

TOWARDS AN ESP SYLLABUS - FINDING OUT WHAT JOURNALISTS REALLY WANT

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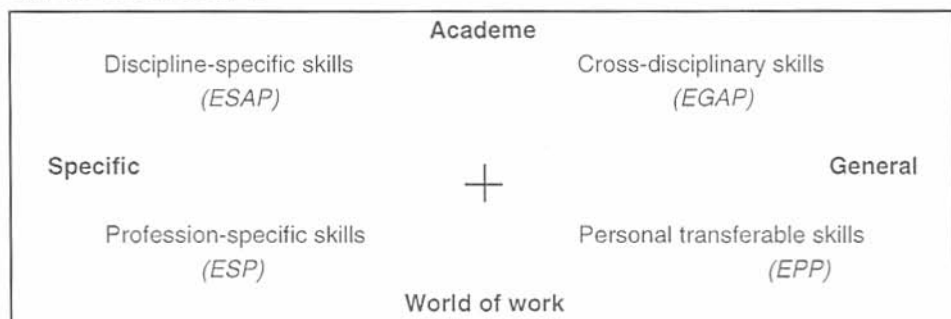
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Summary

This paper will present briefly some of the processes involved in designing syllabuses for the two-year English element in the Journalism degree at Coimbra, and what we are doing to get feedback, change and renew the course in an ongoing way. The Journalism course is nearly 5 years old, and its first students, presently graduating or completing *estágios*, are now able to provide us with data from target professional contexts. The paper touches on the relevance of needs analysis to course planning and on the problems of establishing a target discourse community, and compares our initial needs analysis with current data from graduating students.

Target discourse communities

In many countries, economic pressures are increasingly leading to demands for a higher education relevant to the world of work. Barnett (1994), below, shows this dichotomy work/academe as just one pull on the curriculum, the other being general *versus* specific. Between the main axes, 'discipline-specific' skills are those most usually taught in universities, 'profession-specific' skills may be taught on vocational courses, 'cross-disciplinary' are broad academic skills such as literature searching, and 'personal transfer' are skills in areas such as communication, group work, organisation and IT.



¹With the collaboration of Andrew Packett

I have added (in italics) to Barnett's chart the English-teaching abbreviations which seem to correspond to the skills: English for Specific and for General Academic Purposes (ESAP, EGAP), and English for Specific and for Professional (or occupational) Purposes (ESP, EPP). The chart summarises the sorts of decisions that have to be made by course planners, and raises several questions, such as the following: if, as in our case, a course draws on an analysis of the target situation (the work of the journalist in Portugal), is there a danger that we are identifying a target discourse community too early, when who we are dealing with in the classroom are *not* journalists but (mainly) first or second year undergraduates? Are we being pulled too far towards the bottom left of the chart, to the neglect of the current academic situation? Such a tension may underlie most university ESP courses, and I shall mention it again later.

A related tension is to be found in the materials we use in the journalism course. On the one hand, there is the practical training manual tradition, typified by the Focal Press series, such as Harris & Spark (1993), and on the other the more reflective discourse of the media theorists. Keeble (1998), in a book chosen as a text for our second year, points out this gulf, aiming to pitch his text somewhere in the middle.

Background

Such problems were in fact evident from the inception of the degree course. The *Faculdade de Letras* at Coimbra has no other vocationally-oriented first degree, and the only vocational element in most courses is Pedagogy. There are still those who see no place for such a cuckoo in the academic nest, an interloper ever clamouring for more resources as technology develops. The course has survived, however, and even prospered, judging from the large number of high-quality applicants. What kind of a degree course is it?

As outlined by Mário Mesquita (1994), there are two main kinds of university courses in 'social communication' in Portugal:

- i) those structured around '*a problemática comunicacional*', with curricula aiming to answer the question 'what is human communication?'
- ii) those aiming to provide a humanistic education deemed suitable for media professionals.

While both approaches share an interest in sociology and in media technology, Mesquita considers the former to be a relatively new interdis-

ciplinary area which emphasises linguistics, semiology and philosophy, while the second is a rather more traditional academic approach, focusing on modern history and on Portuguese language and culture; it is this latter approach which more closely corresponds to the Coimbra *licenciatura*.

