Handbook of Business Communication

Linguistic Approaches

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DE GRUYTER
MOUTON

Boston / Berlin 2017

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1 Introduction: Changing language needs in a globalised economy

Although business has always been to some extent internationally oriented, the globalisation phenomena which we have been confronted with since the end of the 20th century have brought along new communicative scenarios and a series of potential "language challenges". Thus we might ask, from the perspective of the organisation, which language(s) companies need for communicating with their clients and stakeholders or which language(s) multinational companies choose for their internal communication, or, from that of the individual, which language(s) managers and employees have to master in order to cope with their daily professional requirements. In the context of these questions, we can observe a tradition of so called "language needs analyses". Some of these have didactic aims, such as defining learning targets for specific language learners or learner groups. In others, the focus may fall on language policy and planning in organisations and companies (either individually or within a certain geographical area). This chapter will give a typological overview of definitions of "language needs" (of companies, of individuals, etc.), as well as describe the types, methods, potential and limits of language needs analyses. In our conclusion, we will highlight the important role of language policies in the business context and for language needs issues, thus leading into Chapter 13, which is dedicated to language policies and practices in business.

2 Language needs: Definitions and typology, learners' vs. business perspective

Before dealing with the existing definitions of *language needs*, we will take a closer look at the different meanings of *need(s)* in general. This word is used as a technical

DOI 10.1515/9781614514862-012

term in a series of disciplines. In psychology, for example, the famous "hierarchy of needs" (Maslow 1970) defines needs as goals that are yet to be satisfied. This disjunction creates tensions and hence motivates people to put effort into meeting the unattained goals. And in business studies, various types of needs – business, consumer, staff and training – are all of central importance. According to Schuler (1992: 19), "strategic business needs [...] reflect management's overall plan for survival, growth, adaptability, and profitability". In marketing, "consumer needs" are supposed to be studied and analysed carefully in order to ensure their satisfaction. In human resource management, "staff needs" relate to the difference between the future and current number of staff required by an organisation, in quantitative terms; "training needs", in contrast, refer to the qualitative aspect of staff needs, from both individual and organisational perspectives (Berthel and Becker 2013: 298–311; Bruhn 2014: 13–25). In general, business studies scholars distinguish between individual needs (i.e., individual wants) and organisational needs (i.e., demands, goals and requirements of the organisation).

Despite the widespread use of the term *needs* in academic language, as yet no general approach has emerged that would summarise and differentiate all its existing and potential usages in the various scientific communities. At first sight, the Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.) are not of a great help either. They define the noun *need* as a "thing that is wanted or required". The entry on the corresponding verb *to need* seems more precise: "to require (something) because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable". This would suggest, for example, that having every manager speak twenty languages would not be a *need* in the narrower sense since, although perhaps "desirable", this could hardly be seen as necessary or even important.

From a social-constructionist point of view, of course, "necessary" and "desirable" lie at two ends of a continuum. Moreover, a specific group that decides on its needs (language or other) simultaneously decides, at least implicitly, on their own understanding of "need". The discourse about (language) needs not only describes but also co-constitutes them. Hence in this sense language needs can only be assessed subjectively. Nevertheless, we can have recourse to other, more "objective" data such as turnover in a certain national market. It is in this light that Vandermeeren (2005: 162) distinguishes between the objective and subjective language needs of businesses by means of the following criteria: "frequency of contact with a certain country indicates *objective need*, [whereas] informants' perception of foreign language need indicates *subjective need*".

The distinction between "subjective" and "objective" needs has been defined not only for companies but also for language learners (cf. Brindley 1989: 70). Thus, "to be more confident when dealing with visitors from abroad" is an example of a subjective need, as distinguished from the objective need "to be able to show visitors around" (Huhta et al. 2013: 12). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) differentiate between "target needs" and "learning needs". According to them, the former are the skills to be achieved, while the latter comprise the steps necessary to acquire those skills. Berwick (1989: 55) distinguishes between "felt needs" and "perceived needs", as learners are often aware of only some of their learning requirements (or have false expectations in general) and depend on teachers or language planners to provide a more realistic assessment.

Another important point to address is the distinction between met and unmet needs. In effect, a "need" is very often seen as something that is still missing: "The gap between what is and what should be" (Brindley 1989: 65). But, for instance, the sentence *I need glasses for reading* can be uttered either by a person who has never possessed glasses or by one wearing a pair at the moment of happily reading a newspaper. Thus a need remains a need even when it is momentarily met/satisfied. (Terminologically speaking, in motivational theory – Maslow 1970 – *satisfied* is preferred, whereas applied linguists – Vandermeeren 1998 and 2005 – prefer the expression *met needs*.) These reflections suggest that there is a broad overlap between what, in business, are considered to be language policies and practices, and what are regarded as language needs. In fact, people in general do what they do because of their necessities. So if you look at what they do, you will know largely what their needs are. In other words, practices can also be regarded – from a needs perspective – as a certain set of needs being met (if this were not the case, businesses would not function). But there will always be some needs that are not met, in part or in full. These are what some tend to consider as "real" needs, being more salient in that they generate a requirement to act differently from before.

