Introduction to Needs Analysis

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Introduction

Needs analysis (also known as needs assessment) has a vital role in the process of designing and carrying out any language course, whether it be English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or general English course, and its centrality has been acknowledged by several scholars and authors (Munby, 1978; Richterich and Chancerel, 1987; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Robinson, 1991; Johns, 1991; West, 1994; Allison *et al.* (1994); Seedhouse, 1995; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Iwai *et al.* 1999; Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Finney, 2002). Also, the importance of carrying out a needs analysis for developing EAP tests is emphasized by Fulcher (1999), McDonough (1984), and Carrol (1980, cited in Fulcher, 1999)

According to Iwai *et al.* (1999), the term needs analysis generally refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of students.

Brindley (1989) and Berwick (1989) offer definitions of different types of needs and accounts of various problems and limitations in making use of this concept, including ways in which we might usefully distinguish between needs identified by analysts and those expressed or experienced by learners. In his state-of-the-art article, West (1994) gives a thorough overview of needs analysis in language teaching, including its history, theoretical basis, approaches to needs analysis, etc.

According to Iwai *et al.* (1999), formal needs analysis is relatively new to the field of language teaching. However, informal needs analyses have been conducted by teachers in order to assess what language points their students needed to master. In fact, the reason why different approaches were born and then replaced by others is that teachers have intended to meet the needs of their students during their learning.

From the field of language teaching the focus of this paper will be on ESP. Clearly, the role of needs analysis in any ESP course is indisputable. For Johns (1991), needs analysis is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities.

Though needs analysis, as we know it today, has gone through many stages, with the publication of Munby's Communicative Syllabus Design in 1978, situations and functions were set within the frame of needs analysis. In his book, Munby introduced 'communication needs processor' which is the basis of Munby's approach to needs analysis. Based on Munby's work, Chambers (1980) introduced the term *Target Situation Analysis*. Form that time several other terms have also been introduced: *Present Situation Analysis*, *Pedagogic Needs Analysis*, *Deficiency Analysis*, *Strategy Analysis* or *Learning Needs Analysis*, *Means Analysis*, *Register analysis*, *Discourse analysis*, and *Genre Analysis*. This article attempts to present an overview of the aforementioned approaches to needs analysis.

Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

Needs analysis was firmly established in the mid-1970s (West, 1998). In the earlier periods needs analysis was mainly concerned with linguistic and register analysis, and as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggest, needs were seen as discrete language items of grammar and vocabulary. With the publication of Munby's Communicative Syllabus Design (1978) needs analysis moved towards placing the learner's purposes in the central position within the framework of needs analysis. Consequently, the notion of target needs became paramount and research proved that function and situation were also fundamental. The term *Target Situation Analysis* (TSA) was, in fact, first used by Chambers in his 1980 article in which he tried to clarify the confusion of terminology. For Chambers TSA is "communication in the target situation" (p.29).

In his work Munby (1978) introduced Communicative Needs Processor (CNP). As Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) say:

> *With the development of the CNP it seemed as if ESP had come of age. The machinery for identifying the needs of any group of learners had been provided: all the course designers had to do was to operate it.*

In Munby's CNP, the target needs and target level performance are established by investigating the target situation, and his overall model clearly establishes the place of needs analysis as central to ESP, indeed the necessary starting point in materials or course design (West, 1998). In the CNP, account is taken of "the variables that affect communication

needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other" (Munby, 1978: 32).

Munby's overall model is made up of the following elements:

1. **Participants**: information about the identity and language of the learners: age, sex, nationality, present command of target language, other languages known and extent of command;

2. **Communication Needs Processor**: investigates the particular communication needs according to sociocultural and stylistic variables which interact to determine a profile of such needs;

3. **Profile of Needs**: is established through the processing of data in the CNP;

4. In the **Meaning Processor** "parts of the socioculturally determined profile of communication needs are converted into semantic subcategories of a predominantly pragmatic kind, and marked with attitudinal tone" (Munby, 1978: 42);

5. **The Language Skills Selector**: identifies "the specific language skills that are required to realize the events or activities that have been identified in the CNP" (Munby, 1978: 40);

6. **The Linguistic Encoder**: considers "the dimension of contextual appropriacy" (Munby, 1978: 49), one the encoding stage has been reached;

7. **The Communicative Competence Specification**: indicates the target communicative competence of the participant and is the translated profile of needs.