The table below shows the subjects studied in the first two years of the four-year degree. All students must study two languages for two years each. The languages are listed in order of popularity, English being chosen in 1997 by about 60 students, nearly three times as many as German. Of those choosing English, most opt to take it in the first two years, though there is a sizeable minority (about 17% on average) who take it in years 3 and 4. Such figures are perhaps generally to be expected, but it may be worth mentioning two aspects of English in news contexts which may influence both students' choices and their needs, namely the important role of English historically in developing news paradigms (Bell, 1996), and the hegemony of English in the rapid globalisation of the media industry (to be seen in global news agencies as well as in the empires of Murdoch and Turner) (Graddol, 1997). We may note here that both of these aspects seem to point to the need for the "reflective, critical approach" to media texts mentioned by Keeble (1998).

SYLLABUS:

1st YEAR

Contemporary History
Political Geography
Economics
General Sociology
History of the Media
Introduction to Media Studies
Tipologia do Texto
A Foreign Language (year 1)

2nd YEAR

Portuguese History
Portuguese Language: Writing
Semiotics
Sociology of Communication
Audio-Visual Communication
A Foreign Language (year 2)

Foreign Languages

English
German
French
Spanish
Russian
Italian

While considering the institutional background, it is worth mentioning a few of the constraints it imposes and the opportunities it offers to the course designer. This is a necessary part of needs analysis, and although Munby (1978) originally relegated it to late in the process, it is sensible to include consideration of these 'local' features (Holliday, 1984) at an early stage.

i) As mentioned above, students from the first two years of the degree are sharing English classes with third- and fourth-year students. The former will sometimes be doing things in the English class (analysing audience, for example) that they are barely familiar with in Portuguese, while the latter are under more, or different, pressure, and are also doing a great deal more writing in their native language. The needs of the two groups are different, but must be catered for together.

ii) Entry level is extremely varied: there is no requirement that students have any particular grade, or any qualification at all, in the foreign language.

iii) Acoustics: it is difficult to teach a media-based course, involving a great deal of listening, viewing and speaking, in rooms amply equipped with ancient echoes or with modern traffic noise.

Needs Analysis: preconceptions and realities

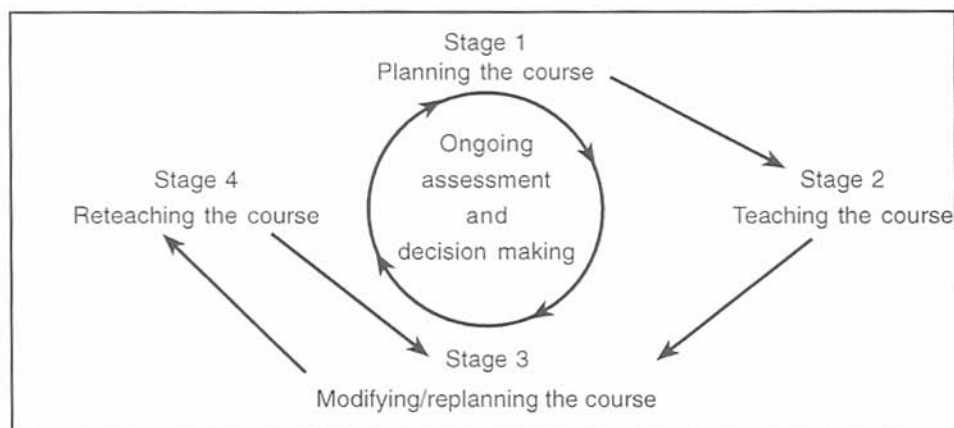
When, about five years ago, I was faced with the task of designing an English course for the degree, my first task was obviously to analyse needs, but about Needs Analysis I had certain preconceptions, three of which I shall outline now.

1. 'Needs Analysis is a daunting task, for experts only'.

This attitude may be an unfortunate reaction to Munby's (1978) fearsome Communicative Needs Processor, a sophisticated, lengthy battery of inventories to gather information on communication in the target situation, and now a totem ritualistically set up, bowed to and knocked off its pedestal in Masters' courses around the globe. Such a 'technical fix' approach, carried out by specialist course planners for the teachers who eventually teach the resulting course, while undoubtedly impressive, has, as West (1994) points out, the consequence of "setting needs in stone", and of being little understood by teachers, by institutions, and last and decidedly least as far as Munby seems concerned, by the learners themselves whose needs it

is supposed to discover. It relies on what Berwick (1989) calls a "positivistic faith" in the power of technology to gain new knowledge for us, some better, 'higher', more 'expert' knowledge than we can gain from our informed experience as 'reflective professionals'.

