

# Conducting and applying English for academic purposes (EAP), needs, assessments in a linguistically-complex environment: an on-going ethnography

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## Abstract

It is probably no exaggeration to say that needs assessment is seen in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as the foundation on which all other decisions are, or should be, made (Belcher, 2006: 135). In the sustained involvement project reported here as a critical ethnography, we describe our efforts to research, design, and execute an ESP curriculum at a Francophone Lebanese University.

**Key words:** Design, English for Specific purposes, Critical ethnography, Lebanon, Comprehensive needs assessment

## Résumé

Ce n'est probablement pas exagéré de dire que l'on voit l'évaluation de besoins en anglais sur objectifs spécifiques comme la base sur laquelle toutes les autres décisions sont, ou devraient être, faites (Belcher, 2006 : 135). Dans notre projet de recherche rapporté ici comme une ethnographie critique, nous décrivons nos efforts de concevoir et exécuter un curriculum d'enseignement/apprentissage de l'anglais sur objectifs spécifiques dans une université francophone libanaise.

**Mots-clés:** Conception, anglais sur objectifs spécifiques, ethnographie critique, Liban, évaluation de besoins

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## Introduction

Throughout its history, there has been considerable variation in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instructional approaches (Swales, 1988) and research (Belcher, Johns, & Paltridge, 2011); however, there has been general agreement about the bases upon which both ESP research and practice are founded: a thorough-going needs assessment for a specific group of students studying in an identified target situation (Long, 2005: 23). The consistent argument throughout ESP's history is that practitioners who teach and develop curricula are needs assessment researchers, exploring the lacks, wants, interests, discourses, cultural and linguistic practices, and goals not only of a target group of students but of the other stakeholders involved in the focus pedagogical enterprise: teachers and curriculum designers, administrators, the students' parents and families, the institutional administration, and in some cases, the educational goals of an interest group (e.g. a religious order) or a nation (Dudley-Evans, St John 1998); or Johns, Price, 2013: 476-477). Not surprisingly, Belcher (2006), in her ESP overview, points out that

It is probably no exaggeration to say that needs assessment is seen in ESP as the foundation on which all other decisions are, or should be, made (2006: 135).

The resultant argument for ESP, rather than TENAR (Teaching English for No Apparent Reason), is that curriculum design and teaching is localized and tailored for the specific requirements of a target group of learners, with careful, research-based consideration of all stakeholders involved.

How does the process from contextualized research to curriculum design, teacher training and student instruction take place? What do those leading thorough

needs assessment do to accomplish their ambitious goals? Unfortunately for practitioners working on pedagogical sites, as we are, *English for Specific Purposes Journal* and related international publications have printed fewer and fewer helpful exploratory, and course design papers as the ESP movement has matured. Instead, published research has become more refined and focused (Hewings, 2001: 2) ---upon specified elements of texts, and more recently, upon identified characteristics of contexts<sup>1</sup>. This concentrated research, often enhanced by the tools of corpus linguistics, is easier to explain, manage, and publish than research on an authentic needs assessment towards a localized curriculum.

Of course, since ESP is known as a practitioners' movement, current researchers make suggestions for teaching or curriculum design at the ends of their papers; however, they generally don't make the point that a thorough needs assessment involving all of the stakeholders at the site may be contradictory or frustrating, thus inhibiting, or making impossible, a refereed publication or a curriculum that will satisfy all involved in the context. Time constraints for conducting thorough need assessment research are an issue in this complexity, but other complicating factors may be teacher overload or their preferred pedagogical approaches, the various goals voiced by the stakeholders, or, to be sure, the "purposes, intentions, and frames" of the researchers themselves. This point about the needs assessment researchers biases is evoked by the critical ethnographers (e.g., Madisson, 2003: 4) and has been studied in international contexts (see, e.g., Johns and Makalela, 2011).

Current published ESP research examines a number of different, specific aspects of texts or contexts. Many of these studies revolve around writing practices, processes, and the experiences or choices made by students or expert writers (e.g., Nickerson, 2000; Hyland, 2008; Lillis, 2008; Kibler, 2011; Dressen-Hammouda, 2008; Starfield, 2004). Authors of these studies may refer to them as "ethnographies." Drawing on the work of Lillis 2008. Paltridge and Wang (2011) say the following about this approach:

Ethnography as a methodology involves using multi data sources as well as a period of sustained involvement in the context in which the texts are produced to try to gain an understanding of the 'dynamic and complex situated meanings and practices that are constituted in and by the writing.' [Italics ours] (Lillis, 2008: 355)

In their own writing ethnography, Paltridge and Wang analyzed Chinese and Australian newspaper commentaries on September 11 over several months following the event from three perspectives: textual, intertextual, and socio-cultural. For studying the third of these topics, the researchers reviewed current research on the media and its readers in China and concluded that, in that nation, the party leadership expects the mass media "not only to inform but also to interpret and analyze complex global problems" for the reading public (2011: 32).