From the above-mentioned elements of the Munby model, the predominant one or at least the one that has been referred to by other researchers of needs analysis is the Communication Needs Processor (CNP) which is the basis of Munby's approach to needs analysis and establishes the profile of needs through the processing of eight parameters the processing of which gives us a detailed description of particular communication needs (Munby, 1978). The parameters specified by Munby (1987) are:

- **Purposive domain**: this category establishes the type of ESP, and then the purpose which the target language will be used for at the end of the course.

- **Setting**: the physical setting specifying the spatial and temporal aspects of the situation where English will be used, and the psychological setting specifying the different environment in which English will be used.

- **Interaction**: identifies the learner's interlocutors and predicts relationship between them.

- **Instrumentality**: specifies the medium, i.e., whether the language to be used is written, spoken, or both; mode, i.e., whether the language to be used is in the form of monologue, dialogue or any other; and channel of communication, i.e., whether it is face to face, radio, or any other.

- **Dialect**: dialects learners will have to understand or produce in terms of their spatial, temporal, or social aspect.
- Communicative event: states what the participants will have to do productively or receptively.
- **Communicative key**: the manner in which the participants will have to do the activities comprising an event, e.g. politely or impolitely.
- **Target level**: level of linguistic proficiency at the end of the ESP course which might be different for different skills.

The aim of Munby's CNP is to find as thoroughly as possible the linguistic form a prospective ESP learner is likely to use in various situations in his target working environment. The outcome of the processing data by means of Munby's model is, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) say, what the learner needs to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. Most subsequent target needs analysis research was based on Munby's model for the reason that it offers comprehensive data banks and target performance (Robinson, 1991).

Many researchers in the field of target situation needs analysis followed Munby's CNP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide a comprehensive target situation analysis framework, which consists of a list of questions the analyst should find answers to. For Hutchinson and Waters (1987) the analysis of target situation needs is "in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of various participants in the learning process" (p.

59). Nevertheless, most of these questions relate to the Munbian model.

These relations can be found summarized below:

1. Why is language needed? • for study; • for work; • for training; • for a combination of these; • for some other purposes, e.g. status, examination, promotion	*cf*. Munbian purposive domain
2. How will the language be used? • Medium: speaking, writing, reading, etc.; • Channel: e.g. telephone, face to face; • Types of text or discourse: e.g. academic text, lectures, catalogues, etc.	*cf*. Munbian instrumentality
3. What will the content areas be? • Subjects: e.g. medicine, biology, commerce, shipping, etc.; • Level: technician, craftsman, postgraduate, etc.	*cf*. Munbian Communicative event
4. Where will the language be used? • Physical setting: e.g. office, lecture theater, hotel, workshop, library; • Human context: alone, meetings, demonstrations, on telephone; • Linguistic context: e.g. in own country, abroad.	*cf*. Munbian Setting (physical and psychological)
5. When will the language be used? • Concurrently with the ESP course or subsequently; • Frequently, seldom, in small amounts, in large chunks.	

Like any other model/approach, however, Munby's model is not without its critics. Munby provided detailed lists of microfunctions in his CNP. What he did not include was how to prioritize them or any of the

affective factors which today are recognized as important (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

West (1994: 9-10) mentions the shortcomings of the Munby's model in terms of four headings:

1. **Complexity**: Munby's attempt to be systematic and comprehensive inevitably made his instrument inflexible, complex, and time-consuming.

2. **Learner-centeredness**: Munby claims that his CNP is learner-centered. The starting point may be the learner but the model collects data *about* the learner rather than *from* the learner.

3. **Constraints**: Munby's idea is that constraints should be considered after the needs analysis procedure, while many researchers feel that these practical constraints should be considered at the start of the needs analysis process.

4. **Language**: Munby fails to provide a procedure for converting the learner profile into a language syllabus.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also point out that it is too time-consuming to write a target profile for each student based on Munby's model. This model only considers one viewpoint, i.e. that of the analyst, but neglects others (those of the learners, user-institutions, etc.). Meanwhile, it does not take into account of the learning needs nor it makes a distinction between necessities, wants, and lacks.

Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

Present situation analysis may be posited as a complement to target situation analysis (Robinson, 1991; Jordan, 1997). If target situation analysis tries to establish what the learners are expected to be like at the end of the language course, present situation analysis attempts to identify what they are like at the beginning of it. As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125) state "a PSA estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, learning experiences." If the destination point to which the students need to get is to be established, first the starting point has to be defined, and this is provided by means of PSA.

The term PSA (Present Situation Analysis) was first proposed by Richterich and Chancerel (1980). In this approach the sources of information are the students themselves, the teaching establishment, and the user-institution, e.g. place of work (Jordan, 1997). The PSA can be carried out by means of established placement tests. However, the background information, e.g. years of learning English, level of education, etc. about learners can provide us with enough information about their present abilities which can thus be predicted to some extent .

Needs analysis may be seen as a combination of TSA and PSA. As noted, within the realm of ESP, one cannot rely either on TSA or PSA as a reliable indicator of what is needed to enhance learning and reaching the desired goals. Consequently, other approaches to needs analysis have been proposed, such as *Pedagogic Needs Analysis*.

Pedagogic Needs Analysis

The term "pedagogic needs analysis" was proposed by West (1998) as an umbrella term to describe the following three elements of needs analysis. He states the fact that shortcomings of target needs analysis should be compensated for by collecting data about the learner and the learning environment. The term 'pedagogic needs analysis' covers *deficiency analysis*, *strategy analysis or learning needs analysis*, and *means analysis*.

Deficiency Analysis

What Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define as *lacks* can be matched with deficiency analysis. Also, according to Allwright (1982, quoted in West, 1994), the approaches to needs analysis that have been developed to consider learners' present needs or wants may be called analysis of learners' *deficiencies* or *lacks.* From what has already been said, it is obvious that deficiency analysis is the route to cover from point A (present situation) to point B (target situation), always keeping the learning needs in mind. Therefore, deficiency analysis can form the basis of the language syllabus (Jordan, 1997) because it should provide data about both the gap between present and target extralinguistic knowledge, mastery of general English, language skills, and learning strategies.

Strategy Analysis or Learning Needs Analysis

As it is apparent from the name, this type of needs analysis has to do with the strategies that learners employ in order to learn another language. This tries to establish how the learners wish to learn rather than what they need to learn (West, 1998). All the above-mentioned approaches to needs analysis, TSA, PSA, and to some extent deficiency analysis, have not been concerned with the learners' views of learning. Allwright who was a pioneer in the field of *strategy analysis* (West, 1994) started from the students' perceptions of their needs in their own terms (Jordan, 1997). It is Allwright who makes a distinction between *needs* (the skills which a student sees as being relevant to himself or herself), *wants* (those needs on which students put a high priority in the available, limited time), and *lacks* (the difference between the student's present competence and the desired competence). His ideas were adopted later by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who advocate a learning-centered approach in which learners' learning needs play a vital role. If the analyst, by means of target situation analysis, tries to find out what learners do with language (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987)learning needs analysis will tell us "what the learner needs to do in order to learn" (*ibid*: 54). Obviously, they advocate a process-oriented approach, not a product- or goal-oriented one. For them ESP is not "a product but an approach to language teaching which is directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 16). What learners should be taught are skills that enable them to reach the target, the process of learning and motivation should be considered as well as the fact that different learners learn in different ways (Dudley-Evans and St.

John, 1998).

Jordan (1997: 26) quotes Bower (1980) who has noted the importance of learning needs:

> *If we accept…that a student will learn best if what he **wants** to learn, less well what he only **needs** to learn, less well still what he either wants or needs to learn, it is clearly important to leave room in a learning programme for the learner's own wishes regarding both goals and processes.*

Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) definition of *wants* (perceived or subjective needs of learners) corresponds to learning needs. Similar to the process used for target needs analysis, they suggest a framework for analyzing learning needs which consists of several questions, each divided into more detailed questions. The framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) for analysis of learning needs is the following:

1. **Why** are the learners taking the course?
• compulsory or optional;
• apparent need or not;
• Are status, money, promotion involved?
• What do learners think they will achieve?
• What is their attitude towards the ESP course? Do they want to improve their English or do they resent the time they have to spend on it?