We want to emphasise that between a met and an unmet language need in a company, there is usually a scale of half tones and intermediate stages, among which are located the so-called survival and threshold levels. Suppose, for example, that complicated technical details must be explained to a Russian customer. Having this done by an employee who speaks severely broken Russian, supported by body gestures, is certainly not the ideal solution. But it might be the cheapest one (cost/benefit, or efficiency aspect), and it might work sufficiently well to get the job done (effectiveness aspect), albeit with some mishaps, misunderstandings, and the use of trial and error. In this case, the language needs are certainly not met completely. We could say that the situation is characterised by a certain portion of communication needs being met, whereas another (important) portion remains unmet.

Among unmet language needs, some may be clearly perceived by the participants, while others remain unperceived. (We prefer the terms *perceived* / *unperceived* to the dichotomy *conscious* / *unconscious* employed by Vandermeeren 2005, because the latter carries a certain psychological connotation.) According to Vandermeeren (2005: 162), an unperceived need exists if "[c]ompanies who are in regular business contact with a certain country [...] claim that it is not or only occasionally necessary for them to use that country's language". However, if a language need is unperceived, who may decide, and on what grounds, whether it really exists? This question is highly relevant for research methodology (as addressed in Section 4 below).

Be they objective or subjective, met or unmet, perceived or unperceived, (business) language needs can be considered and studied from various different angles. We first have to decide which languages are considered as "necessary", and then, in further steps, which specific language competences and proficiency levels are "needed" (and: by whom, when, where, in what situation. . .). In doing so, we must also choose the perspective(s) we are interested in (following and adapting Huhta et al. 2013: 13) and define whose needs we are referring to: those of an individual (the user/speaker/learner/single employee), of a group (of learners, of professionals, etc.), of the workplace/company/organisation; or even those of the whole country or society. And we might then also ask who defines each of these needs, and how the different types and levels of needs correlate.

For the most part, current linguistic-didactical definitions of "language needs" only take into account a single perspective, namely that of the individual as language learner, or of language learners as a homogeneous group, for whom a curriculum is to be designed. See for example both Richterich's seminal work from 1972 and Richterich and Chancerel (1978), as well as the Council of Europe's definition of "language needs" that builds upon their work: "[T]his term refers to the linguistic resources which learners need in order successfully to cope with the forms of communication in which they are going to be involved"[1] (Council of Europe s.a.). "Linguistic resources" in this sense can be understood either as a certain level of specific language and communication competences in a given language, or as the languages themselves, although most definitions of "language needs" do not consider the latter. Actually, "needs" typically refer to those necessities that arise after a given language has already been chosen. See, for example, one of the earliest definitions by Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54), who imply that a language has already been chosen before they define "language needs" as "the ability to comprehend and/or produce the linguistic features of the target situation".

This reference to the "target situation" tells us that in a language needs analysis, the first step (following the selection of a language) is to determine in which target situation(s) learners are likely to use the chosen language. The next is to list the linguistic tools that are commonly used in such situations. Thus the text by the Council of Europe quoted above states further: "These needs (and hence these communication situations) are identified as part of a specific process which consists of gathering together the information required to assess what uses will actually be made of the language learnt and thereby determine what types of content should be taught

1 The Council of Europe goes on to specify: "in the short or medium term". This limitation of language needs to the short and medium term does not utterly convince us, as it is well known that curricula for schools, in particular, have to take into account the long term as well. And even for companies, a long-term needs analysis is certainly beneficial and may well be necessary as a basis for drawing up long-term language policies (see Chapter 13 on language policies and practices).

on a priority basis." (Council of Europe s.a.). As mentioned previously, the perspective expressed in such definitions is clearly that of an individual learner or of a language class tailored to learners' needs, which makes analysis of such needs primarily a part of, or a prerequisite for the design of curricula for specific learner groups (see below, Section 5).

