

THE IMPORTANCE OF TASK-BASED LEARNING AND SCENARIO-DRIVEN EXERCISES IN THE TEACHING OF MILITARY ENGLISH

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Abstract: *In the field of military education, the role played by effective communication is a crucial one. Traditional language instruction methods like the Grammar – Translation Method, its opposite, the Direct Method or the repetitive and sometimes dull Audio-Lingual Method do not always address the unique linguistic demands of the contemporary military operations environment. Task-Based Learning represents a language learning approach where those who learn a foreign language are required to complete various interactive tasks. Scenario-driven exercises represent simulated, real-world situations that are meant to encourage learners to practice language skills in realistic military contexts. The teacher engages cadets in role-play situations where they must make use of their English knowledge in order to complete specific tasks that they are likely to encounter in their future professional lives. The present paper explores the importance of Task-Based Learning (TBL) and scenario-driven exercises in military English training, highlighting their roles in enhancing language proficiency and operational readiness. It focuses on the benefits as well as on the challenges such a language learning approach can have and presents suggestions on how these could be overcome.*

Keywords: teaching, military, English, task-based learning, scenario-driven exercise

1. Introduction

The military of today have to operate in a fast-paced, increasingly complex, and technologically advanced international environment. Numerous missions of the military personnel today extend beyond the traditional kinetic operations, including peacekeeping, cognitive warfare, counterterrorism, disaster relief, cyber warfare, etc. Service members often work alongside allies coming from various countries on the globe, government agencies or non-military organizations and they have to deal with a multitude of challenges: linguistic, cultural, technological or of another nature. Since the lingua franca of military operations is English, effective communication in this

language represents a crucial element that will ensure the success of the mission and will foster international cooperation. In this extremely dynamic setting, the military must be capable to correctly and timely interpret orders, to transmit critical information and to engage in strategic decision-making, all these under extremely stressful conditions. It goes without saying that the military training of those who prepare to become officers must go beyond the traditional classroom instruction and incorporate authentic, scenario-driven exercises and task-based learning so as to train personnel for the operational challenges of contemporary and future military engagements. With the current changes taking place around the world, the

military personnel must operate in environments where clear and precise communication is of the essence and often makes the difference between success and failure. The traditional language training methods could not always adequately prepare the military for the specific difficulties they would face. This is the main reason why many teachers of foreign languages who work in the military system resort to Task-Based Learning (TBL) and scenario-driven exercises in order to provide contextually relevant instruction that reflects real-world situations their students may encounter.

2. Content and Language Integrated Learning and Communicative Language Teaching

There are deeply intertwined connections between TBL, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), some of the most used methods preferred by teachers that aim especially at improving their learners' oral and written communication skills, a preference that reflects a shift towards more authentic and meaningful language acquisition.

The "Communicative language teaching methodology emerged in the 1980s as a response to the growing demand for a language curriculum that would enable learners to use the second language in real-life situations. Previously, foreign language teaching (or English language teaching for non-native English speakers) has predominantly had its emphasis on grammatical competence, especially because the Grammar-Translation method was the most accepted teaching method, rather than actually focusing on developing students' communication and interaction skills." [1]

CLT, through its emphasis on real-life communication and interaction, is considered to have laid the groundwork for CLIL and TBL.

The CLIL method means the teaching of subjects in a foreign language. "Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become the umbrella term describing both learning another (content) subject such as physics or geography through the medium of a foreign language and learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject." [2] In the case of CLIL, knowledge of the foreign language is the means that enables the student to learn content. The motivation for learning the language is higher as the learners are interested in the topic that is taught. The language is learned in context, in a more natural way, by means of real-life situations.

Even though it takes a long time to reach an academic level of English, fluency gains precedence over accuracy and errors become a natural part of language learning. CLIL, CLT, and TBL are all focused on authentic interaction and real communication. CLT provides the foundation for CLIL, while TBL represents a practical application of CLT, using meaningful tasks to encourage language use, and fitting well within CLIL settings. TBL offers a structured way to apply the principles of CLT in CLIL, fostering both language and content acquisition.

3. Task-Based Learning in Military English Training

The teachers that employ Task-Based Learning (TBL) focus on developing the learner's language skills by means of meaningful, real-life tasks, the learning of grammar becoming a secondary goal. When teaching military English, one also has to avoid the dry memorization of vocabulary or the dull completion of textbook exercises. The learners are to be engaged in mission-specific activities like writing reports, conducting briefings, or solving problems related to everyday work situations. These types of tasks require the military to use the foreign language in practical, goal-oriented ways, fostering both

English competence and critical thinking. When learners are immersed in realistic roleplay scenarios, TBL enables them to develop confidence, fluency, accuracy, and effectiveness. Additionally, we have noticed that since these tasks are directly linked to the cadets' professional duties, they find them more motivating.

Since those that learn a foreign language, and especially those that serve in the military, should acquire effective communication skills needed in various real-life situations that imply interaction with others outside the classroom, teachers must prepare them by means of real-life scenarios.

When employing Task-Based Learning, the main objective of the teacher is to give the learners the opportunity to complete meaningful realistic tasks. In the military context, this could involve simulations of mission briefings, communication in tactical situations or negotiation scenarios. By engaging in these undertakings, learners develop language skills that are directly applicable to their present and future roles. Before embarking upon the adoption of task-based learning in a military environment, the foreign language teachers need to take into consideration several principles that will enable them to be successful. They need to keep in view several guiding principles when designing the syllabus and the lessons they deliver.

