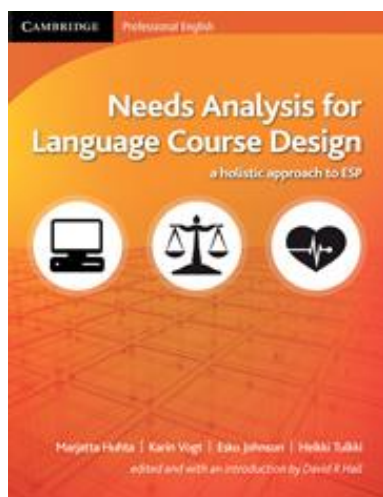# BOOK REVIEW

ANALYSING NEEDS FOR WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

Marjatta Huhta, Karin Vogt, Esko Johnson and Heikki Tulkki. NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR LANGUAGE COURSE DESIGN. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ESP (2013), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 266 pp., ISBN 978-0-521-12814-8 (PB).

The examination of language and learning needs (i.e. "needs analysis" or "needs assessment") within the realm of language teaching has been the object of a significant number of studies. As some review papers attest, these have been particularly prolific in the contexts of English as a Foreign and Second Language (Long, 2005; Brown, 2009), English for Specific Purposes (Flowerdew, 2013), and English for Academic Purposes (Bocanegra-Valle, in press). *Needs Analysis for Language Course Design. A Holistic Approach* is, however, a publication of a rather different nature as it provides a detailed explanation of how needs may be assessed in modern enterprises and organizations and bridges the gap between the theory of needs analysis and its practical application when teaching or learning languages for professional purposes. Most importantly, this book opens new avenues for practitioners willing to get started in needs analysis in view of a more efficient course design and development because it shows how a needs analysis project can be conducted from start (i.e. gathering of data pertaining to needs so as to create profiles for target professions) to finish (i.e. application of the profiles for the design of a course syllabus, the creation of activities and materials, and the evaluation of learner progress).

Between 2005 and 2007 six European partner countries (Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands and Poland) participated in the EU-funded

Leonardo Da Vinci project that, based on an earlier project (see Huhta, 1999), eventually led to the development of the Common European Framework (CEF) Professional Profiles in this book. These Profiles depict an approach to needs analysis carried out in modern enterprises and organisations that is applied to the syllabus design and curriculum development of workplace communication courses in the fields of technology, business, health and social care, and law. The guidelines and detailed instructions provided show the flexibility of the process and can be very purposeful if attempting to conduct an effective needs analysis in both academic and professional context, and to create profiles that are based on the Common European Framework of References for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and may be applicable across different cultures and educational systems.

Needs Analysis for Language Course Design. A Holistic Approach contains five main chapters plus a very interesting introduction, a useful glossary and three appendices. All chapters are preceded by a "Chapter Overview" – a short text which describes the contents and goals of each chapter and helps the reader to gradually interpret the relevance and application of the project. The introduction was written by David R. Hall, Associate Dean International at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquaire University (Australia) and a renowned scholar in the field. Hall updates the most relevant research on needs analysis, sums up the theoretical basis for the framework presented in the chapters which follow, and also provides the keys to understanding the contribution of the CEF Professional Profiles to the practice and research of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Chapter 1, titled "Needs analysis and the CEF Professional Profiles in ESP", explains the key role of needs analysis in ESP course design by providing a detailed account of how needs analysis has evolved to the present day and presenting a typology of research methods together with their benefits and disadvantages in the process of needs assessment. Section number three is important here as it outlines the CEF Professional Profiles project, gives an in-depth description of the methodology used for creating them and briefly presents the structure of the Profiles. The link between needs assessment and the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) is made clear here: each CEF Professional Profile is the outcome of a thorough needs analysis conducted among informant professionals and language teachers in four different professional fields, which uses a triangulation of data-gathering techniques (both quantitative and qualitative) and adopts the characteristic task-oriented framework contained in the CEFR.

Chapter 2, titled "From teaching Language for Specific Purposes to teaching Language and Communication for Professional Purposes", revisits ESP and, on the basis of the work undertaken for the development of the CEF Professional Profiles, adds two further defining characteristics to the construct: (i) ESP is evidence-based; and (ii) ESP is specific to professional purposes in that it concerns the dynamic communication practices of professional discourse communities. Here, the importance of the situational aspects of communication, rather than the

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language associated with particular professional groups, is highlighted and addressed, and language and communication are viewed together as "holistic communication situations" (p. 40). The acronym LCPP (Language and Communication for Professional Purposes) comes now into play and will be used throughout the whole book to refer to the purposeful interaction involving verbal and non-verbal communication in professional settings. LCPP and communication situations structure the following six parts of the CEF Professional Profiles specifying the target profession (Part A), providing relevant background information on the occupational field (Part B), giving information which accurately reflects professional practices (Part C), describing the professional communication situations in which communicative tasks have to be accomplished and prove to be most frequent (Part D) and most demanding (Part E), and offering "day-in-the-life" narratives (labelled "snapshots") of the target professionals (Part F).