As far as the professional language needs of companies or organisations are concerned, the target situations are determined by the activities in which a particular company engages or by the tasks typical of certain positions in a particular organisation. Therefore, language needs analysis must also take into account the perspective of an individual company. This does not necessarily imply the design of a curriculum for an internal language course; apart from staff training, there are other ways to react to a language need detected in the enterprise (e.g., by recruiting new staff, by purchasing additional language services, by delegating the language problem to subsidiary companies, by standardisation in the form of a lingua franca; see also Chapter 13 on language policies and practices). If the needs analysis is carried out at the enterprise's own request, it can take the form of a "language audit" (or "linguistic audit", see, e.g., Reeves and Wright 1996; Koster 2004). Alternatively, the initiative may come from outside the company – from a national or supranational body, or a research institution. In such a case, the resultant studies may be less concerned with possible applications and may be conducted out of sheer scientific curiosity.

With regard to methodology, we can find single case studies that use interviews and/or participant observation; here, of course, a number of similar studies will be necessary if general conclusions are to be drawn. On the other hand, some large, questionnaire-based studies have been conducted with the aim of providing an overview of the language needs in a certain geographical area (sometimes only for companies of a certain size or a particular sector). For more details, see Section 4 below. Both these methods have a common goal and allow the following rough definition of *language needs* (*analysis*) as seen by companies/organisations: (the study of) those languages that are and/or should be used in organisations (companies, etc.) to meet their internal and external communication requirements, in terms of language/variety choice, level of competence, and tasks/situations to be covered. Clearly, the learner-oriented and organisation-oriented aspects of language needs analysis are closely connected. For instance, the results of a needs analysis based on organisations' needs should have an impact on the curriculum design of language courses in schools, universities, etc., as well as on national and/or local language policies.

In both perspectives, we have to deal with a hierarchy of layers, of strata. First, there is the layer of teaching/learning contexts. An individual who learns a language, or who uses it in her/his profession, can be ascribed certain types of needs, At the same time, in more abstract terms, there are also the needs of whole groups of learners, of a class or course, or even of larger social groups such as college students in general, students of business colleges and business schools, language or translation students, etc. However, the language needs of individuals and groups can also be envisaged outside teaching/learning contexts. For example, a second – more private – hierarchy comprises language needs in families, in neighbourhoods, in peer groups and in other social, political or religious environments. A third hierarchy is work-based and ranges from the language needs of a particular position to those of a whole department, of a company, of a corporate group, of an economic sector, of the whole economy, etc. Fourth, from a geographical perspective, one may be interested in the language needs of a certain district, of a city, a region and a whole country. Last but not least, it is also possible to transcend the level of a single country and take into account supranational entities, such as the EU. On this level too, all four hierarchies mentioned can be found (the learning, the private, the work-based/economic, and the geographical; see Table 12.1).

Furthermore, we must take into account the fact that language needs are widely diversified on all levels, from the individual to the supra-individual, organisational, etc. Different languages, language registers and partial competences may be relevant for different communication situations or domains. In sociolinguistics, the term *domain* was introduced by Joshua Fishman (1972) to denote a type of human activity or situation – classified according to the criteria place, role-relationship and topic – that correlates with a certain language, variety or register choice. Thus one and the same individual or group might speak one language or variant in religious contexts, another in the family, a third at school or work and yet another in the peer group or among friends. The existence of such domains explains many of the code switches and code choices that occur in any kind of speech community. This "domain" approach is the "practices" correlate of what we describe here under a "needs" perspective. Table 12.1 gives an overview of the various perspectives and levels. Note that distinctions between different items are not always clear-cut and that the table is not meant to be exhaustive.

An example can serve to illustrate the interrelations between the various perspectives and levels of language needs in business contexts described above (individual/organisation/national economy). Many companies have a general demand for English-language skills, which translates into a corresponding demand for, and interest in, English language education among "individual" secondary school students. This, in turn, makes it necessary to develop language policies on a national level, such as the incorporation of English language classes in secondary and tertiary education. In many cases, however, the relationship between business demands, educational offers and individual interests is more complex, as is illustrated by an example from the Austrian context. In Austria, French is still the most frequently taught second foreign language, followed by Italian and Spanish. Although interest in Spanish has increased over the last few decades, it is offered as an option only in some schools, and there mostly as a third language (Bäck 2004: 163). These arrangements reflect the fact that Austria trades more with French-speaking countries than

Table 12.1: Factors influencing language needs: Perspectives and levels

Perspectives → Levels ↓	Learners' Perspectives	Private & Social Perspectives	Job & Work Perspectives	Geographical Perspectives
Individual	learner	human being, citizen	employee, manager	resident/inhabitant
Group	school class, students in a language class	family, friends, neighbours	department, members of a project team, board of directors, works council	neighbourhood, rural community
Organisation	educational institution (e.g., school, university)	specific social group, subculture	company	town/city, rural district
Several similar organisations	all secondary schools, all universities in a country	social classes, lifestyles, etc.	business sector	region, federal provinces/states
State, Society	education system of a country	society	economy of a country	territory of a country
Supranational (Europe)	education policy of the EU	EU as a societal actor	EU as an economic actor	EU territory as a geographical unit

with the Spanish-speaking world, but not Italy's position as a more important trading partner than either group (Bäck 2004: 130). At the same time, Eastern European countries – four of which actually border on Austria – are very important partners with which no single language can be used to facilitate communication. But the various "Eastern" languages play only a minor role in the Austrian education system, which seems disadvantageous in economic terms (even if bilingual migrants from these countries meet a part of the Austrian economy's language needs).

