FROM TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES TO TEACHING LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

OD PODU AVANJA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA ZA POSEBNE NAMJENE DO PODU AVANJA JEZIKA ZA POTREBE PROFESIONALNOG KOMUNICIRANJA

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Abstract: *Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has always been a challenge for language teachers. Today, many professionals are expected to accomplish the tasks in their professional environment in the foreign language. This paper discusses the importance of tailor-made courses to fulfil learners' professional needs. It explains how a good language course can be developed by using the Common European Framework (CEF) Professional Profiles based on needs analysis with detailed instructions on how to use the profiles in course design.*

Keywords: *Common European Framework (CEF) Professional Profiles, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), course design, needs analysis*

Sažetak: *Suvremeni svijet tehnologije i globalizacije od stru njaka zahtijeva ne samo stru nost, nego i komunikaciju na stranom jeziku. Polaze i od te injenice, ovim radom željeli bismo ukazati na izazove s kojima se susre u nastavnici pri podu avanju engleskog jezika za posebne namjene te naglasiti zna enje pripreme nastavnih materijala prilago enih potrebama studenata.U radu je objašnjen na in oblikovanja takvog nastavnog materijala, uvažavaju i pri tome zahtjeve Zajedni koga europskog referentnog okvira za profile zanimanja koji analizira specifi ne potrebe za odre eni profil zanimanja te sadrži detaljne upute kako koristiti te profile za pripremu nastavnih materijala.*

Klju ne rije i: *Zajedni ki europski referentni okvir za profile zanimanja, engleski jezik za posebne namjene, izrada nastavnog materijala, analiza potreba*

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1. Introduction

One of the typical problems that language teachers face is how to design a course that is efficient and relevant, as well as tailor-made to cater to learners' professional needs. In professional and organisational contexts, language teachers lack the experience of such contexts and they cannot be expected to understand the heterogeneity in the workplace without a coherent analytical framework.

As a solution to the problem, the Common European Framework (CEF) Professional Profiles outline an evidence-based approach to needs analysis with detailed instructions on how to use the profiles for course planning and design. This is a practical manual on conducting a needs analysis in organizations instead of in lifelong language education. It is based on past models of needs analysis and creates a new, collaborative model for successful dealing with the demands of complex discourse world of the modern workplace.

The profiles are certainly of a great help for teachers, whose understanding of workplace communication will help in preparing the activities which are learner focused and connected with their professional experience, knowledge and practices. Teachers have become not just consumers of commercial textbooks but also material writers which means that they also took on the role of researcher:

The dividing lines in ESP between researchers and teachers, or curriculum designers, materials developers, and teachers, are frequently blurred. Since even the earliest days of ESP … practitioners have viewed assessment of specific needs as requiring research skills and creative approaches to novel situations. [1]

Despite the recognition of the dual researcher-teacher role in our own profession, the fact is that teachers operate with very restrictive time and funding constraints.

2. Needs analysis and the CEF Professional Profiles in ESP

Teaching ESP has always been characterised by a hands-on, communicative approach to language teaching. Learners are expected to accomplish tasks that they are familiar with from their professional environment in the foreign language. In this kind of language teaching and learning the task is brought to the forefront of the foreign language classroom. [2] [3]

The importance of tasks in language learning has also been highlighted by the Council of Europe in the document the Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). The action-oriented approach adopted by CEFR makes tasks central to language learning:

We speak of tasks in so far as the actions are performed by one or more individuals strategically using their own specific competences to achieve given results. The action-based approach therefore also takes into account the cognitive, emotional and volitional resources and the full range of abilities specific to and applied by the individuals as social agent.[4]

The main concern of action-oriented approach to course design is to enable the learners to use the foreign language to accomplish just those tasks that are of most relevance for their professional lives. At this point needs analysis is called for. It must

be clear whose needs we are interested in. It is obvious that not just one perspective or one context should be taken in consideration. Needs may be investigated from the perspective of teachers, learners or the employers who are funding the language course. Then within the learner group itself, perspectives on what can be learned, what should be learned and why will it differ from learner to learner. [5]

ESP learners vary and they will most frequently be adults or mature adolescent learners with diverse learning biographies.