Although in the research on writing, both texts, often as genres, and processes, seem to predominate in broader, recent studies, there are a considerable number of other studies which make the student's interests, wants, or lacks central.

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful discussion of specificity as it relates to ESP, see Hyland, 2011.

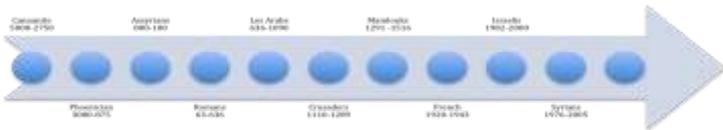
Jasso-Aguilar (2005), for example, conducted a study of the needs, wants, and interests of hotel maids as they studied English. James (2010) delved into students' ideas about what they had transferred from the language classes to other academic classes.

Unfortunately for need assessment researchers, among these publications, it is impossible to find one that moves from research to curriculum design ---and then to attempts at teacher training related that results from that work. In the sustained involvement project reported here as a critical ethnography, we describe our efforts to research, design, and execute an ESP program from 2005-2012 at a French medium Maronite university in Lebanon. After providing background information about the linguistic and institutional context, we describe the study's history and what we accomplished, and didn't, during Johns' two-week Fulbright consultancies in 2009 and 2011, projects that were designed to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment while at the same time presenting an intensive workshop for ESP instructors and making recommendations for curricular revisions

**The Context**

*Demography and languages*

Lebanon, the site for this study, has a population of approximately 4 million, with an additional 350,000 long-term Palestinian refugees. There are also considerable number refugees from recent conflicts (mainly Palestinians & Syrians). The list of civilizations that have shaped the linguistic landscape of Lebanon is impressive. Throughout history, the major civilizations that have appeared, with their languages, are Ugaritic, Phoenician, Canaanite, Akkadian, Aramaic, Syriac, Persian, Egyptian, Greek, Arabic, Italian, French, Armenian and English/American.



**Table 1. The civilizations that have shaped Lebanon (Eid, 2012, Volume 1, 40)**

Currently, within the documented population, 98% speak a dialect of Arabic, and 38% have mastered French. Lebanese Arabic is the commonly spoken dialect, but the literary Arabic language is mandated as official by the government, though there is an accepted policy of “strategic multilingualism.”

At School, Lebanese students study besides Arabic, French, and English.

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2009-2010
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	En <sup>2</sup>	Fr <sup>3</sup>	En	Fr	En	Fr	En	Fr	En	Fr
Beirut	349 10	503 74	349 68	487 93	346 53	470 19	335 60	449 42	364 66	426 55
Mont-Leban on BB	949 05	123 137	955 37	122 785	994 19	123 382	101 716	121 163	110 124	119 566
Mont-Leban on SBB <sup>4</sup>	404 99	627 03	404 67	616 54	404 03	610 80	401 81	598 36	428 59	590 40
North	126 88	201 477	129 24	200 117	129 87	206 571	133 34	204 367	225 89	203 510
Békaa	563 11	743 92	561 08	725 79	572 03	720 83	574 51	700 32	623 42	674 22
South	645 80	360 64	661 93	348 13	665 05	331 42	676 98	311 01	852 20	287 73
Nabati yeh	248 70	400 36	257 15	386 61	260 66	373 64	271 80	356 40	293 84	324 41
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b> <b>763</b>	<b>588</b> <b>183</b>	<b>331</b> <b>912</b>	<b>579</b> <b>402</b>	<b>337</b> <b>236</b>	<b>580</b> <b>641</b>	<b>341</b> <b>120</b>	<b>567</b> <b>081</b>	<b>388</b> <b>984</b>	<b>553</b> <b>407</b>

**Table 2. Distribution of English & French speakers students, primary and secondary levels by region (CRDP, Statistiques, 2010: 75)**

According to Article 11 of the Constitution (11/9/1943), two official languages are to exist: Arabic was to be the official national language for the state, but French would also be an official language. It was assumed that future laws would determine more clearly the status of French.

