JØRGEN HØEDT: THE STUDY OF NEEDS ANALYSIS

This brief discussion is based on a commented bibliography by Høedt, Mansur and Rasmussen (1) prepared in connection with a comprehensive project concerning Danish society's foreign language needs. The purpose of the bibliography has been to collect existing research literature material on foreign language needs in Denmark and abroad.

This presentation is an attempt to give a brief outline of the present state of affairs within the field of needs analysis in Western Europe.

The emphasis is on objective needs, and the main criterion for the selection of the works treated has been whether they contain interesting results and/or methodology.

1. Works of a general nature

Trim (2) gives a detailed survey starting with a section on society's language needs followed by a summary of a substantial number of presentations on the subject. The article also includes various publications concerning language needs outside Western Europe. Trim's article "Analysis of Society's Needs for Foreign Languages" provides an especially valuable entry to the study of needs analysis for the newcomer.

James (3) gives a comprehensive account of needs analyses in the field of adult language learning. In his article James gives a comparative criticism of 8 major needs analysis projects existing in 1974.

From the French side, Coste (4) gives an outline of certain analyses and other material concerning foreign language needs in relation to adult learning. It should be noted that Coste's article also includes a comprehensive treatment of Richterich's (5-11) works.

Of recent date we find Christ (12) giving a brief account of three new German foreign language needs analyses, namely Bausch (13), Augsburg (14) and Christ (15).

Also of recent date is Bausch (13), which includes amongst other treatments an interesting chapter concerning foreign language needs in trade and industry and public administration. Bausch presents a description of the analysis, which has its purpose of categorizing the LSP elements necessary in language learning already at the primary school level. Bausch has a concluding chapter in which he summarizes a number of other needs analyses from modern language learning sources.

Schröder's treatment (14) forms part of the major European foreign language planning project at Augsburg. In recognition of the fact that, in order to maintain her status as a leading exporting nation, West Germany must keep pace with, for instance, the Scandinavian countries as far as foreign language competence is concerned, the project-workers have made an analysis of skills, needs, foreign language choices, language course preferences, etc. in a broad spectrum of trades and industries in the Augsburg/Munich area.

It should also be mentioned that Richterich and Chancefel (10) have made a comparison of data collection methods, and designed directives as to how
needs analysis results should be read and interpreted.

2. Works of a theoretical nature

In general it may be said that recent publications show a new trend in the understanding of the concept of needs analysis. The keen confidence in the results of early analyses has in recent years been succeeded by an attitude of reservation regarding the value and realism of language needs assessment. One of the most industrious needs analysts, Richterich (5-11), in his latest work (11) arrives at the conclusion that the traditional methods of analysis, which mainly derived from the worlds of psychology and sociology, did not take into account the special non-materialistic nature of 'language'. Richterich's conclusions should be seen in relation to an explosive development in recent years in the number and complexity of language needs. He concludes his paper by calling for a re-definition of language needs.

Debyser (16) examines the concept of needs applied to foreign languages. Whose are the needs, the pupils', society's or the employers', and where are possible mutual components to be found?

Pélfrente (17) claims that language needs are elastic and always dependant on fashion trends in the interpretation of needs as such, as well as the needs of the users as regards performance - everything being decided by the socio-economic and political conditions of the language community in question.

Rousson and Boudineau (18) are concerned with the psychological aspect of educational needs. They have designed three methods of analysis. As far as language education is concerned, the authors test their results in relation to the traditional communication models.

Chancerel and Rousson (19) have evolved a new methodology for analysing educational needs which distinguishes a socio-political and a psycho-educational dimension.

Munby (20), in a very comprehensive survey, points to the fact that needs analysts and course designers have suffered from a tendency to concentrate overmuch on teaching methodology and have underplayed the role of content. He claims that a vacuum has been left with regard to the definition and description of language needs where these are socio-culturally embedded. Munby suggests that the field of analysis should be described as 'language plus situational context', thus distinguishing between different types of needs according to situation.

Another type of theoretical consideration, which is decisive in the evaluation of needs analyses, is to be found in Gorosch (21), who underlines the fact that even if a reliable model for needs analysis were available, i.e. one which would yield reliable results, it would still have to relate the needs breakdown to a goal specification. Gorosch maintains that the transformation of results into goals specification ought to be considered an area of study in its own right.

3. Works demonstrating methodological originality

Claessen (22) has made an analysis in Holland which is comprehensive in the literal sense of the word. The field of analysis is the role of
foreign languages in the Dutch population and in the schools. The analy-
sis moves systematically through a large number of questionnaires design-
ed for technical apprentices, students, members of the teaching staff in
universities and higher institutions of learning, and professional users
of foreign languages, e.g. in trade and industry or science. All the de-
tailed reports are supported by ample statistics and graphs.

Billiez (23) has investigated the adult population's needs for education
in foreign Languages in the Grenoble area of France. He presents a sub-
stantial collection of stational materials. The results have been inter-
preted in terms of a preferential list of foreign languages and course
types in relation to age groups, sex, social groups, etc.

Dabène (24) describes a project which has the purpose of custom design-
ing foreign language courses for concrete local needs with respect to
the individually interpreted needs of the target groups and thus also to
their motivation levels.

Candlin (25) presents a well-founded demonstration of how in-depth studies
of communication situations and function analyses may lead to the de-
signing of specific syllabuses and teaching materials. The authors are
also concerned with theoretical linguistic considerations - an area too
often neglected by needs analysts.

Two examples of what could be called 'applied needs analysis' are to be
found in ELTDU (26) and Richter (27). Both projects are concerned with
the internal analysis of major commercial enterprises with the purpose
of transforming the results into concrete instruments for the programming
and evaluation of language courses.

Evans (28) makes a similar study, within a public sector branch, of those
foreign language skills necessary for social service staff in developing
countries. The presentation contains, i.a. a detailed analysis of a com-
prehensive selection of communication situations likely to be met in the
course of the foreign service social workers' activities. The results
have been used in the development of case materials on the basis of the
problem situations, and also of a graded list of communication situation
frequencies.

The Aston publications (29-32) as well as Ulijn (33-38) have designed
comprehensive needs identification methods with the purpose of identify-
ing the language needs of non-language students. Of special interest
in Ulijn's procedure is the inclusion of the relevant potential em-
ployer categories.

Concerning works in which the questionnaire or a detailed account of
similar material or methods of data collection are to be found, reference
should be made to Ager et al (29-32), Claessen (22), Deutscher Volks-
hochschul-Verband E.V. (39), Emmans (40), Kilian (41), Looms (42), and
Ulijn (33).

The trend which one can detect in most recent commentaries seems to be
one of increasing scepticism as to the ultimate practical value of
needs analyses. The problem concerns not only the method of arriving
at results, and thus the validity of the latter, it relates also to
the difficulty in translating these into terms amenable to effective
course construction.
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