As a starting point for needs analysis for ESP course, Robinson [5] views needs in ESP on three different levels: the micro-, the meso- and the macro-levels of need. Figure 1 illustrates these three levels with examples taken from ESP context of the middle manager in the medical equipment industry.
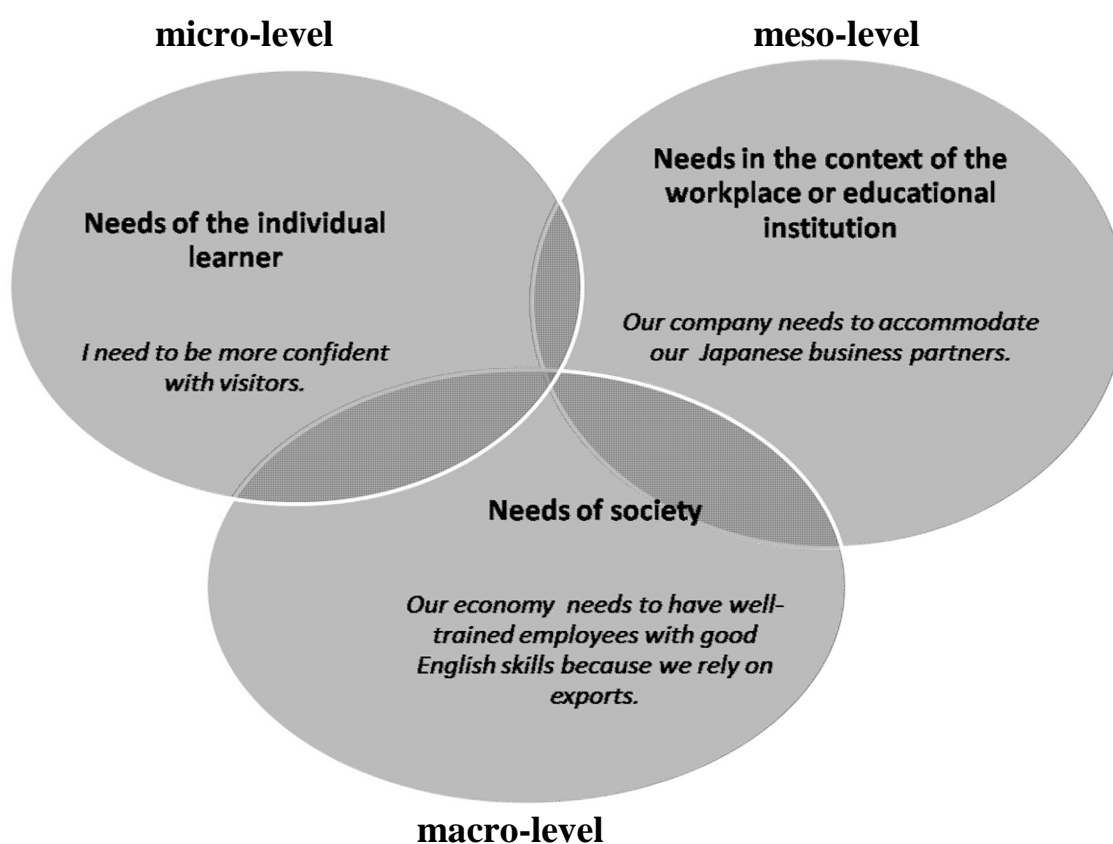

Figure 1: Needs in ESP on three different levels based on Robinson [5]

Robinson's description of needs can accommodate varied perspectives and sources of information which can be incorporated.

Careful insight into Robinson's meso- and macro- level of needs help to develop the CEF Professional Profiles. The basic aim of a CEF Professional Profile is to describe the language and communication needs of professionals at a level of detail good enough to create an effective ESP workplace training programme or vocationally oriented language course. We will suggest ways in which the results collected from the needs analysis of workplace communication can be represented in order to assist the teacher in recognising relevant course content accompanied by course activities.

3. The significance of situational aspects of communication

Our knowledge about the workplace communication has increased as a result of evidence-based needs analysis practice. In the 1970s and 1980s, the aim of needs analysis was mainly concerned with identifying potential language needs. The more recent needs analyses have moved towards the use of triangulated and mixed methods resulting in thick descriptions, where the communication of a discourse community, its professionals and interlocutors is explicitly documented for communication situations.[6] Descriptions such as CEF Professional Profiles help the ESP teacher to design content and plan activities.

The CEF Professional Profiles Project is based on series of needs analyses for industry and business conducted and developed since 1989 in Finnish and European projects.[6] The focus in these analyses has been on the objective needs of professional work communities, mainly of industry and business, but also law, social services and healthcare, and culture. One of the evidence-based needs analyses is the Prolang Project as a forerunner to the CEF Professional Profiles. [7] This project was the first needs analysis to inquire into the contexts of communicative events within the total communication of an employee. Between 1997 and 1999, the Prolang study examined the language and communication practices of 197 individuals working in sixty-nine different companies. The results of the study were in support of seeing language and communication as holistic communication situations.

