

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Collection of Data

In line with the recent trends of needs assessment which has concentrated on individual needs than on group needs (Mackay & Palmer, 1981), and with the suggestion that Munby's needs analysis model work best on individual learner (Munby, 1978 : 32), in December 1997, a target learner was identified. The target learner is a sales manager in an international corporate pharmaceutical firm in Malaysia. Names have been kept confidential upon the learner's request. I shall therefore henceforward simply refer the subject as 'the Manager' and the company as 'the Company'.

Data of needs analysis came mostly from questionnaire administered (Appendix A) and 3 very brief informal interviews of about 5 minutes each, spanning over a period of one month. One rationale for such procedure was mainly due to time constraint and convenience of the Manager. Just as Lonnfora (1987), I was concerned that the questionnaire would be understood by 'laypeople', that is, non-linguists. The formation was preceded by an informal talk on what he does as a Sales Manager. I also went through some product literatures he had to read and reports he had to write.

I was also able to pursue an interesting line of inquiry that developed more information - structured interview guided by interviewer through a questionnaire as advocated by Mackay (1978). As I discovered, the interviewer was able to help the respondent with linguistic clarifications and at the same time to record 'other' answers and observations, thus confirming suggestions by Tarantino (1988). In this way, assumptions and speculations on the questions and responses on the parts of the subject

and researcher were minimised. Furthermore, during the interviews, both structured and informal, the learner was encouraged to be involved in the investigation of his own needs (Munby's work has been criticised on excluding this factor).

Unfortunately, due to circumstances and time on the part of the learner, I was not able to supplement the questionnaire and interview with observations of learner at his workplace at different times of day, nor was I able to 'shadow' him as he went about his work, noting job duties, details of the environment, nature of spoken interactions which could also have been tape-recorded. But as mentioned earlier, I was able to carry out a form of participatory needs analysis, where needs or wants were discussed and where the target learner made some recommendations as to what the course be like.

Authentic data collection was limited to samples of written documents, mainly the types of reports the learner had to prepare and some professional product catalogues or journals, provided as supplementary to oral briefings of such products. From sample of reports, shown but not given to me due to confidentiality, I was able to gauge the learner's initial level of ability to confirm with the responses in the questionnaire. The above approach would to some extent prevent the hasty redesign of a course during its implementation (Sanders, 1984).

2.2 Selection of Textbooks

There was no theoretical basis to my initial selection of Business English textbooks. At the same time, I did not want to be accused of being prejudiced or biased. Therefore, I had been careful not to be influenced by the following factors related to the textbooks :

- 1) Popularity
- 2) Competence of author
- 3) Reviews

However, I must admit that my selection had been influenced by :

- 1) availability
- 2) time
- 3) seemingly different approach or focus, and different outlook in content

My initial selection had also ruled out the following texts which would quite definitely not meet the needs of the Manager :

- 1) texts which were too technical although a small portion of the content was indirectly related to pharmaceutical line. For example, *The Language of Medicine* (1992) by Ethel Tiersky & Martin Tiersky, (rev.edn.), Prentice Hall Regents.
- 2) texts whose main focus was on writing or reading only. For example, *Preparing For English for Commerce* (1990) by David Davies & Douglas Pickett [it was for examination purpose too]; *Business Reading* (1996) by Geoffrey Land, Longman UK.
- 3) texts which were too focussed on one communicative / professional skill. For example, *Socializing* (1992) by Mark Ellis & Nina O' Driscoll; Longman Group (FE).

Thus, the final selection for analysis was narrowed down to five Business English textbooks as depicted in Table 1 below :

Table 1 : Textbooks Selected

Title	Author	Publisher	Year
Longman Business English Usage	Peter Strutt	Longman	1993
Business English Recipes - A creative approach to business English	Judy Irigoien & Bonnie Tsai	Longman	1995
Business English Teacher's Resource Book	Sharon Nolan & Bill Reed	Longman	1993
Case Studies in International Business	Christine Uber Grosse & Robert E. Grosse	Prentice-Hall	1988
Business Objectives - Student's Book	Vicki Hollett	Oxford	1994