In contrast to this, the kind of needs analysis we have been using here is that described by Berwick as "shaped by the local working environment and common-sense thinking of practising teachers about their work". According to this model, needs are not "*out there*", "waiting to be counted with the latest innovations of educational technology", but instead are shaped by our own perceptions of what is educationally worthwhile. What is involved is more than just prior analysis, but the yearly, weekly, daily and hourly decisions about what to choose, omit and develop - and *all* teachers have experience of this. Course planning of this kind has been summarised by Graves (1996) in the diagram below.



2. 'Needs analysis identifies the language used by target situation professionals, and these language items, taught to students, will necessarily satisfy their needs and lead to proficiency'.

This folly is clearly related to the long-discredited 'English for Motor Mechanics' model, in which discrete items of specialised language are identified and taught; the misconceptions here are on the nature of 'special language', but also, and particularly relevant for our purposes here, on the nature of needs analysis. While target situation analysis (the study of the uses of the foreign language in appropriate professional situations) is certainly important, it must be combined with present situation analysis

(evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of students at the beginning of their course), and with means analysis (assessment of institutional opportunities and constraints, as mentioned earlier).

But these are still insufficient: what is missing is something harder to label, involving a consideration of students as more than just a collection of lacks, empty vessels which we, latter-day Gradgrinds and McChoakumchilds, will fill to the target level with bits of 'English For'...motor mechanics, hairdressers, journalists, etc., and will then send into the world to pour forth their accumulated language upon anyone in their professional way. Seeing students as lacks, by the way, is likely to accompany a transmission-oriented pedagogy, which is perhaps still too prevalent in Portuguese educational culture.

In fact we must consider what (and whose) needs we are analysing: are these, in Widdowson's (1990) terms, goal-oriented, leading to proficiency, or process-oriented, leading to achievement? In motivational terms, are we and our students thinking about long-term purposes, calling for investment of knowledge (Widdowson), or here-and-now interest in the task? (Van Lier, 1996). Our view is to see needs analysis as dynamic and learner-centred, in that it is responsive, is not only done at the beginning of the course, and provides feedback leading to ongoing course modification, as in the Graves diagram above. We are trying to see students *as* students, who we have to work with *now*, with language needs and problems *during* their degree course and not just after it.

3. 'Needs Analysis is done by means of questionnaires'.

Indeed this is the most popular method, and one which I used, but it has disadvantages. Brindley (1989) calls it a closed or 'category-dependent' method: the categories are determined in advance, often without opportunities for respondents to select, shape or interact with the questionnaire designer's selection. It is the designer who calls the tune - and the results may be rather off key as a result.

I give as an example my own initial target situation analysis questionnaire from the original course planning stage, which was handed or sent to a selection of Portuguese media professionals.

Exmo Sr/Sra,

Estou a desenvolver um curso de Inglês para estudantes portugueses que desejam seguir carreira no jornalismo. Para este fim agradecia que completasse o questionário junto, que tem por fim analisar as necessidades específicas de alunos interessados num curso semelhante. Junto um sobrescrito para o envio do questionário.

QUESTIONÁRIO

Nome:.....

Posição:.....

No seu trabalho profissional durante os ultimas doze meses, quantas vezes utilizou a lingua inglesa nas seguintes actividades? Escolha um número para cada frase e coloque--o ao lado.

1. Raramente ou nunca
2. As vezes
3. Frequentemente.

1. Na leitura de jornais _____
2. Na leitura de revistas ou de material informativo _____
3. Na leitura de livros _____
4. Para ouvir notícias na radio _____
5. Para ouvir notícias na TV _____
6. Para ouvir programas documentários na TV _____
7. Para tomar parte nas conferências _____
8. Para falar com colegas estrangeiros _____
9. Na utilização do telefone _____
10. Para fazer entrevistas _____
11. Para escrever e responder a cartas _____
12. Na utilização da maquina de fax _____
13. Para tomar notas _____
14. Para escrever notícias _____
15. Se houver outras actividades para as quais ache que o conhecimento de Inglês seria util, por favor, indique-as no espaço em baixo.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Agradeço atenciosamente a sua colaboração.