2. **How** do the learners learn?

- What is their learning background?

- What is their concept of teaching and learning?

- What methodology will appeal to them?

- What sort of techniques bore/alienate them?

3. **What** sources are available?

- number and professional competence of teachers;

- attitude of teachers to ESP;

- teachers' knowledge of and attitude to subject content;

- materials;

- aids;

- opportunities for out-of-class activities.

4. **Who** are the learners?

- age/sex/nationality;

- What do they know already about English?

- What subject knowledge do they have?

- What are their interests?

- What is their socio-cultural background?

- What teaching styles are they used to?

- What is their attitude to English or to the cultures of the English-speaking world?

Finally, as Allwright (1982, quoted in West, 1994) says the investigation of learners' preferred learning styles and strategies gives us a picture of the learners' conception of learning.

Means Analysis

Means analysis tries to investigate those considerations that Munby excludes (West, 1998), that is, matters of logistics and pedagogy that led to debate about practicalities and constraints in implementing needs-based language courses (West, 1994). Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125) suggest that means analysis provides us "information about the environment in which the course will be run" and thus attempts to adapt to ESP course to the cultural environment in which it will be run.

One of the main issues means analysis is concerned with is an "acknowledgement that what works well in one situation may not work in another" (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998: 124), and that, as noted above, ESP syllabi should be sensitive to the particular cultural environment in which the course will be imposed. Or as Jordan (1997) says it should provide us with a tool for designing an environmentally sensitive course. Swales (1989, quoted in West, 1994) lists five factors which relate to the learning environment and should be considered by curriculum specialists if the course is to be successful. These considerations are:

- classroom culture

- EAP staff

- pilot target situation analysis

- status of service operations

- study of change agents

Register, Discourse, and Genre Analysis

In this section the focus will be on the description of the language in ESP. The terms *Register Analysis*, *Discourse Analysis*, and *Genre analysis* will be discussed

Register analysis

Changing approaches to linguistic analysis for ESP involve not only change in method but also changing ideas of what is to be included in language and its description (Robinson, 1991). One of the earliest studies carried out in this area focused on vocabulary and grammar (the elements of sentence). This stage took place mainly in the 1960s and early 1970s and was associated with the work of Peter Strevens, Jack Ewer, and John Swales. The main motive behind register analysis was the pedagogic one of making the ESP course more relevant to learners' needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Register analysis, also called "lexicostatistics" by Swales (1988: 1, quoted in Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998) and "frequency analysis" by Robinson (1991: 23) focused on the grammar and "structural and non-structural" vocabulary (Ewer and Latorre, 1967: 223, quoted in West, 1998). The assumption behind register analysis was that, while the grammar of scientific and technical writing does not differ from that of general English, certain grammatical and lexical forms are used much more frequently (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

As noted, register analysis operates only at word and sentence level and does not go beyond these levels. The criticism on register analysis can be summarized as the following:

- it restricts the analysis of texts to the word and sentence level (West, 1998);

- it is only descriptive, not explanatory (Robinson, 1991);

- most materials produced under the banner of register analysis follow a similar pattern, beginning with a long specialist reading passage which lacks authenticity (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

Discourse Analysis

Since register analysis operated almost entirely at word and sentence level, the second phase of development shifted attention to the level above the sentence and tried to find out how sentences were combined into discourse (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Also, West (1998) says that the reaction against register analysis in the early 1970s concentrated on the communicative values of discourse rather than the lexical and grammatical properties of register.

The pioneers in the field of discourse analysis (also called rhetorical or textual analysis) were Lackstorm, Selinker, and Trimble whose focus was on the text rather than on the sentence, and on the writer's purpose rather than on form (Robison, 1991). In practice, according to West (1998), this approach tended to concentrate on how sentences are used in the

performance of acts of communication and to generate materials based on functions.