While retaining a privileged but precarious status (Abou 1994: 416), French ceased to be the official language in 1943, when the country became independent. French therefore now enjoys a less favorable legal status during the first half of the 20th century, during which the Lebanese intelligentsia was formed in French and francophone schools. However, it has now spread to other categories of users. Historically confined to the only Christian community, it gradually won the upper classes and became accessible to the entire population (Eid, 2012: 80).

Several types of popular French publications (for news, women) and media are available in the country. Armenian is the first language of this small population; there are Armenian schools and universities ---and a press, as well.

Due to the demands of international business, however, much of the Christian population (approximately 27% of the country) is now trilingual, with English as the third language. English is the second language among most Muslims even though the confessional aspect is not anymore the criteria. Thus, as is the case in other trilingual countries in this region (e.g., Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Morocco), the local dialect of Arabic is considered to be the spoken mother tongue for most; French is the "language of culture," and English the commercial language.

<sup>2</sup> En = English

<sup>3</sup> FR = French

<sup>4</sup> BB = suburbs of Beirut; SBB = without the suburbs of Beirut.

### *Language use in secondary and tertiary education*

As can be imagined, the secondary school situation, true of both public and private schools, is diverse, as the principal language of the classroom may be Arabic, French, English, or Armenian. Whatever the case, since the 1990s, six to seven hours of literary Arabic has been required in all schools, from primary through high school. One compulsory second language (French or English) is required in primary classrooms, and two-second languages are compulsory in secondary schools. At the university level, classes at public universities (e.g., Lebanese University) are taught in Arabic, and other languages tend to be compulsory for foreign language study. Private universities can select their language of instruction, and the other international languages may be compulsory. Armenian is the language of instruction for their universities; at the American University in Beirut, the language is English, and at universities overseen by Christian “confessions,” the language of instruction is French, for the most part, though English is making major headway in business, engineering, and fields such as dental prosthetics, where professionals work consistently in English (Eid, 2011-c).

But the French are fighting back. A group of high-level politicians, linguists, and others, (including the President of the Lebanese Republic, Michel Sleiman) concerned about the inroads that English is making in Francophone countries, attended the Francophony Summit of Montreux (2010) and signed linguistic pacts for the countries involved. For Lebanon, goals were the following:

In education: to continue French as the second foreign language for most Lebanese schools, and the third language in English-medium schools. Improved teacher training should be offered.

In culture: to continue the positive image of the language and further develop cultural centers and French institutes.

In the society: encouraging the use of French within politics, the army, the courts, and police ---as well as in media and advertising.

### **The History of the ESP Project at a French-medium University**

#### *Founding of a language center at Antonine University: Its purposes*

Before one author of this paper (Johns) first appeared on the scene in 2009, the other author (Eid) established, in 2005, the CLER (Centre for Languages and Resources) at this French-medium, Maronite (private, confessional) university. This was quite a coup, not only for the university but also for its young director, a trilingual, who was able to obtain considerable start-up support from both the French and the American embassies. Adapted from the CLER brochure, printed in French, English, and Arabic, are the following goals for the Center:

1. Opportunities to study, with full ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) support, the following languages at a number of levels: French (as a foreign, second, or specific purpose language), English (in the same categories), Arabic and Lebanese for foreigners and Italian. For French for Specific Purposes (FSP) and ESP, studying involves classroom instruction at various levels for Antonine students, supported by the CLER ICT lab.
2. As the English language was growing rapidly, the Antonine University has over 25 teachers that work for the center of languages. A specialist was needed to train these teachers in writing skills and to develop the English curricula. The specialist had also helped to benchmark Antonine university programs with other universities locally and internationally. Teacher and professional training of various types, some examples of which, ESP workshops in 2009 and 2012 and in 2012, a workshop on publishing internationally, were offered by the Fulbright consultant (Johns).

In 2009, Johns came on the scene as a Fulbright ESP specialist. Her charge was to:

- ✓ Re-examine and re-evaluate the curriculum and skills at the Center for Languages and Resources.
- ✓ Work with the CLER Director and her Faculty on developing courses for undergraduate students ranging from beginners to advanced professionals who use English as a second language<sup>5</sup>;
- ✓ Consult with administrators and instructors of post-secondary institutions on faculty development;
- ✓ Develop and/or assess academic curricula or educational materials.
- ✓ These goals were, for the most part, achieved; however, much was still to be done. The remainder of the paper focuses on the issues during the second visit (2012) again for two weeks.

