

TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE TO FUTURE ARMY LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

English is nowadays a “lingua franca”, a language that speakers of various native tongues use to communicate with one another. This global role has implications for cultural exchange, international relations, and access to information. Understanding the reasons behind English’s global reach and its impact on societies offers insight into how language shapes our interconnected world. Military personnel can greatly benefit from learning International English because it enables clear and effective communication in diverse, international settings. As the armed forces are increasingly engaged in multinational operations, there appears an increased need for better communication between the soldiers and military leaders and the local populations as well as between the national militaries and their foreign counterparts. The fact that the mastery of the English language must be a priority cannot be overstated in this context.

KEYWORDS: English as an international language, teaching, army leaders

1. Introduction

500 years ago, English was spoken by around 7 million people, mainly on the British Isles. Today, no matter where you go in the world, you will find someone who speaks English. As a direct descendant of the British Empire, English has become the dominant (even official) language of 75 countries worldwide. Even in 19 of the 25 EU member states, where it is not the official language, it is the most spoken foreign language. But how and why is English the international language? It is the main language of business, science, literature, politics, diplomacy and many other fields and sectors. It is also the vehicular language of the world. What can explain this global hegemony, which is in

no danger of stopping? To understand it, one must go back to its origins and know its history. A unique history, which today makes it the major international communication language for many sectors.

The English language had already been widely spoken for a millennium on the British Isles: the sailors, pilgrims, and merchants of the Empire largely contributed to spreading it across the globe. At the start of the 20th century, the British Empire represented about a quarter of the planet’s surface. There was even a popular saying that *“the sun never set on the British Empire”*. English was the lingua franca, that is to say the vehicular language used over the very vast geographical area of the empire (Seidlhofer, 2004; Garcia, 2013).

Then, the first waves of immigration moved from Europe to the new land that was to become the United States of America. However, why is English the international language, when the settlers who arrived in America also spoke other languages, such as Spanish, French, Dutch or German? The reason is quite simple: when the Founding Fathers of the United States wanted to federate the different states, they quickly understood that a language represented a national identity. At the time, English remained the majority language, so they took steps to encourage its learning. At the beginning of the 20th century, some countries even prohibited the teaching of other foreign languages in private schools.

WWII played an important role, too. While Europe was busy rebuilding itself, the United States experienced an economic boom: many American companies at the time exported internationally, concurrently promoting English as the language of international commerce. Coupled with the influence of English in the former British colonies, it quickly became the primary language of the business sector.

Nevertheless, besides geopolitical or economic reasons, there are some more reasons why the language of Shakespeare is the international language. One reason is that English is the default language of commerce.

Another reason is that most films are in English. A global generator of entertainment, Hollywood has helped make English the main language of the film industry. Even if films are often dubbed in many countries, many moviegoers prefer to watch films and series in their original language. Throughout human history, no other language has had as widespread use as a lingua franca (Dewi, 2012).

Learning English is relatively easy when compared to other foreign languages. Indeed, the vocabulary is rather simple to assimilate, there is no feminine and masculine, and few conjugations. English is also connected to other languages: between

wars, invasions and global influences, English has been influenced by the Romans, Vikings and French. Modern English is therefore a hybrid language, which was built with Latin, Germanic and Roman linguistic elements. It is a flexible language as well, constantly enriched by new words, and continues to evolve by absorbing expressions from other languages so as to adapt to everyone's linguistic needs.

2. Standard English versus International English

Exposing military students to English varieties other than American or British English and assisting them in being aware of the Englishes used in modern world are two of the frequently advised practices (Matsuda, 2018).

The key differences between Standard English and International English lie in:

- Grammar and Syntax: International English tends to simplify grammar rules, avoiding complex sentence structures common in Standard English.

- Vocabulary: International English uses universally understood words, while Standard English may use regional terms or idioms (Tauchid et al., 2022).

- Pronunciation and Spelling: Standard English might follow regional pronunciation and spelling rules, whereas International English is less strict, aiming for clarity rather than regional accuracy (Jenkins, 2002).

On the one hand, Standard English refers to the form of English widely accepted as the “norm” within a particular region or country, often taught in schools, used in formal writing, and observed in media. In the U.K., for example, Standard British English is often considered the norm, while in the U.S., Standard American English is typical. Standard English typically has consistent grammar, vocabulary, and spelling rules within each dialect, like British or American, and is often more formal (Seidlhofer, 2003).

On the other hand, International English, or Global English, no longer resembles Shakespeare's English. It is a simplified, inclusive, and flexible form of English, used by speakers from various backgrounds, including those who are non-native speakers. It has fewer idioms, simpler grammar, and avoids region-specific vocabulary or spellings to make it understandable worldwide. Sentences in International English are brief and use of passive voice is avoided. The word order follows a consistent and predictable pattern. The sentence's subject and its modifiers have an explicit connection. There is no usage of metaphorical language. Everything makes sense and is literal. Making English as understandable as feasible for speakers of various original languages is the common objective of all these principles.

Examples:

Instead of "Let's call it a day" (idiomatic), in International English, one might say, "Let's stop working for today."

Instead of "I'll touch base with you" (idiomatic), one might say, "I will contact you."

In both cases, the International English version is clearer and avoids region-specific idioms that might confuse non-native speakers.

3. Why Should Military People Learn International English?

Here are several reasons why International English is especially valuable for military members:

- Enhanced communication in multinational operations

Military personnel often work alongside allies from various countries in joint operations or peacekeeping missions. International English helps eliminate misunderstandings by using straightforward vocabulary and avoiding idioms or region-specific expressions. For instance, instead of saying, "Let's get this show on the road," military personnel might say, "Let's begin

the operation." This way, the message is universally understood.