One of the shortcomings of the discourse analysis is that its treatment remains fragmentary, identifying the functional units of which discourse was composed at sentence/utterance level but offering limited guidance on how functions and sentences/utterances fit together to form text (West, 1998). There is also the danger that the findings of discourse analysis, which are concerned with texts and how they work as pieces of discourse, fail to take sufficient account of the academic or business context in which communication takes place (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

Genre Analysis

Discourse analysis may overlap with genre analysis. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 87) give a clear distinction between the tow terms:

> *Any study of language or, more specifically, text at a level above that of sentence is a discourse study. This may involve the study of cohesive links between sentences, of paragraphs, or the structure of the whole text. The results of this type of analysis make statements about how texts -any text-work. This is applied discourse analysis. Where, however, the focus of text analysis is on the regularities of structures that distinguish one type of text from another, this is genre analysis and the results focus on the differences between text types, or genres.*

The term 'genre' was first used by Swales (1981, quoted in Robinson, 1991). His definition of genre is: "a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a personal or social setting" (Swales, 1981: 10-11, quoted in Robinson, 1991). Bhatia who is one of the researchers in the field of genre analysis has his definition of 'genre analysis' as the study of linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic or professional setting (Bhatia, undated).

In his article, Bhatia distinguishes four, though systematically related, areas of competence that an ESP learner needs to develop so as to get over his/her lack of confidence in dealing with specialist discourse. These four areas are:

1. **Knowledge of the Code** which is the pre-requisite for developing communicative expertise in specialist or even everyday discourse.

2. **Acquisition of Genre Knowledge** which is the familiarity with and awareness of appropriate rhetorical procedures and conventions typically associated with the specialist discourse community.

3. **Sensitivity to Cognitive Structures**, that is, since certain lexical items have specialist meanings in specific professional genres, a number of syntactic forms may also carry genre-specific restricted values in addition to their general meanings codified in grammar books. Thus, it is imperative that the specialist learner become aware of restricted aspects of

linguistic code in addition to the general competence he or she requires in the language.

4. **Exploitation of Generic Knowledge**, that is, it is only after learners have developed some acquaintance or, better yet, expertise at levels discussed above, that they can confidently interpret, use or even take liberties with specialist discourse.

Genre-analysis approach goes two steps beyond register analysis and one step beyond discourse analysis (though it draws on the findings of both). As Bhatia (undated) states the main benefit of a genre-based approach to the teaching and learning of specialist English is that the learner does not learn language in isolation from specialist contexts, but is encouraged to make the relevant connection between the use of language on the one hand and the purpose of communication on the other, always aware of the question, *why do members of the specialist discourse community use the language in this way?*

Conclusion

Different approaches to needs analysis attempt to meet the needs of the learners in the process of learning a second language. Not a single approach to needs analysis can be a reliable indicator of what is needed to enhance learning. A modern and comprehensive concept of needs analysis is proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125) which encompasses all the above-mentioned approaches. Their current concept of needs analysis includes the following:

- Environmental situation - information about the situation in which the course will be run (means analysis);

- Personal information about learners - factors which may affect the way they learn (wants, means, subjective needs);

- Language information about learners - what their current skills and language use are (present situation analysis);

- Learner's lacks (the gap between the present situation and professional information about learners);

- Learner's needs from course - what is wanted from the course (short-term needs);

- Language learning needs - effective ways of learning the skills and language determined by lacks;

- Professional information about learners - the tasks and activities English learners are/will be using English for (Target Situation Analysis and objective needs);

- How to communicate in the target situation – knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation (register analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis).

Today, there is an awareness of the fact that different types of needs analyses are not exclusive but complementary and that each of them provides a piece to complete the jigsaw of needs analysis (Figure 1). All the works done in ESP have sought to promote the communicative nature of language teaching, because starting with register analysis, ESP teachers have been very concerned with the needs of students as they used the

language, rather than language *per se*. For this reason, today needs analysis should not be (and is not) of concern only within the field of ESP, but also that of General English because the needs of the learners is of paramount importance in any language process.

Target Situation Analysis: includes objective, perceived and product-oriented needs.

Strategy or Learning Needs Analysis: includes subjective, felt and process-oriented needs.

Present Situation Analysis: estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skill, learning experience.

Means Analysis: the environment in which the course will be run.

Register Analysis: focuses on vocabulary and grammar of the text.

Deficiency Analysis:considers learners' present needs and wants.

Discourse Analysis: investigates how sentences combine into discourse.

Genre Analysis: focuses on the regularities of structure that distinguishes one type of text from another.

Figure 1. Needs Analysis Jigsaw

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