In the end, the crucial factors in school- or university-related language decisions are not restricted to the economic potential of a certain language or, to put it another way, needs analyses are not inspired by economic considerations alone. Demand and supply on the "language market" (Stegu 2008) are determined not only by economic or work-related interest in particular languages, but also (fortunately!) by the demands of leisure-related and everyday communication, not to mention culture, educational background, tourist interests, etc.

At the state level, language options in secondary schools (which of themselves affect individual pupils' decisions) are likely to be influenced by other aspects of current circumstances in the country's education systems. To return to Austria, one such aspect would be the lack of teachers of "Eastern" languages and the excessive number of state-employed French teachers who cannot simply be dismissed for legal reasons. However, private interests or systematic pressures in educational policy are not the focus of this chapter. In the following sections, we turn instead to the particular language needs that arise in business contexts and the methods used to determine them.

3 Language needs in business and in companies

The most fundamental question to be asked in assessing language needs in business is, quite simply: Which language(s) is/are needed? The next relates to competences and levels: "Is there a need for oral or written competences, active or receptive, and on which level of the CEFR [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages], A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 or C2?" (Council of Europe 2011). An even more sophisticated variant would be task-oriented, inquiring about the specific situation types and language acts the learner will have to perform (answering phone calls, writing mails, negotiating, etc.). As regards the possible answers, the need may be for one language, for two languages or for several (for all learners or for specific groups). In the last two cases, the same skills may be seen as useful in all languages or requirements may differ ("We need language A for task X, language B [only] for task Y, etc."). For example, English language skills are frequently expected to be very well-developed and comprehensive, whereas in other languages receptive competences, or the ability to make small talk, may be regarded as sufficient. Of course, views may vary within an organisation between positions or departments. This leads to the questions of who needs which skills, in which languages, and for which tasks.

As an example of a needs-analysis study in the business realm we will cite here the ELAN study (ELAN 2006a) carried out on behalf of the European Union. Using questionnaires, it investigated a representative sample of 2000 export-oriented small and medium sized businesses located in a total of 29 EU, EEA and candidate countries. The focus on SMEs was an innovative approach. ELAN also stands out because it gives actual figures for language needs, which are then extrapolated to the whole of the EU economy. The title of the study – "Effects on the European economy of shortages of foreign language skills in enterprise" – suggests that the questions were focused on problems and barriers of a linguistic nature. Below are some quotes summarising the key findings:

> The survey of SMEs found that a significant amount of business is being lost as a result of lack of language skills. Across the sample of nearly 2000 businesses, 11% of respondents (195 SMEs) had lost a contract as a result of lack of language skills. [...] If the proportion of businesses losing trade through lack of language skills were repeated across the whole EU exporting SME sector, we could calculate conservatively that at least 945,000 European SMEs may be losing trade as a result of lack of language competence. The average loss per business over a three year period is € 325,000. (ELAN 2006a: 5)

> Recruiting native speakers with language skills appears to be widely used as a language management technique, with 22% of businesses drawing on this resource. [...] There was varied practice in the use of translators and interpreters – between 4% (Ireland) and 84% (Lithuania) of businesses per country. [...] The use of local agents tends to be a recourse of smaller businesses lacking the investment resource to appoint additional staff themselves to service the requirements of a new market. (ELAN 2006a: 5–6)

> A high proportion of businesses (48% across the sample) claimed to offer language training to their staff [...]. The proportions drop, however, when businesses are asked whether they have undertaken training (as opposed to offering training) in the previous three years. [...] However, both small and large companies say they prefer to recruit staff who already have language skills rather than having to invest in training. (ELAN 2006a: 6)

> English is a key language for gaining access to export markets. However, the survey results suggest that the picture is far more complex than the much-quoted view that English is the world language. Russian is extensively used in Eastern Europe as a lingua franca (along with German and Polish). French is used to trade in areas of Africa and Spanish is used similarly in Latin America. Longer-term business partnerships depend upon relationship-building and relationship-management. To achieve this, cultural and linguistic knowledge of the target country are essential." (ELAN 2006b: 1)[2]

