatever their particular situation and specialization. The 'common core' provides a basis one can rely on in conducting needs analysis in the general English classroom (as in the case of arts & science colleges in India). It is argued that it is not possible to specify the needs of general English learners. So, needs analysis has been neglected in the general English classroom and emphasized in ESP as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggested.

AIMS OF NEEDS ANALYSIS

The needs analysis forms the cornerstone of the ESP approaches to language teaching. A teacher can't claim to be conducting an ESP course if she or he has not done a needs analysis. The purposes, goals, and ways of doing a needs analysis are many, but they all boil down to one simple

thing – a needs analysis makes the class more focused and therefore more successful. It is important to bear in mind that ESP reject the circular design of general English courses which focus on the internalization of language as the means and ends to construct language. For ESP practitioners, language is used to achieve goals in the world. An ESP course is designed around such goals and language learning is necessary to achieving those goals. In this kind of model it should therefore be clear that such goals must be defined so that they can be dealt with. Since the students, and not the teacher will be moving toward those goals, it would seem to make sense to have the students identify the goals they wish to achieve. It is hard to see how a teacher might presume to now better about what a specific learner wants or needs to be able to do with the target language. Thus, we need to do a needs analysis.

ESP

In the theoretical model of ESP, the needs analysis is the first stage in the designing and implementation of any course. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998:121) mention the following theoretical constructs in the design and implementation of ESP classes and present them in this order.

Needs Analysis
Course Design
Teaching/Learning
Assessment
Evaluation

In reality, however, there is no linear order to how we deal with designing a course in a general sense. It needs

analysis for sample will and show it affects all the other elements in the above list. The problem with this linear order scenario is that gives us the false impression that we can do one thing and then we move onto the next thing without considering what occurred previously. Course designers therefore then move this kind of chain doing things independently. Of course you shouldn't do that because your course will then never actually be student centered or centered around needs for that matter. Everything we do in teaching a course should somehow be affected by the other aspects of what we're doing in the course. We need to constantly bring in the information from different areas to help inform us on what we can do either in the immediate future or in a more distant future when running the same course over again. In short we need to understand the differences between these different aspects of course design but at the same time they are not separate nor are they to be dealt with in a strict linear fashion. Needs analysis needs to weave through all of these different aspects. It is extremely important for someone to realize this when they are creating their needs analysis because a good needs analysis will not only impact but also in phone worm all the other elements/stages in the design/running of a course.

NEEDS ANALYSIS MODELS

Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) introduce three different models for needs analysis. They suggest that objective, perceived and product-oriented needs correspond to a Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and subjective, felt, and process-oriented needs correspond to a Learning Situation Analysis (LSA). They suggest one more analysis that is a Present Situation Analysis (PSA). A Present Situation Analysis is intended to suggest what learners already know. Thus the analysis can be used to find out what they lack. A TSA deals with objective, perceived and product-oriented needs of learners; an LSA discusses subjective, felt and process-oriented needs; and a PSA estimates strengths and weaknesses of learners in language, skills and learning experiences.

PRESENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

Looking back at some of the needs analyses that we received in class and took a brief look at we can see that many needs analyses really just focus on the present situation of the students and even their past situations. The idea behind asking about the students passed is that we can therefore then makes some assumptions about their present situation. It is important to note that if you are moving into and trying to operate an ESP course in a location or a field with which you are unfamiliar then it is going to be very hard to use past information to make assumptions about the present. If we are asking about the past of Korean's then, on the basis of our extensive knowledge of Korea and the Korean situation, we can probably make some valid assumptions but just remember that the assumptions that we make in Korea will not necessarily be valid in other places. Nor are the assumptions that we are making even within Korea always valid. This is an important aspect of needs analyses which is clearly mentioned in the text, i.e. the basic idea that much of the information which we may end up guessing from the

needs analysis is not always valid.

This tells us a lot about the nature of surveys in particular we are using a needs analysis in a survey. It is very easy for people to misunderstand our intention in a survey and to therefore give us information which is not particularly useful or it may be useful but not actually real. The basic idea is that even though we assume that we were getting on the art needs analysis it is true we need to keep an open mind and constantly check up on what's actually going on in class. If we use a needs analysis to design our syllabus, then we need to follow up and make sure that the syllabus really does match the students needs because even though they seem to indicate that it would be on the basis of the needs analysis this may not actually be true reality of the situation. Simply put, an ESP practitioner needs to stay open-minded, reflective and readily adaptive to the classroom situation.

TARGET SITUATION ANALYSIS

The TSA, or Target Situation Analysis, aspect of a needs analysis basically tries to glean information from the students about what they are hoping to be able to do with the language by the end of the course and certainly into the future. As mentioned in class, this generally revolves around specific real-world types of functions. When asking the students to think about skills and strategies but rather simply what they want to be able to do. This would include things like being able to yell at people over the phone, or control a meeting with mixed level individuals in a corporation. It is important for us to realize that we are the language experts at our students are not. It is probably not overly helpful to ask them questions that are too closely linked to specific elements of language. Normal people don't think like that. It is therefore important for us to try to bring our knowledge of language into the real world because real people think in real-world terms. Unfortunately, most language teachers don't think like that. This is therefore the tricky part for us is language teachers. We are often so fixated and focus on language (because that is our job) that we never see how the language relates to the real world. This is an unforgivable mistake for language teachers, and particularly those endeavoring to work within an ESP paradigm. It is therefore comparative that language teachers get a good fix on this TSA aspect. It really helps us design our lessons in ways which correlate to ESP approaches. Again your students are thinking or shortly thinking in TSA (if we can think of this as a certain type of cognitive code related to goals). It, therefore, helps us a lot if we also begin to think and plan in TSA.

LEARNING SITUATION ANALYSIS

LSA or learning situation analysis is often how language teachers think. These are the types of skills strategies and other cognitive aspects of learning which we are trying to guide our students towards. LSA may or may not and often does not include specific elements of language, so it is still somehow distant from the general English language teachers' way of thinking. It is important for in ESP practitioner in the planning of their course to be able to translate both TSA and LSA goals to specific language forms which relate to the content area, genre, or fields that they are trying to get the students to be able to work and function in.

Students in Korea may be a somewhat adept to dealing with the LSA as a cognitive type of code. Students outside Korea who are more real world focused will not be so adept at this. Careful putting too much LSA in a needs analysis because it may be hard for students to understand easily what you're getting at.

CONCLUSION

An important aspect of needs analyses which was mentioned in this paper and we briefly mentioned in class is the idea that we don't want to overdo this. We don't only get one chance to do a needs analysis with our students. Needs analysis is something that we should be doing in every class in some way shape or form. We don't often get a chance to do this before the class begins but we often do it right in the beginning of the course. Resist the temptation to overdo your needs analysis. Bear in mind that most people do not enjoy filling out forms and taking surveys. Make these things as user-friendly as you possibly can and if you have to make a choice between TSA and LSA, for you may not be able to include both, then it's probably a better idea to choose TSA. TSA will not only make it easier for you to design your syllabus, but it also incorporates aspects of LSA as well as language itself. It is up to the teacher to break TSA down into the individual skills, strategies, and linguistic content which is necessary to achieve those TSA goals. A well-designed needs analysis is not a luxury but something in her attempt to the running of an ESP class.

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