### **The story continues: 2012**

Here, we go into considerable detail about Johns' second visit: the constraints, the stakeholders, and other related issues.

#### *Constraints:*

Every needs assessment has its limitations; we cannot accomplish everything that is mentioned in the literature, even in a project that has continued intensively since Johns' previous visit. She was given eight days in 2012 for needs assessment completion both the interviews (with ESP teachers and content experts) and the concurrent ESP workshop for teachers and invited participants from other universities (17 hours). At the same time, she was to draft the results of the needs assessment, some of which appear in this paper<sup>6</sup>. To be sure, her work was to be an impetus for project continuation after she departed.

#### *Key players: teachers, content experts, and organizers*

*The teachers:* Central to the success of the needs assessment/application were the ESP teachers themselves, particularly the four who had been selected as full-timers based on their competencies and commitments to the program. The majority of the teachers, however, were part-timers, and every one of them was working another job: as English director and teacher in a secondary school, as a translator for the military, or as an instructor at another tertiary institution<sup>7</sup>. During this short period, and presumably, in the weeks that followed, they were being asked to re-think and revise their curricula (mostly taken directly from published textbooks) and, perhaps even more frustrating, they were being asked to abandon an approach to grammar (their specialty) and view language and texts as contextualized.

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<sup>5</sup> Hosting an American Scholar will have a broad and lasting impact on the Antonine University, specifically the development of its English curriculum. The potential impact on Antonine University will increase the expertise of the English teachers who were trained 2 years ago by Ann Johns on modifying some of the English programs, upgrading curriculum and increasing strategic thinking. This needs to be completed in order to have a full and adequate program.

<sup>6</sup> Although the consultancy was fifteen days in length, four of those days were national or university holidays or Sundays and three days were devoted to a conference (in French).

<sup>7</sup> Because they work long hours (and the workshops took place from 3:30 to 7:00, in addition to their ½ hour interviews at the end of their days) and because of the remarkably congested traffic situation in Beirut, they found it difficult to concentrate, especially upon some of the “new” ideas brought to them.

In addition to the obligatory workshops (17 hours), led by Johns, each teacher was scheduled for a ½ hour conference with Eid and Johns to discuss their curricula and the problems/lacks that they identified in students since time did not permit direct student needs assessments such as assessments or interviews.

*The content experts:* The most productive of the needs assessment work was with the instructors in the disciplines. Due to the contacts in the university made over the years by the CLER Director, we were able to spend an hour interviewing influential individuals on the university campus<sup>8</sup>.

After telling the experts about our goals (to determine how we can enhance our EAP program), we asked each of the experts to tell us about their students' abilities, attitudes and lacks. We were also interested in the uses of English (both oral and written) in their classes, and in the instructors' professional lives. As part of the interview, we requested and received artifacts mentioned by instructors such as tests, oral presentation evaluations, and research papers. What was interesting to us was how insightful the experts were about the goals and values of their disciplines. As they discussed an assignment or an artifact for the classes, they would tell us why it was important, what it accomplished, and what the implications are for ESP.

*The organizers:* As the critical ethnographers have noted, integral to research is the researcher herself, and her ability to assess her own "purposes, intentions, and frames." ESP researchers must ask ourselves "How can we create and sustain a dialogue of collaboration between others in the context?" (Madison, 2003: 4). Fortunately for the project, Eid had excellent relationships with faculty and administrators who support the CLER and its aims across the campus, so the collaboration at that level was quite successful. She also had established good working relationships with the teachers in the program, and this opened the door for some of the richer, more productive discussions with them.

Johns, on her fifth visit to Lebanon (the second at Antonine), was still more of an intruder into the context, the "foreign expert" who had written the objectives for the classes (in 2009) that the teachers were expected to follow. In her reflective moments, Johns realized that she needed to admit to the goals and frames that would guide her ESP work, not only in Lebanon but elsewhere:

1. Like Eid, Johns does not believe in "general English" though some of the ESP classes in the program have that name. Instead, she hoped to convince teachers at all levels that they should be teaching for transfer to the target situations, that is, that the approaches that they took toward oral and written texts, presentations, vocabulary, and grammar teaching would all be transferable to the more advanced ESP classes ---and to students' classes in the disciplines and professional lives, as well.
2. What is transferable to other contexts are the strategies for learning not the content. Throughout the teacher training and interviews, she continued to say, "It's not about content, it's about strategies for learning and producing texts ---and students' rhetorical flexibility."
3. That when teaching "smart" reading, writing, or presenting, the approach be top-down, context and genre-based rather than the traditional bottom-up (grammar, vocabulary-based) that is so typical of