- Improved coordination in high-stress environments

In high-stakes or emergency situations, clear, unambiguous language is crucial. International English emphasizes clarity, reducing the chance of errors in communication. For example, rather than saying, "We'll touch base in five," they would say, "We will communicate in five minutes." This reduces potential confusion and helps everyone understand the exact plan.

- Simplified training and instruction for non-native speakers

Military personnel work with non-native English speakers or train forces in different countries. Using International English helps instructors convey information in a way that is accessible and easily understood by those with varying English proficiency levels. Instead of "We'll iron out the kinks," an instructor might say, "We will fix the small issues." This phrasing is much clearer for non-native speakers.

- Improved diplomacy and cultural sensitivity

International English avoids slang, idioms, or culturally specific references that may not translate well across borders. This respect for language barriers can improve diplomatic relations and build trust among international teams. For instance, instead of "Keep it under your hat" (meaning "keep it secret"), a military person might simply say, "This information is confidential."

- Support in peacekeeping and civilian interactions

During peacekeeping missions, military personnel often communicate with local civilians. International English helps them explain things clearly and avoid words that might be misinterpreted or misunderstood by non-native speakers. For example, using, "We are here to help and keep peace" rather than "We're just

boots on the ground” helps convey their mission’s intent more effectively.

- Effective use in briefings and reports

International English is ideal for written reports, briefings, and presentations that are shared with international teams, ensuring that the information is accessible to a broad audience without needing extensive explanations or clarifications.

Learning International English equips military personnel with a communication style that is clear, concise, and universally accessible. It is a powerful tool for fostering cooperation, preventing misunderstandings, and ensuring smooth operations in diverse, multilingual environments.

4. Strategies to Teach English as an International Language to Military Students

Teaching English as an International Language in the military requires a focus on practical, clear, and universally understandable communication. We suggest some effective strategies we have already experienced to help our military students quickly develop International English skills suitable for their future international missions.

4.1. Focus on clear, direct communication

During speaking classes, we try to emphasize clear and concise language. We encourage cadets to avoid complex sentence structures, idioms, and regional slang that could confuse non-native speakers.

4.2. Teach core vocabulary and phrasing for international contexts

We prioritize teaching essential vocabulary and phrases that are likely to be useful in multinational operations, peacekeeping, or diplomatic contexts. For example, we create vocabulary exercises that include simplified, universally understood terms for military actions, equipment, and

commands and have students practice using these terms in simulated scenarios with foreign counterparts.

4.3. Use scenario-based training

Prioritize teaching essential vocabulary and phrases that are likely to be useful in multinational operations, peacekeeping, or diplomatic contexts.

Activity Example: Create vocabulary lists that include simplified, universally understood terms for military actions, equipment, and commands. Have trainees practice using these terms in simulated scenarios with foreign counterparts.

4.4. Incorporate cross-cultural communication skills

Teach awareness of cultural nuances that might impact communication and emphasize respectful, neutral language. This helps military personnel avoid misunderstandings with foreign partners.

Activity Example: Use case studies of past multinational missions to discuss potential cultural differences and practice ways of phrasing questions or commands to make them neutral and clear.

4.5. Teach active listening and clarification techniques

Emphasize skills for understanding non-native English speakers, such as listening carefully, speaking slowly, and using simple language. Teach personnel to ask clarifying questions if something is unclear, and how to respond when others need clarification.

Activity Example: Pair trainees and have one person give a set of instructions using International English while the other asks clarifying questions to practice both giving and receiving information clearly.

4.6. Leverage technology and language apps

Provide access to language learning apps that emphasize International English or

tools like translation apps, which can help military personnel prepare for communicating in mixed-language environments.

Activity Example: Use apps that focus on vocabulary building and practice through daily exercises. This can be reinforced by interactive simulations in the classroom where they practice with the new vocabulary.

4.7. Simulate communication with non-native English speakers

Role-play exercises where trainees practice speaking with individuals who have limited English skills, such as speaking slower, avoiding complex vocabulary, and checking for understanding.

Activity Example: Have one person in each pair speak as a non-native English speaker, while the other practices communicating in clear International English. This helps develop patience and communication techniques suited to multinational contexts.

4.8. Focus on simple grammar and standardized structures

Teach the use of simple grammatical structures and avoid complex tenses, which can often be confusing for non-native speakers.

Activity Example: Provide drills where trainees rephrase complex sentences into shorter, simpler ones. For example, change “If we don’t get reinforcement, we might be in trouble” to “We need reinforcement soon to stay safe.”

4.9. Evaluate and provide feedback on communication clarity

Regularly assess trainees’ ability to communicate in International English through practical drills, simulations, and feedback sessions, focusing on clarity and simplicity.

Activity Example: Conduct periodic assessments where trainees respond to prompts in International English. Provide constructive feedback on language clarity, including simplifying phrases or using alternative vocabulary.

By integrating these strategies, military personnel can develop skills to communicate effectively with international teams, improving mission coordination, teamwork, and overall operational success in diverse environments.

5. Conclusion

English dominates the world, and everyone benefits from mastering this language. This language dominates the others for historical, commercial, political or simply practical reasons. It is true that languages like Spanish, French or German are also widely spoken, but they do not fulfil the same role. English maintains its position compared to the official languages of other countries, since it has already firmly established itself as an international language. It is the lingua franca of today in all the sectors of human activity. Military personnel can greatly benefit from learning International English because it enables clear and effective communication in diverse, international settings, and teaching International English in the military is a powerful way to enhance collaboration within the different international structures and theatres of operations.

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