In general, we can assert that the great majority of studies of language needs and policies, and especially those which claim to be prescriptive, are characterised by a very restricted focus. The prototypical company in mind when language questions are investigated is, as to be expected, a large industrial internationally-oriented company. The questions asked relate almost exclusively to language needs in external communication, and above all in exporting (i.e., selling) rather than importing. In this context, the studies inquire about the languages of core international clients and the way companies cope with the resultant needs. Even in multinational businesses, internal communication is rarely investigated, particularly in production contexts. Moreover, most of the studies that do exist have been of situations where a "corporate language" is to be introduced – usually English, and following a merger or acquisition. This situation is salient because it tends to create massive short-term language needs and thus momentarily places the language question centre stage (see, e.g., Ammon 1996; Truchot 2001; Vollstedt 2002; Lüdi and Heiniger 2005; Nekula, Nekvapil, and Šichová 2005; Nekvapil and Nekula 2006; Leeb 2007; Millar and Jensen 2009; Nekula, Marx, and Šichová 2009; Truchot and Huck 2009; Groot 2012).

This limited focus – big company, industrial, international – urgently requires to be corrected and widened. Small and medium-sized companies, which in many countries make up the major part of the economy, also have international connections and thus language needs, as demonstrated by ELAN. The same is true of service companies (in tourism, insurance, bank, transport sectors, etc.) that deal with their clients personally, a situation which creates multiple, highly complex language needs. Moreover, languages can be crucial in importing as well as exporting. As for internal business communication, discrepancies may arise between a company's official language policy (often "English only") and the complex, multifaceted reality of language practice (see Lavric 2012). Interesting issues can also be found in the

2 As *language* skills must always be complemented by *intercultural* skills, both individuals and organisations certainly have "intercultural needs" as well. For a detailed discussion of intercultural business communication, see Chapter 11.

much neglected production area, for example when foreign staff are employed or when all production is relocated to a country with a different language.

4 Language needs analyses in business: Methodologies

Long (2005) discusses language needs analysis in great detail, without focusing specifically on businesses. His study presents a list of "procedures" and related references: non-expert intuitions; expert practitioner intuitions; unstructured interviews; structured interviews; interview schedules; survey and questionnaires; language audits; ethnographic methods; participant observation; classroom observation; diaries, journals, and logs; role-plays, simulations; content analysis; discourse analysis; register/rhetorical analysis; computer aided corpus analysis; genre analysis; task-based, criterion-referenced performance tests; triangulated methods. This collection lists, in a non-systematic way, terms and methods used by a whole range of authors. However, Long later provides a more structured overview of the advantages and disadvantages of various qualitative and quantitative approaches. Not surprisingly, he suggests a mixed-methods strategy (i.e. triangulation), as is common in other fields, and recommends that both language and business experts be included in the process (Long 2005: 32–34).

In the following, we present our own overview of the major research methods for establishing language needs in companies, as well as a discussion of their respective advantages and drawbacks. We will concentrate on needs from the business perspective and focus on the most important current methodological approaches:

A. *Quantitative studies* based on *questionnaires*, usually covering very large samples of companies (in one country, or a group of countries), among which we would like to highlight Hagen (1999a and b) and Vandermeeren (1998), both European in scope. Other researchers focus, for example, on small and medium size businesses (ELAN 2006a), on a certain language or a certain economic area (e.g., Austria, see Archan and Dornmayr 2006), or on both a language and an economic area (see Minkkinen and Reuter 2001; Reuter 2003: German in Scandinavian countries). The great advantage of this type of studies is their breadth, which enables statistical conclusions to be drawn and numerical comparisons between different languages and regions to be made. Their major drawback is a degree of superficiality, as it is rarely possible to ask deeper questions or to take into account respondents' individual experiences and interpretations.

B. *Case studies* in the form of *qualitative interviews*. These have been conducted above all by Lavric (2008) and (2009a) and her students: see Bäck's (2004) Ph.D. dissertation, Mrázová's (2005) Master's thesis and the contributions to the collective volume Lavric (2009b). This method allows researchers to go into greater depth,

while making it harder to provide quantitative results. Its success depends heavily on the choice of interview partners in companies, as well as the precise formulation of questions and a skilful interview technique. The method gains in representativeness and, to some extent, allows more general conclusions to be drawn if several case studies are conducted using similar methods and comparable questions in a relatively large sample of businesses. In the case of Lavric and her students (see above), the sample included thirty companies covering a broad range of sizes and industries. A special type of case study is the language audit (or linguistic audit), which is peculiar in its client and its aim. Here, a company asks a consulting firm to conduct a survey about the languages needed, asking first who in the enterprise needs which language, when, and for what task(s), and then how the corporate language policy can be optimised. This approach does not necessarily mean that more language needs will be covered; it might, for example, be aimed at cutting language-related costs (see Reeves and Wright 1996; Koster 2004, quoted in Millar, Cifuentes, and Jensen 2012).