Chapter 3, titled "Sample profile and its application: mechanical engineers", is central to the book as it contains the full sample of a Profile for the case of mechanical engineering students specializing in machine automation. It explains the Profile's development and describes in detail the six parts of which it is composed. More particularly, the grid in section 3.2 explains the background for the needs analysis and the methods and sources used in the process of collecting the information. The occupational information lists the typical professions/occupations/jobs as well as the typical organizations and companies to be employed in, with particular reference to the foreign languages requirements to perform such roles. The context information explores both the work and study contexts, and analyses them in terms of location, persons (communities, companies or institutions), communication situations and text- and discourse-types. Next, out of the nine situations explained, six have been identified and discussed as the most frequent and three as the most demanding. Lastly, a working day and a project manager's work are two snapshots that aim at offering the course designer an insight into the personalized experience of a representative mechanical engineer professional: a project manager in a waste management company.

Chapter 4, titled "From profiles to course activities: mechanical engineers", takes a step forward to explain how the contextual knowledge gained in the sample Profile can be used in the design of an ESP course for mechanical engineering students. It is above all a demonstration of how CEF Professional Profiles assist course design and how course participants can be co-designers in the process. The activities presented provide clear pointers to address participant communication needs, strengthen a professional communication identity, contribute to knowledge of the professional field, raise awareness of professional genres, consolidate one-to-one routine communication exchanges, and make use of complex simulations to mirror authentic workplace communication. All the activities are detailed in terms of description, professional and communication challenges, language aims, teacher input, procedure, learner output, learning

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outcomes, evaluations, language level required, preparation and materials, duration and suggestions for follow-up work. The photocopiable material supplementing each activity is also very useful for those practitioners in similar workplace contexts who are in need of developing classroom activities.

Chapter 5, titled "Creating your own CEF Professional Profile", is the final chapter and brings together clear instructions on how to create our own Professional Profiles from scratch. In the belief that creating a Profile may be very demanding at first, although worthwhile because the resulting document can be used as a template for several courses over time (with the corresponding updates as required by the local context), Huhta and colleagues supply here clear clues that will guide readers when tailoring a Profile informed by a preceding needs analysis. Such clues refer to the definition of the target group, the collection and processing of data or the varying applications of the resulting Profile.

A glossary of 47 relevant terms and three appendices complete the book. The appendices contain: a blank grid or ready-to-use template of a CEF Professional Profile (Appendix A); questions pertaining to the six parts of the Profiles and aimed at guiding practitioners when filling out the templates (Appendix B); and four sample Profiles that have been selected for four fields of expertise (business, healthcare and social services, law, and technology) and adapted from the mechanical engineer Professional Profile developed in chapters 3 and 4 together with the full list of Profiles developed under the CEF Professional Profiles Project (Appendix C) – this list can be accessed via the Proflang Association website <http://www.proflang.org/cef-professional-website-handboo/>. As the authors suggest, these four sample Profiles are useful to illustrate "how the teacher can modify the profile concept to his or her own needs" (p. 207).

Needs Analysis for Language Course Design. A Holistic Approach takes a step forward in the assessment of needs at the workplace for professional communication and envisages a second-generation analysis built on the concept of "task", rather than on learning or target needs and based on the input gathered from teachers and professionals. A shortcoming of this book may be that it is too ambitious when scrutinizing the process that leads to the development of the Profiles and, hence, it occasionally results in unnecessary repetitions. Also, readers are faced with a rather lean glossary when compared with the magnitude of the project and the list should contain explicit definitions to some other terms which become key to the book (e.g. "task" as a unit of assessment in a task-based analysis approach). Nevertheless, despite these minor points, it is a nicely readable study with two main assets: (i) the provision of a solid empirical basis together with hands-on guidance for conducting a needs analysis project and creating our own professional profiles that can be applied to the curriculum planning and the design of an ESP course (including activities and materials); (ii) the five sample profiles contained in the chapters and the appendices for the fields of mechanical engineering, business, healthcare and social services, law and technology.

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This book is not only targeted at ESP novice and experienced teachers and ESP course designers (as suggested in its introduction), but it will also be highly valuable to needs analysis researchers in any learning context (either occupational or academic). More particularly, it will be an invaluable resource to European language practitioners who have been forced to match their courses and teaching practices with the tenets of the CEFR in the wake of the European Space for Higher Education.

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