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. Georges Nehme, Dean of the Faculty of Business and Dr. Elizabeth Sfeir, a former ESP teacher who now coordinates the first year programs in the Business Faculty; Dr. Paul Gobril, Dean of the Engineering Program; Dr. Carol Stephan, Director of the Physical Therapy Program; and Mrs. Maya Nohra, Director of the Office of Orientation and Admissions and the founder of the only program in Dental Prosthetics that exists in the Middle East.

the students' secondary classes and many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and ESP classes in the country<sup>9</sup>. After a session on cohesion and metadiscourse, for example, teachers were urged to create activities that helped students to view texts as coherent entities.

4. Teachers need to distance themselves as much as possible from textbooks in order to tailor their teaching to the Antonine and Lebanese contexts. Although teachers selected lessons from some of the best volumes, they often did not consider how they could make them more context-specific or appropriate for the Arabic-French backgrounds that were central to students' understanding of language.

5. Teachers understand that the best way to create a coherent language curriculum is to design a performance task (either oral or written) toward which all student work, readings, videos, speakers, etc. can be directed. After interviewing some of the content faculty, some of these tasks were modeled for the teachers. In Figure x, below, of the paper, some of these performance tasks, suggested by the disciplinary faculty, are outlined.

#### **Take-home performance tasks**

1. The petition: You are a student at Antonine who has failed one of your classes. You now have a problem because the class you need to makeup and one of the classes you are required to take for graduation are scheduled at the same time. The dean (or department chair) has asked that you write a page-long solution for the problem you face. In a memo to your dean, explain your problem and its causes and propose and evaluate a solution to the problem. [Note: One of the administrators who dealt with students suggested that students practice writing in this genre. Not only would the genre itself be useful, but the problem/solution structure that this text takes can also be transferred to a variety of other genres, as indicated by the content experts interviewed and experts in Writing-across-the-Curriculum (e.g., Carter, 2007: 385-418).
2. An internship report: You are a student in a business or engineering class who participate in an internship. You must write a report at the end of the internship within which you reflect on your experiences and make suggestions for changes in the organization in which you worked. The report has the following structure:
  - ✓ Describe the context in which you are working.
  - Discuss what you observed
  - ✓ List what you did (what your job was) while you were an intern.
  - ✓ Make recommendations for
    - a) what the company might do to improve, and
    - b) how the internship experience might be improved.
  - ✓ Conclude, summing up your experience<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> One of the teachers commented that she taught "ESP" classes at another school, and "they're nothing like what you're suggesting, because the teachers there decided that the students weren't ready for ESP vocabulary. We're teaching general English and the paragraph, instead."

<sup>10</sup> This was suggested by the deans of Engineering and Business during our interviews.

But, you say, “my students are not ready for the internship yet.” How can you simulate the experience and require a report (perhaps of only a few pages rather than the 30 that are required for the internship? Here are some possibilities for a performance task that has the same general functions. It can be “performed” both as a written or spoken text, and to practice using Power Point, which is important in all disciplines; you can accompany your performance with a slide show. Here are the instructions:

- ✓ You are attending an event: a friend or relative’s wedding, a meeting at your church, a teacher workshop, a celebration of some kind...Write an email to someone who cannot attend which contains the following:
  - The context of the event. Who is there? How is the room decorated? What are people wearing? (etc.)
  - What you observed about the occasion: How was it organized? Who spoke? Who didn’t speak? What did the rest of the group do? (etc.)
  - What your role was during the event. Did you take part? If so, what did you do? Did you just observe?
  - What recommendations would you make for the event? What went well? What didn’t?
  - What conclusions would you draw? Did you have a good time? Why or why not? Did others have a good time? How do you know?

**Figure 1. Take-home performance tasks**

### **An Adapted Activity**

During interviews with content experts, we collected classroom and professional artifacts. This type of introduction shown in Figure 1, and adapted for undergraduates, was said to be appropriate for research in engineering, physical therapy, and dental prosthetics, at a minimum. In engineering and physical therapy, the students have to complete a review of the published literature; certainly, understanding how these introductions work would be useful for them as they collect and compare research articles.