Some scholars have tried to overcome the possible shortcomings inherent in choosing between a quantitative and a qualitative methodology, and to obtain a more realistic assessment of what is actually needed in the workplace. This has led to the development of "blended needs analysis" (Lung 2014). Based on Bhatia's (2012) critical genre analysis – an approach which attempts to be multi-perspective and multi-dimensional at the same time – this combines different methodologies, such as surveys, language audits, text analysis and interviews in order to gather information from the reflections of specialist informants (see also the end of this chapter and our remark concerning triangulation).

Nevertheless, all these different methods or combinations of methods raise the question of whether it is really possible to establish language needs "objectively" (see above, Section 2). Indeed, any statement about such needs seems to involve a certain degree of subjectiveness (see also Vandermeeren 1998: 159 and 2005: 160). Questionnaires and interviews cannot establish language needs as facts; they can only generate utterances and subjective opinions about them. As Vandermeeren (2005: 160) states: "A respondent's claim that his/her company has foreign language need [sic] originates in his/her attitudes towards the use, acquisition and perfection of foreign languages". Effective analysis requires knowledge of who answers questions about needs, their degree of expertise,[3] and the experiences and personal language biography that lie behind their claims. It can reasonably be expected that a multilingual person will see language skills as more "necessary" than someone who speaks only English, and has, as they see it, always got by with this single

3 It is difficult to define the qualifications needed for someone to count as an expert in language needs. "Folk conceptions" often play an important role. The distinction between "folk linguistics" and "academic linguistics" is a problematic one (see Wilton and Stegu 2011). But linguistic laypeople, which most managers can be expected to be, and linguists are likely to differ on some aspects.

lingua franca. These observations can be summed up, in slightly exaggerated form, in the claim that every (successful) manager is convinced that their specific approach to the language issue is optimal – even if some approaches may seem somewhat odd (Lavric 2008: 161).

In light of the above, we can see that research methods A and B share a common methodological weakness: they are more or less "self-report methods", which are therefore liable to considerable bias. They identify, not real language needs (or practices), but the perception/representation/construction of those needs by respondents. This self-report bias should, at least, be borne in mind by researchers using the two methods.[4]

C. One way to override self-report bias, at least partly, is to employ one of the many research methods based on *observation* or *participant observation*, for example, case studies where the researcher him/herself works in the company that he/she is studying. But even here results may be influenced by a certain amount of subjectivity, that of the researcher. Greater objectivity can be achieved with recording methods, where recording can be done either by the researcher or by those recorded (see below, D). This brings us to the *language-diary* method developed by Bürkli (1999) in her study of code-switching between standard German and different varieties of Swiss dialect in a large Swiss firm. It has been adopted by some of Lavric's students, especially by Mrázová (see Mrázová 2005 and 2009), whose studies are also notable because the author presents her results in the form of a "*logogram*", a kind of a sociogram applied to language issues – in other words, a graphic representation of the language choices made by a single employee in her dealings with all her various professional contacts.

Just as much as language needs in companies and organisations, the qualitative methods discussed in the last paragraph actually serve to investigate language policies and practices, which once more underlines the interrelatedness of the "needs" and the "policies and practices" concepts: as we have seen above, language needs can be viewed in a double sense, those yet to be met and those already met. As a measure of the latter type we can reasonably take the actual language practices in a company or organisation. But in order to determine where an "unmet language need" exists, questions must be asked about communication problems or potential contracts that were lost, as, for example, the ELAN study did. Alternatively, questions can be posed about future developments that will require additional language competences. Company representatives are in general willing to answer such questions, but their responses will relate only to "perceived language needs".

4 See Millar, Cifuentes, and Jensen (2012), as well as the publications issued by Lüdi in the DYLAN-project, for example, Lüdi et al. (2009). They deliberately do not speak of language needs *per se*, but of "representations", of "discourse" uttered by certain people about perceived language needs.