Seen from a 'closed/open' perspective, the above seems largely closed, although there is some space for additional comments. It now seems to me to beg several questions, as well as inevitably leaving us in continued ignorance about *students'* needs.

To analyse the 'present situation' of students needs/wants, a questionnaire (given below) is used in the first or second class of the first year. Students interview their partners and fill in their answers, thus enabling the teacher to get a first impression of students' spoken English (especially question-formation), as well as data from the students themselves on their language learning experiences and wants.

JOURNALISM: ENGLISH 1. 199.....		CLASS
Name:.....	Date of birth:.....	
Place of birth:.....	Resident in:.....	
Year in Journalism course - 1st, 2nd or 3rd:		
Years of English:.....		
Learnt English at:.....		
Other languages (B - basic, M - moderate, F - fluent):.....		
.....		
Other language(s) studied / considered in Journalism course:.....		
Work experience:.....		
.....		
Use of English (social/professional) - details:.....		
.....		
Journalistic interests:.....		
Needs in English learning:.....		
.....		
Leisure interests:.....		
.....		
Other information:.....		
.....		

Questionnaires *elicit* information from respondents; another method is to actually *observe* the use of English in target situations. This is perhaps the ideal, but obviously difficult to set up. Somewhere between the

closed rigidity of the questionnaire and the perhaps impractical openness of observation is the more or less guided, or structured, interview. Here, questions are still used, but as scaffolding to support the one-to-one interaction; there is an opportunity for real contact, and information beyond the reach of pre-set categories may usefully emerge. Some of the questions I have used in interviews with journalists who are also students on the course are listed below.

Target Situation, Guided Interview: Some questions.

STUDENTS /COURSE

- * How many students, do you estimate, have had some experience as journalists?
- * What kind of experience will this have been?
- * Are incoming students generally well-prepared for the first year?

JOBS /TRAINEESHIPS

- * What are the job prospects for our graduates?
- * What kind of in-course traineeships will students have?
- * What are the prospects for student or trainee exchanges with foreign countries?

ENGLISH IN JOURNALISM

- * Have you needed English for work activities, other than those in the questionnaire?
- * Are there any particular situations when you need to use English?
- * What particular jobs are most likely to need a good knowledge of English?

Having thus dispensed with a few notorious fallacies, and seen some methods of doing needs analysis, here are some of the results obtained by these methods.

Results

Tabulated below are results from the initial target situation questionnaire sent to practising journalists: the questions have given us target needs expressed in terms of broad skills or activities. It can be seen that receptive skills predominate; English audio-visual media are more used than print, but magazines are read slightly more than newspapers. None of the twelve respondents had done any journalistic writing in English. Talking to foreign colleagues was a significant activity, and interviewing and note-taking were done 'occasionally' by over half of respondents.

Target Situation questionnaires: analysis of journalists' responses

Frequency of activity in previous 12 months. (N=12)

Activity	No. of respondents indicating choices below: Total			
	often (x2)	sometimes (x1)	never (x0)	(x2/1/0)
listening to/watching TV news	12	0	0	24
reading magazines etc	7	5	0	19
reading newspaper	6	6	0	8
talking with foreign colleagues	5	7	0	17
listening to radio news	5	7	0	17
watching documentaries	5	5	2	15
using the telephone	2	8	2	12
writing & answering letters	0	10	2	10
sending faxes	0	10	2	10
reading books	2	5	5	9
interviewing	0	7	5	7
taking notes	0	7	5	7
participating in conferences	0	4	8	4
writing news articles/reports	0	0	12	0

The present situation questionnaire, administered in class by students to their partners, elicited information on interim or process needs, which they have expressed in traditional grammatical or macro-skill terms.