The content of the lesson needs to be tailored to the needs of the military students. Starting with 2025, they need to demonstrate they have at least a B2 English level according to the CFR, obtained at the Bacalaureate exam or at internationally recognized exams for the certification of linguistic competences. [3] STANAG LEVEL 2 is described as Fair (Limited working), those that obtain it being able to [4]. The teachers are required to follow the descriptors presented in the *Participant's Guide* to the STANAG exam so as to help the learners achieve a STANAG Level 2 at the time they graduate from the Academy, a

requirement of the Ministry of Defence. All the English syllabi, for all the specializations, are designed having in mind the tasks that the cadets should be able to carry out when they become officers.

With TBL, we embed the grammar explanations within the lesson as not everything needs to be discovered. "Explicit instruction in task-oriented language teaching is also best offered repeatedly: better a series of short 'grammar spots' in which the grammar rule is repeatedly recalled every time a task requires it than one 50-minute lesson on that rule." [5]

During the classes all the skills are exercised, but each semester one or two skills are given precedence over the others, the emphasis being on communication through interaction in the target language, on authentic texts, on the creation of opportunities for cadets to concentrate, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.

The learner's personal experience, his general and specialized knowledge are considered important elements to contribute to the learning done in the classroom.

4. Scenario-Driven Exercises

Scenario-driven exercises immerse learners in realistic situations, requiring them to use English in contextually appropriate ways. These exercises can range from emergency response exercises to simulated peacekeeping missions, each intended to reproduce the difficulties of military operations.

At the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, the teachers employ scenario-based exercise in order to prepare the cadets for working with foreign counterparts. They are required to interact during real-world exercises that improve both language proficiency as well as cultural competence.

One of the commonly used tasks they are required to fulfill is that of delivering various types of military briefings. They

also practice how to communicate via radio using the appropriate military phraseology, how to respond in crisis situations like hypothetical security threats or how to engage in mock negotiations with foreign military to solve various conflicts.

These activities they engage in during the English classes help them acquire vocabulary, fluency but also clarity, concision, and even a better understanding of operating procedures.

Such real-world exercises as the ones we mentioned above help making lessons more meaningful and effective for cadets and prepare them for international cooperation and future missions.

5. Benefits of using TBL and Scenario-Driven Exercises

One of the most evident benefits of using TBL and scenario-driven exercises is the learners' increased motivation when they see the relevance of their training to real-world situations.

Moreover, the practicality of the application of language skills in real-life scenarios boosts memory retention and recollection.

Since the cadets have already practiced the language necessary for various work-related contexts, it goes without saying that they will be able to carry out their duties more effectively when in actual operations.

TBL is one of the recognized methods of teaching foreign languages that fosters the students' critical thinking by prompting them to come up with solutions in dynamic situations that indicate the unpredictability of military engagements.

6. Challenges

One key issue is the lack of structure, especially for learners who are used to traditional, grammar-based instruction. Students may feel uncertain or overwhelmed when given open-ended tasks without explicit guidance.

Another challenge lies in classroom management and time constraints. TBL often requires group work, which can lead to off-task behavior or unequal

participation. Teachers must carefully plan and monitor activities to ensure productive collaboration. Additionally, assessing task-based activities can be difficult, as they focus on process and communication rather than right or wrong answers.

Teachers also face the challenge of designing meaningful tasks that align with students' language levels and interests. Poorly designed tasks may fail to engage learners or to provide enough language input. Moreover, in large or mixed-ability classes, it can be hard to meet the diverse needs of all the students.

Despite its advantages, Task-Based Learning demands skilled teaching, careful planning, and a supportive classroom environment to be successful. Without these, its implementation may fall short of achieving desired learning outcomes.

A study conducted by Gaddala Subbarao explored the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning in improving English proficiency. The findings demonstrated "that students in the TBL group experienced a significantly greater improvement in overall language skills compared to the control group." [...] Furthermore, learners reported high levels of engagement and confidence when using TBL, confirming its potential to create a dynamic and interactive language learning environment. [6]

The benefits brought using TBL are also confirmed by the research work of Xie Chunliu and Lan Guangsheng: "TBLT can significantly enhance communication skills across different language areas, including speaking, listening, vocabulary, and overall proficiency. By incorporating real-life communication tasks, TBL allows students to practice language in meaningful contexts, improving their fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Interactive techniques such as task repetition and reflective learning further support long-term language retention and proficiency." [7]

7. Conclusions

The real-life situations that cadets are

“confronted” with during the English classes represent an essential component of their training due to the fact that they are compelled to use the language in a practical and meaningful way. These exercises replicate authentic military contexts and by engaging in these activities, cadets develop linguistic accuracy, fluency, critical thinking, decision-making, skills that are vital in the contemporary environments. These tasks construct an immersive and engaging educational experience that prepares the learners for the future challenges of the military profession.

Incorporating Task-Based Learning and scenario-driven exercises into military English training offers a robust framework for developing language skills that are directly applicable to military operations. Thus, the future officers are better equipped to communicate effectively and the probability of the mission success increases. With the help of these innovative teaching methodologies, military teachers can significantly develop the language performance and the communication skills of their students.

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