How, then, can "unperceived language needs" be approached and acknowledged? In that regard, it is possible to adopt a fundamentally sceptical position and ask whether a researcher has the right to decree, from his/her expert perspective, the existence of an unperceived language need in a particular company. That leads us to the very heart of the "perceived-unperceived" or, as some authors might argue, of the "conscious-unconscious needs" dichotomy. The assertion that language needs exist but are not perceived might also be seen as deriving from the researcher's imposition on the situation of a view favourable to multilingualism. Let us posit the case of a company that has regular commercial contacts with a certain language area and complains about related communication problems and contract losses. Among multilingualism researchers, there might be broad consensus that – to apply Vandermeeren's (2005: 162) criterion – the firm has an unconscious (in our terminology: unperceived) and unmet language need, even if the respondents themselves assign their difficulties to a lack of English skills on the part of foreign business contacts. Yet, should the costs of an appropriate language investment outweigh the benefits, the company would however be acting in a very rational way. Be that as it may, language practices are likely to be suboptimal in some companies, and experts, researchers or simply rational outsiders can, by asking the right questions, potentially identify and diagnose such unmet and unperceived business language needs.

D. Last but not least, this survey of needs analysis methods must include those – particularly "objective" – methods that employ *audio or video recordings* of certain (business) communication situations, and their *transcription and analysis*. See the literature relating to business meetings (cf. Handford 2010 and Chapter 6 of this handbook) which has to cope with the problem of data confidentiality and is therefore constrained, in many cases, to have recourse to role play and non-authentic communication data. Unfortunately, in this research field questions of language practice and choice are hardly ever taken into account (for one of the few exceptions, see Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1998). In addition, the complexity of these methods means that they can produce only case-specific results with very little potential for generalisation. Admittedly, the results are analysed in great detail, often in data sessions that involve whole groups of researchers (and are thus more "objective" than observation by a single researcher). But these studies deal essentially with practices rather than needs. They might illustrate a language need that has been met but will hardly ever be able to uncover an unmet one.

All in all, it appears to be difficult to define and investigate language needs in companies and organisations independently of language policies and practices – even more so when the aim is "objectivity". Nevertheless, the methods mentioned under A can provide numbers and statistics, while those discussed in B to D yield a multitude of relevant examples, observations and evidence. There is no doubt that the most complete research results would be obtained by combining as many methods as possible. However, this approach, which is often referred to as "triangulation", can rarely be applied thoroughly, partly for practical reasons. What is more, some puristic scholars object to it on principle, because of fundamental epistemological considerations (cf. Flick 2004; from a critical perspective already Blaikie 1991).

5 Language needs and teaching and learning of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP)

In contrast to businesses' language needs, those of individuals or learner groups – which will often relate to business generally or to a specific job or professional area – seem more accessible and easier to research. In this context, needs analyses – using surveys, interviews and, less frequently, observation – are often conducted with the aim of improving and targeting language learning (including learning of technical language and job-specific jargon). The results obtained will gain in precision, the more precisely the work environment and tasks of the person or group concerned are defined. The ideal situation in this sense is one where the individual(s) in question already work(s) in a specific workplace, for example, when a company organises language courses for groups of employees or one-on-one language classes for specific employees.

In such cases, the language to be learned is often predefined. All that remains to be ascertained in order to design teaching materials is the relevant "tasks", i.e. the situations expected to be encountered and the communicative acts to be performed within them. Examples of this strategy are the "Deutsch für Ballkünstler" German course for footballers (Wiemann 2003; Repplinger 2005) or the EU's VinoLingua project (VinoLingua 2009), which designed materials for winegrowers wishing to learn German, French, Italian or Spanish. In the latter case, a preliminary needs analysis showed that there was one core situation/activity to be covered, i.e., wine tasting, and two relevant contexts: a visit by a client or group of clients to the winegrower's vineyard, and his/her participation in a wine fair.

Language choice is also predetermined in training employees who are expected to work closely with people from a particular language area. In this case, the crucial point is to identify those skills in the language concerned that will be especially useful and seem especially relevant to the anticipated tasks. The simplicity/complexity of formulating precise needs also depends on the time frame. While language preparation courses for a short-term stay abroad can be highly targeted, that is not possible if future professional tasks cannot be predicted with any precision. Secondary and tertiary education is a good example of this latter situation.

In these contexts, learners often seek, and expect to be prepared for, the realities of "business" and, understandably, want to acquire language skills they will need in the long term. Similarly, companies may desire job applicants who already possess certain indispensable, general skills, whereas complementary specific skills can be

acquired on the job. In cases where it is impossible to predict the exact communicative skills that secondary and higher education (business) students will need in their professional future, determining language needs and crucial "tasks" is much more intricate. Moreover, the choice of a language in addition to English is also difficult: how can a 14-year-old student (or a 20-year-old undergraduate) be expected to know which language(s) might one day become important for them? Such a case not only tests the limits of needs analysis; it also requires a different understanding of learners' needs, since every newly learned language helps to broaden the learner's perspective(s) about the world and their intercultural competence. In addition, they will acquire techniques they may later be able to use for learning further languages. Finally, the choice of language(s) made during education can often – and hopefully – become a "self-fulfilling prophecy" with regard to language needs. Former students may deliberately look for – and find – jobs that require and enable them to use their language skills. Interestingly, according to Lavric (1991: 375–376), this scenario is more probable the better the skills in the language concerned.