Present situation questionnaire: analysis of students' responses

20 students - item x no. of students.		Average
<u>Ages:</u>	18 x 14 19 x 1 21 x 2 22 x 1 23 x 1 32 x 1	19.5
<u>Years of English:</u>	3 x 1 5 x 2 6 x 2 7 x 9 8 x 5 9 x 1	6.85
<u>Learnt English at:</u>	school only x 19 school + lang. school x 1	
<u>Work experience:</u>	none x 13; radio reporter x 2; newspaper office x 1 various non-journalism (bar, warehouse, library) x 4	
<u>Use of English:</u>	foreign friends x 3; tourist info. x 2; holidays x 2; Internet x 2 bar work x 1; singing/songwriting x 1; student exchange x 1	
<u>Journalistic interests:</u>	TV x 3; press x 3; radio, ecology, sports, law, music, photojournalism, :- 1 each	
<u>English needs:</u>	grammar x 5; vocabulary x 3; speaking x 3; pronunciation x 2; verb tenses x 2	

It can be seen that the great majority were recent school-leavers, 65% having no work experience, so their knowledge of journalism would be no greater than the teacher's or a layperson's. This implies the need for a range of materials to help broaden their global knowledge, and it also suggests, as mentioned earlier, that we may be asking students to carry out media-related tasks in English that they will only just be learning to do in their own language. 60% of students had used English outside the classroom, mainly for social or creative purposes. 75% had had six or more years of English, suggesting a knowledge of basic grammar and some familiarity with reading in school. Accuracy, however, especially in spoken language, could be a problem, and students themselves may have recognised this when entering 'grammar' and 'verb tenses' (35% of respondents) and 'speaking' and 'pronunciation' (25%) as their learning needs.

Using this initial data, what decisions were made about the nature of the course, and why?

Goal setting

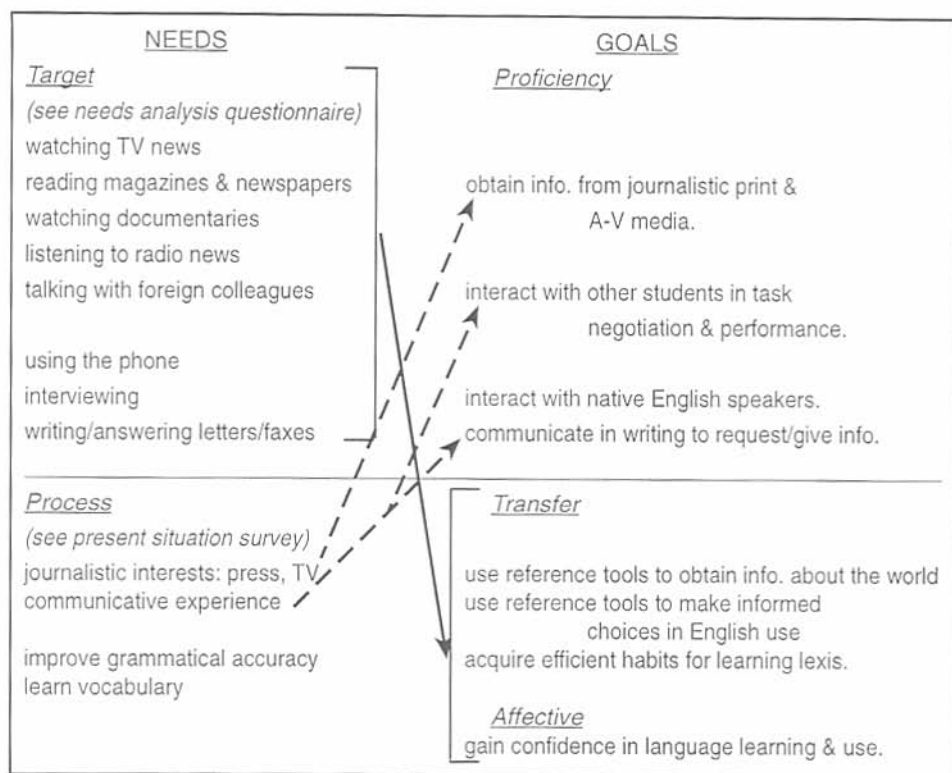
Stern (1992) has identified four types of goals and objectives:

- proficiency (general competencies & behaviours to be practised during & shown after the course)
- cognitive ('mastery of linguistic knowledge')
- affective (gaining confidence in one's learning)
- transfer (mastery of learning skills transferable to future independent study or work)

The goals defined for the English course, in relation to the needs already identified, are shown in the table below.