4. Understanding of professional communication

The needs of learners are perceived in connection with the needs of the business or workplace in which the learner is based, which are in turn, seen from the point of view of social institutions, held together by communicative practices.[8] The communication includes the use of verbal and non-verbal communication. It is a medium of group interaction and it functions as a means for creating social reality in which decisions can be made. Communication occurs at workplaces, which are social institutions where resources are produced and regulated, problems are solved, identities are played out and professional knowledge is constituted. [8]

Boswood [9] claims that professional communication involves two things: communicating as a professional and communicating to a professional standard. He details his opinion with nine propositions describing professional discourse. According to Boswood a professional:
1. applies the body of knowledge by exercising a range of skills in an ethical manner;
2. is able to communicate within and across discourse boundaries;
3. is able to reflect critically on the workings of power through discourse;
4. has access to the technical, contextual and world knowledge necessary for communication within the communities concerned;

5. creatively uses the communicative resources of discourse communities to a standard that is recognised as exemplary;
6. applies knowledge and skills in accordance with codes of conduct which are recognised as ethical by communities;
7. is effective in reconciling and achieving multi-level purposes through communication;
8. can manage international and external organisational communication by defining and implementing communication policy;
9. seeks to develop himself/herself through active reflection on performance.

If we carefully consider the nine propositions, we realize that multiple perspectives need to be included in a needs analysis to describe professional communication in a given field: typical job descriptions, contexts, participants, locations, situation descriptions and texts.

5. CEFR used for CEF Professional Profile design

CEFR clearly references the context within which communication occurs. The field-specific language and communication profiles, which make up the CEF Professional Profiles Project were constructed using an extensive data-gathering process. Professionals working in companies and other organisations were interviewed, and language curricula of the institutes providing vocational and professional language studies were analysed. Professionals provided information on the specific situations in which they need languages in their workplace, and on the most frequent situations in which they are required to use the language. The results of the needs analyses were processed in a special format, the CEF Professional Profiles. Details on the data-collection methodology can be found in Huta. [6]

Each CEF Professional Profile consists of six parts. The first part (Part A) presents an overview of the professional field while each subsequent section provides more detailed description of the professional language and communication found in that domain (Part B - Occupational information, Part C - Context information, Part D – The most frequent situations, Part E – The most demanding situations and Part F – Snapshots). These six different parts of the profile were matched against the comprehensive descriptions found in CEFR.

The CEF Professional Profiles provide teachers with knowledge on the communication situations of various professions, by describing discourse communities and their communicative events. It is obvious that the content of ESP course should be based on evidence, not on teachers' intuition.

6. Creating your own CEF Professional Profile

Creating a profile requires a considerable amount of time and effort, but it results in shorter language learning times since the language and communication needs are directly targeted.

New profiles can be re-used, updated or modified for specific variations and teachers can use the profile for several courses and if regularly updated they can also function as course material.

Creating a Professional Profile involves five basic steps:

       1 considering the depth and coverage of your profile
       2 defining the target group
       3 collecting data
       4 processing the data for the profile
       5 applying the profile

The basic template for creating a Professional Profile should be considered as a flexible set of guidelines which will help teachers in shaping their courses. A flexible approach also makes it possible for the profile to be updated over time. The course designers should review the examples of the profiles of several researchers to see how they made practical decisions about the depth and coverage of the needs analysis conducted for the profile.

The next step is to define the target group for the needs analysis which will inform the profile. When the target group has been defined, the course designer has to decide who the key informants for communication in the professional field will be. The best situation is to gain access to professionals working in the field.

After that follows collecting data. A useful step in data-collecting process is to do a search of the Internet for background information on the target profession. Teachers with experience in the target profession can give valuable information as well as former students now working in the profession.

Then when the data has been collected it needs to be processed and the document revised. Finally, when a Professional Profile has been created it can be used keeping in mind that it is a flexible document that will probably be modified.

7. Conclusion

Most language teachers realize that they lack the experience of the social and linguistic complexity of the workplace when they have to design a course that will meet the needs of their students.

This paper can serve as a framework for teachers and course designers that will help them to form the basis for the design of professionally orientated course with suitable learning activities.