IMRD<sup>11</sup> introduction (See Swales & Feak, 2009: 242-264)

Your students are preparing to write a research paper, and you want them to practice using introductions that they may have learned while writing academic essays in secondary school. Together, you and the students select (the same), topic based on something you have been reading or discussing (e.g., bullying in school, why people divorce, eBook versions from the movies). Then, this becomes your performance task prompt:

You are a freshman student at Antonine, and you want to know more about bullying, which seems to be a problem in many schools throughout the world. Write an introduction for an academic research paper in which you do the following:

- Establish the territory, stating why studying bullying is important.
- Discuss a one or two references related to bullying
- Identify the gap in the understanding of freshman students at Antonine.
- Relate the purpose for your research.
- Post research questions.

<sup>11</sup> Introduction, methods, results, discussion (IMRD)

After students study some texts about on-line bullying, doing predatory scans of the material to find out what they need to know, present an oral report on bullying, practice posing questions to those who make report makers, they might plan, write, revise, edit (etc.) a text that looks something like this (or this can be used as a model):

Bullying is becoming a big problem among students throughout the world. According to Taylor (2012), a prominent bullying researcher, there has been a considerable increase in on-line bullying in the last five years. Therefore, additional research into bullying is very important for all: teachers, parents, administrators, and the public at large. Smith (2010) has pointed out that there are certain characteristics of bullies: they are generally boys who have low self-esteem and may have experienced abuse in their homes. In his research, Jones (2011) notes that often bullies are loners who don't associate with other children readily. So far, however, most of the research has taken place in Europe or North American. Extensive, careful research into this problem in the government schools in Lebanon has not taken place.

It is the purpose of this research to investigate on-line bullying in the Lebanese government schools using interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators and a survey administered to a variety of Lebanese schools. Research questions are the following:

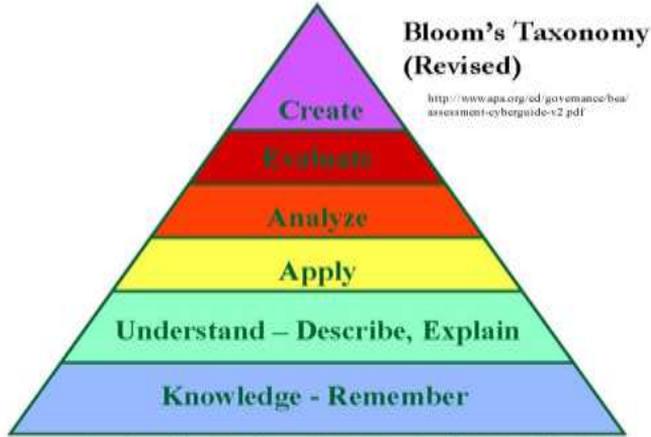
- Is on-line bullying a major problem in Lebanese government schools?
- What are the characteristics of those students in Lebanon who bully?
- What steps are schools or communities taking to stop the bullying that takes place?

**Figure 2. Introduction, methods, results, discussion**

### **Student assessment**

Finally, Johns and Eid encouraged the teachers to design tests that reflected ESP workshops and the findings from the content experts' interviews. The examinations previous to the needs assessment and teacher training, and suggested revisions are discussed below:

- True/false questions most of which test the lowest level of Bloom's taxonomy (with which they are all familiar: Knowledge, comprehension, application) were common in the pre-needs assessment and training sessions.



Based on an APA adaptation of Anderson, L.W. & Krathwohl, D.R. (Eds.) (2001)

- Suggested instead were questions that test students understanding of genre and context: “This text would most likely be found in (a textbook, a popular science or health magazine, the local news sections of a newspaper, a professional scientific journal.” Or those that test whether the students can identify the conclusion: “The author of this text concludes that (four choices, paraphrasing the conclusion<sup>12</sup>).”
  - Vocabulary matching questions were common. Suggested, instead, were items (perhaps word webs) that require students to identify related words (synonyms, antonyms, collocations, etc.) or adapted cloze tests in which students fill in the appropriate words in a context. Also suggested were in-context questions from the reading on the test, e.g., “In this sentence, negotiate means.”
  - Summaries of texts that are difficult to analyze structurally were central to the old tests. Suggested were asking students to practice following summary templates in class for problem-solution and argumentation texts, then requiring them to summarize a fairly transparent a text of this type without a template on an examination. In-class practice could be with using this template or a variation:

One problem that is mentioned by the author is \_\_\_\_\_. Its causes are \_\_\_\_\_. The author recommends the following solution:\_\_\_\_\_.

He believes that this is a good solution because \_\_\_\_\_.