(Ver Quadro na página seguinte)

Reading this table horizontally, the solid lines define types of need and corresponding goals. But the diagonal lines also indicate that all needs (bracketed together) based on target tasks will also be satisfied by pursuing the bracketed transfer and affective goals (for example, the target need to read newspapers leads to the formulation of a goal of using dictionaries



and reference tools). Similarly, process concerns shown in the present situation student questionnaire feed into proficiency goals (for example, students' interest in and experience of talking to foreign visitors contributes to the goal of interactive oral communication).

From the needs and goals a more student-focused list of Aims was produced, to be given to students with course materials at the beginning of the academic year. This is reproduced below.

AIMS OF THE COURSE

By the end of the year you should be able to use English to:-

- 1.— read periodical articles rapidly to find specific information and to get an overall impression of the content, using headlines to help you
- 2.— read and understand articles in some detail
- 3.— recognise some different kinds of English-language journalism]
- 4.— listen to radio and TV news items and interviews, both for general impression and

for specific information

5. — participate in discussions
6. — conduct an interview with an English speaker, using clear and accurate language
7. — write a short business-type letter
8. — take notes from a variety of oral and written material
9. — use a learners' dictionary efficiently
10. — keep a record of new vocabulary and use a variety of techniques to learn new words
11. — find your way around local libraries and use them to find information

Is there anything else you want to do in English?

.....

.....

All the aims are examples of terminal behaviour, expressed in product-oriented terms, since it is felt that at this initial stage in their university careers it is important to give students a clear idea of where they are going, stressing *performance* rather than passive acquisition of knowledge. The same aims could however be expressed in a more process-oriented, developmental way, useful for checking progress during the year, and this list of Interim Objectives is shown below.

Interim objectives (numbers of respective Aims in brackets)

During the course of the year students should:

- 1- gain confidence and skill in reading articles rapidly (1)
 - 2- get information from print and audiovisual news media with increasing efficiency (2,4,8)
 - 3- read British newspapers with increasing awareness of genre variations (3)
 - 4- learn to plan and discuss work with colleagues in English (5)
 - 5- build confidence and skill in speaking English (5, 6)
 - 6- gain confidence in discovering and using reference sources (9, 11)
 - 7- develop independent learning strategies for dealing with new vocabulary (10)
 - 8- take responsibility for organising their work and meeting deadlines
 - 9- develop positive attitudes to independent work in English
-

We have thus used our analysis of Needs to formulate Goals, Aims and finally Objectives. In a paper of this length it would be impossible to deal satisfactorily with the details of the course which was developed on this foundation: what I shall do now is to return to needs analysis, mentioning how we are continuing the process in order to update our course.

Feedback

Graves's cycle, seen earlier in this paper, shows us that needs analysis is not done once and for all. Accordingly, we are gathering data from our new graduates and *estagiários* on their English use. In view of what I have said about methodology, we are not relying on questionnaires, but on guided (structured) interviews. So far we have spoken to seven of our former students, with more soon to come, and points of interest arising seem to be as follows:

Audio-visual media: there should be continued emphasis on this. Several students are now working in radio and TV.

Interviews: in both years of English, a major project is for students to plan, carry out, record, write about and critically reflect on an interview with a (not necessarily native) English-speaker: this has generally been a popular activity. We can also now see its immediate usefulness, since some ex-students have already had to interview foreigners in English.

Agency reports: this is a genre which we had not picked up on, nor collected in questionnaires, but it has come up repeatedly in feedback interviews - a significant activity for Portuguese journalists is reading and adapting reports from news agencies.

Translating: in view of the above point, we need to look at whether, and how, to include elements of translation in our course.

Directions for the future

I can see no necessary conflict between the "more critical, reflective approach" mentioned by Keeble (1998) and the target professional competencies identified so far. The link between the two is perhaps indicated by Fairclough's (1995) notion of 'discourse practice': "the ways in which texts are produced by media workers in media institutions".

Our needs analysis methodology so far has consisted of broad-brush techniques for identifying skills, activities and text-types. If we need to know more about 'discourse practice', there may be a need for a more ethnographic approach to our target level, involving more detailed samples of the English used by and between journalists: not just the language they produce in the media, but what they use 'behind the scenes'. It may be difficult to get behind these scenes, but at least now our graduates are giving us samples of the written texts, such as agency material, that they are actually working with. We look forward to further collaboration with them in the future.

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