Furthermore, we conclude that ESP should be redirected towards training in communication for professional purposes in which the foreign language arises. The purposes will be defined by the demands of the specific workplace context. The ESP teacher collects data on the most relevant communication situation by building up a

description in the needs analysis. An effective needs analysis determines what communicative tasks the learners have to accomplish and what discourses they have to know in order to function in their profession. The CEF Professional Profiles provide a suitable framework for such a description. Each profile that the analysts produced for the project consists of information about typical working-life organisations, professions/occupations and jobs descriptions in the field. The existing profiles can be used for our target profession. If they are not an exact match, they should be adapted and reviewed within the local context. The following step is to design a course syllabus. After that, learning activities and materials should be designed. Finally, the learners' progress should be assessed and evaluated so that they can reflect on and analyse their own performance, and the performance of others in relevant communication situations. The final result should be the promotion of professional communication competences that will help the learner to build a greater self-awareness of himself or herself as a professional in the field.

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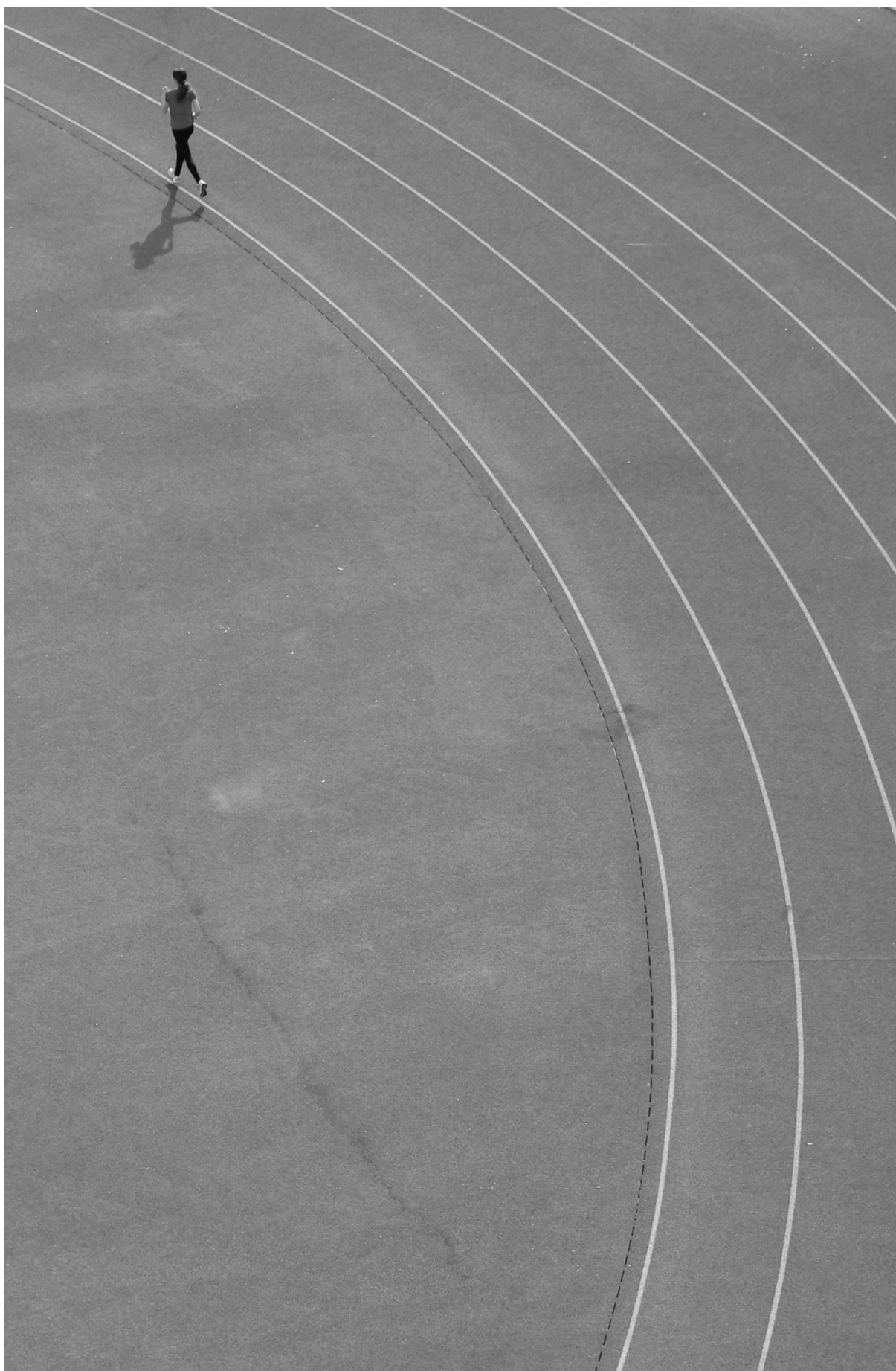
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