- Common in the past were assignments that give the students little guidance and do not obviously emulate the results of the content experts’ interviews. Suggested, instead, were writings that incorporated the readings on the test (e.g., for argument analysis) or emulated at least part of one of the genres suggested for the disciplines.

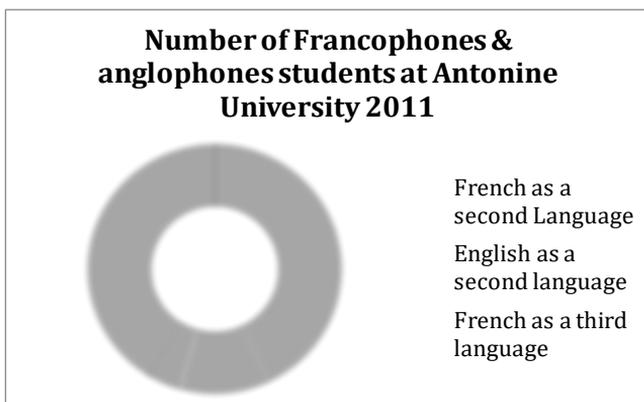
<sup>12</sup> Adopted from the California Standards Test questions, 2008.

### Further results from the needs assessment and teacher training

As can be seen in the discussion above, a considerable amount was accomplished during Johns' second visit--and this work continues at Antonine. Below is a summary of what we believed we accomplished and what wasn't in this on-site needs assessment in a French-medium university:

*1. Determining learners' linguistic and pragmatic backgrounds, needs/lacks wants, and goals:* In the brief time allotted to the consultancy, we were unable to conduct the kinds of surveys and interviews with students that would have enabled us to have an in-depth understanding of their linguistics issues. Interviewing or conducting focus groups with students would have been ideal; however, they were sitting for examinations during this period, and it was impossible to capture and talk to representative groups. So as noted, we arranged to interview the ESP faculty and key content faculty and administrators from the disciplines to hear their views on students, to collect written artifacts, and examine ESP test results and student writing. We also worked with the university administration to gather data. What did we learn from these sources?

- *Educational backgrounds and experiences with English language education.* Students came from a variety of educational backgrounds, but since most have attended private schools, and they had been French-educated.



**Figure 3. Number of Francophones and Anglophones students at Antonine University**

- *Learners' comments on their linguistic, cultural, academic, and professional need/lack, wants, and goals.* In previous surveys, it was discovered that the majority of students, if they wanted to study English at all, preferred to focus on grammar or specialized vocabulary, which they thought was the important content of a language class. Since the CLER has excellent ICT materials, many of the students enjoyed the videos in their CLER lab sessions. Some students complained if their ESP classes did not focus on the content in their major or profession believing, as many do, that content (that is, topics) is basic to ESP. The faculty divided students' attitudes towards English into three types: those that saw the value of English language education for both their professions and their lives; those that were neutral and played along, but

didn't show much enthusiasm; and a group that was vocal in both the content classes and the ESP classes, saying that English was useless, and ESP classes were a waste of time. "These students try to influence the others, unfortunately," said the Dean of Engineering."

2. *Students' difficulties with English:* The CLER teachers' accounts of students' problems were also considered. These include problems with:

- ✓ cohesion and coherence of EFL/ESP essay writing;
- ✓ form, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax that are different in English and their native language;
- ✓ expressing unclearly their main ideas
- ✓ Poor grammar
- ✓ Sentence Fragments
- ✓ Run-on Sentences
- ✓ Lack of Subject-Verb Agreement
- ✓ Incorrect Noun Plurals
- ✓ Incorrect Plural and Possessive Nouns
- ✓ Wrong End Punctuation

### 3. *ESP Teacher approaches, curricula, tests, and attitudes*

Note: Only after most of the interviews were completed, did we realize what we should have been doing: asking teachers to juxtapose their current curricula to the adapted European Framework that Johns and Eid had used to create the class objectives. Although some of the information that would have been gained was elicited, more focused, curriculum/objectives-driven interviews would have been more productive. However, other issues were raised that were important to the teacher attitudes and interviews:

- *Workloads:* One of the points all the teachers wanted to share is how much work they were doing outside of their ESP responsibilities. This was a factor in all of the decisions they made regarding the classroom. Another factor is the nature of the course load: a considerable number of ESP courses are offered (and assigned to part-time teachers) in the fall; however, in the spring, their course load is lighter, so they must find work elsewhere to compensate for the loss of salary. This problem is mirrored in many parts of the world, unfortunately.
- *Attitudes towards student work ethic:* Teachers had different attitudes about the students' work ethic. Those teaching physical education and media advertising said that the students were "fun" but not interested in reading—and certainly not about writing. "They just wanted to be beautiful," said one teacher. All agreed that engineering students were much more serious, "but sometimes only about engineering, not English," commented another teacher.
- *Teaching approaches:* When asked, the teachers' discussion was principally about content (topics the students enjoyed discussing) or grammar (a favorite is the conditional). All agreed that asking students to read and write short "authentic" texts (usually on topics from the internet) or to watch videos was a good idea. Several teaching the more advanced classes talked about the professional and academic genres that they assigned, e.g., a formal presentation with PowerPoint slides, resumes, cover letters, memos, professional emails, etc.

Those who had attended the 2009 ESP workshop argued for grammar in context, and a few considered functional grammar as a possibility.

*Teacher performance:* Fully as revealing as the interviews were the teaching demonstrations by the teachers on the last day of the ESP workshop. Of the eight who attended, five came prepared, and with the exception of one, all principally used readings and activities from a textbook, generally commenting on how they might expand the grammar teaching or augment the materials through the use of lexical cohesion, which had been discussed in our ESP class. Two suggested possible performance tasks based on the textbook materials.

### **Continuing the work...**

Of course, in two, two-week Fulbright consultancies, only a fraction of what must be done to create an effective ESP curriculum can be achieved. We accomplished a considerable amount; however, more must be done. The CLER will encourage and help in building adjunct teaching or co-teaching between content faculty and ESP classes, especially in the Business faculty. The business faculty is willing to start this possibility the coming semester. Also, the CLER will encourage the English teachers to meet with content teachers and key faculty and to attend their meetings.

In addition, work will need to be done to investigate more deeply the students' interests and goals, their proficiencies, and their experiences. Belcher and Lakkarila (2011:74) argue that learner identity should be central to needs analysis rather than the texts and contexts into which they may be initiated. They note that the even learner-centered classroom can be a site of struggle, especially if the instructor assumes an understanding of the learners and their agency—their ability to interpret, negotiate, modify and resist what others, including their teachers, may expect of them—but is not fully informed by an awareness of learners' actual experiences, multiple proficiencies, worldview, and life goals, all of which constitute their self-perceived identities (Belcher, Lakkarila, 2011:74).

Working in an English-speaking environment (the United States), Belcher and Lakkarila completed a “qualitative study with a purpose sample” (p. 78), drawing from Dornyei (2007), of six students from different countries to determine what they viewed as their core cultural identities. To their surprise, the findings indicated that no matter how long the students had been living in the United States, they still self-identified with their languages and cultures of origin and feared first language attrition. However, they also viewed English as having “a significant role in their lives” (p. 87), educationally, professionally, and socially. The authors conclude by suggesting a list of questions, not posed to learners in this study, but significantly important for understanding learner identities in the complex Lebanese environment, to pursue in the future:

1. How aware are we, as L2, L3 teachers, of learners' concerns about the effects of English and its cultures upon their L1s?
2. How conscious are we of the possibility that progress in an L2 may heighten learner concerns about L1 attrition, concerns that may affect investment in language learning?
3. How often do we, as language teachers, consider that learners may want to do more than be academically and professionally in English? Perhaps they would prefer to use the language to express their emotions or share their “core” feelings. Do we more narrowly define “purpose” for language use than our students do?

4. Does it occur to us that whom learners want to be in the present and near future may be very different from whom they hope to be in the more distant future? (p. 88).

Since Eid has completed identity work among French students (2011 a & b - 2012), she will be designing a study of learner identity for the ESP students. Also, Eid talks about 3 phases teachers has to bring in ESP classes based on identity and interculturality: the first step for students in ESP classes is discovering the identity of other students and comparing it to its own. The second step teachers bring in ESP classes is students' empathy, and reflexivity and third step is creativity: new experiences, new cultural forms (Eid, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

In real-life needs assessments, researchers must cover a variety of topics, areas, discourses, and assessments, sometimes in conflict, and that EAP work requires the investment (and investigations) of key teachers, language program administrators, interested content faculty, and students who are recruited as co-researchers to make the project both as transparent, broadly-based, and complete as possible (Johns, 1997: 102 on "the students as researcher"). We hope that the CLER work will continue, to the benefit of the students, the teachers, and the university.

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