Evidently, it is impossible to predict the concrete communicative purposes for which different foreign languages might be employed in the future. Yet business surveys geared at identifying necessary "tasks" can bring to light particular core skills that are crucial in almost all (office) work environments (e.g., making phone calls, participating in business meetings, writing emails) or that are closely related to professional life in other ways (e.g., job interviews). At the same time, other typical and representative genres (contracts, orders, stock exchange reports…) can be practiced, although primarily as examples.

Similarly, it is impossible to recommend simple recipes for implementing and integrating identified target needs into various forms of language learning and teaching (including the learning and teaching of technical language and job-specific jargon). Needs-based language learning can be expected to happen in many different ways depending on, for example, whether the learners are students who plan to become managers, translators/interpreters or "foreign business language" teachers, or whether they are already working in a specific occupation.

In that connection, we wish to mention so-called "task-based teaching methods" (see Ellis 2003). These have become a topic of discussion in modern language pedagogy because they are based on linking concrete tasks in teaching contexts very closely to potential needs. However, as it is difficult to predict ad-hoc needs for students who are still in school or university, the concept of "language (learning) awareness" may become especially relevant (James and Garrett 1996; Knapp-Potthoff 1997). This idea suggests, among other things, that learners should be prompted to reflect on their learning, and on how they may speedily adapt to, and achieve new learning goals. In other words, they should strive for their own "language needs awareness" which would enable them to become more acutely conscious of the requirements of their future work environments and their own concrete learning needs (compare the title of Holme and Chalauisaeng 2006: "The learner as needs analyst").

6 Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is at the same time a transition to the next, written by the same authors and covering language policies and practices. By now, it has become clear that language needs are closely related to both these latter, the differences deriving mostly from the perspective adopted.

Thus we have remarked on the very wide overlap between needs and practices, many of which can be considered as examples of needs already or about to be met. In fact, it is hard to distinguish between needs analyses and studies of language practice in businesses. The only perceptible difference concerns those cases where there is a patent discrepancy between need and practice, and hence a clearly unmet need. These situations are, of course, the most potentially interesting and those that most draw the attention of researchers and practitioners.

Likewise, interconnections and overlaps can be detected between language needs and language policies. One such is the strong but complex correlation between the need for certain languages and language competences, and the policy measures that assign languages their roles in public life, in education, in organisations and in companies. These roles may already have given rise to certain language practices, which policies will have to address – a step that often takes a considerable time. Conversely, language policies contribute to creating realities which may, once established, have an important impact on perceived needs. One example would be a company establishing English as its corporate language, and so creating massive new language needs.

In the context of this handbook, it is natural that business language needs have been considered mostly from an economic perspective. However, they should always be seen in the context of other political, social and cultural "needs", for example, that of the much broader EU policy in favour of multilingualism. This is pointed out, among others, by the *Forum des entreprises sur le multilinguisme* (see Commission européenne. Direction générale de l'éducation et de la culture 2008), which adopts a clearly prescriptive stance.

We regard it as obvious that, especially within business and LSP contexts, language teaching and learning cannot and should not be conducted without taking language needs into consideration. However, in discussing needs, we must always clarify whether we are referring to the needs of learners, of companies, etc., or to all potential needs. Furthermore, we must be aware that we can never refer to "objective" needs in the strict sense, since language needs are always social-discursive constructs arising from, and closely linked to subjective ideological, language-policy-related and other positions.

It is a fact that the majority of needs analyses nowadays are based on questionnaires and interviews, which *stricto sensu* do not show respondents' "real" needs, but only those they perceive. However, subjective perceptions may still allow conclusions to be drawn about real, "objective" needs. To put it in social-constructionist terms: "objective" – if we remain comprehensive and reasonable – only means constructed in an intersubjective way. In order to explain why people think what they do about language needs, there is a need for studies of the connections between statements about such needs and personal language experiences, language biographies and other relevant factors. This would allow language needs analysis to be firmly anchored in sociolinguistics and cross-linked with neighbouring disciplines.

To sum up, we have sought to enhance the "objectivity" – in the sense mentioned above – of needs analyses, which should (also) apply methods that are not prone to so called self-report bias, and – a further research desideratum – attach more importance to non-participant observation, especially (video)recordings of real business communication activities and their transcripts.

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