

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE SUCCESS OF GLOBAL MILITARY OPERATIONS AND ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LINGUA FRANCA

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—Abstract —

This article explores the role of Foreign Language Education (FLE) in particular English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in educating global warriors and global military education. Parallel to the rise of English language as an essential tool determining the success in the field of the global trade, by the foundation of NATO and emergence of English speaking super powers, English language has also become a major factor affecting the success of military operations all over the globe. The fact that multinational command structures are deadly in need of robust civil-military relations and interagency, intergovernmental organization, and nongovernmental organization coordination has led to the rise of English as a Global Lingua Franca. Similarly, mastering English language is a sine qua non for the global citizens of the new era since they are supposed to operate as part of joint organizational structures coordinating air, land, maritime, space, and special operations. So, EFL education has become a core element in military academies and war colleges all over the globe. This paper will also handle the cultural aspects of language teaching to the global citizens in uniforms and offer some implications for language teachers

Key Words: *English, military, education, globalization, curriculum.*

JEL Classification: I20

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. English as the global lingua franca

Not only in the modern globalized world but also throughout centuries interconnectedness and achieving means of effective communication have become one of the major concerns of mankind. Although there might be numerous

attempts to reach practical ways connecting peoples of the world, one of the well-known efforts was realized by a Polish scientist. In 1887, Polish physician Ludovic Zamenhof created an artificial language called Esperanto in order to provide the peoples of the world with a culture free, easy to learn, common language. Although Esperanto has had numerous speakers and advocates till 1970s, it has not evolved into a widely used world language. Instead, English has become the language of science and technology, international politics, commerce, finance, tourism and military. Indeed, English as the global *lingua franca* of the 21st century has started to become a worldwide language since the early 17th century. The development pace of English language as a global language had accelerated rapidly between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries throughout the world, particularly after the 1950s, when a greater mobility of people was facilitated by the growth of air travel and international tourism (Richards 2001). A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country (Crystal,2003:3).

Today, it cannot be denied that English has become a global *lingua franca* with non-native speakers of the language outnumbering its native speakers. Since roughly only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language (Crystal 2003), most of the interactions take place among non-native speakers of English. For those, English is a contact language between people who share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication (Firth 1996: 240).

English is now the official or dominant language for two billion people in at least 75 countries. It has taken different forms in different parts of the world. In some cases new native varieties developed, like those spoken in North America and Australia; they now enjoy the prestige of 'core varieties' along with British English. In other cases, again, English was adopted as a second language in mainly Africa and Asia, and the resulting varieties are often spoken of as 'outer circle' varieties, 'New Englishes' or 'World Englishes'. According to the British Council, speakers of English as a second language probably outnumber those who speak it as a first language, and around 750 million people are believed to speak English as a foreign language. Indeed, over 80% of interactions in English worldwide are now estimated to be between non-native speakers (Graddol, 2006). In this respect, native speaker competence may no longer be relevant as a model to imitate or a golden standard to reach (Seidlhofer, 2004).

Although it cannot be denied that English is the most common language to communicate scientific, technological, academic, and international trade information and it is an indisputable fact that English is the world's lingua franca, the focal point of this paper will be limited to the role of English language in military and under the light of the above facts some recommendations will be given for teaching the globe's lingua franca. This paper will also handle the cultural aspects of language teaching to the global citizens in uniforms and offer some implications for language teachers

2. ENGLISH AS A MILITARY LINGUA FRANCA

2.1. Multinational Operations

Parallel to the rise of English language as an essential tool determining the success in the field of the global trade, by the foundation of NATO and emergence of English speaking super powers, English language has also become a major factor affecting the success of military operations all over the globe. In this global village global problems entail global solutions. Multinational operations are operations conducted by forces of two or more nations, usually undertaken within the structure of a coalition or alliance. Features depicting the modern warfare are as follows:

- One integrated battlefield,
- Combined joint operations led by commanders with a combined joint responsibility throughout the chain of command,
- Employment and integration of long range, precise and lethal weapons,
- Decision cycle down to minutes,
- Global deployment of troops,
- Use of large networks with distributed information.

[http://www.docstoc.com/docs/52360680/Bureau-for-International-Language-Co-ordination-\(BILC\)](http://www.docstoc.com/docs/52360680/Bureau-for-International-Language-Co-ordination-(BILC)) [Accessed 24.04.2012]

In such a great battlefield filled with troops deployed over continents, multinational soldiers led by commanders from different cultures, it is a real challenge to defeat the enemy. In this respect English emerged as a language systematically used to make communication possible between multinational soldiers living and fighting together to make the world a peaceful place for our children.

The fact that multinational command structures are deadily in need of robust civil-military relations and intergovernmental organization, and nongovernmental organization coordination has also led to the rise of English as a Global Lingua Franca. Furthermore, as it is seen in Figure 1, unified action is the synergistic application of all instruments of national and multinational power; it includes the actions of nonmilitary organizations as well as military forces. This concept is applicable at all levels of command. In a multinational environment, unified action synchronizes and integrates multinational operations with the operations of intergovernmental and nongovernmental agencies in an attempt to achieve unity of effort in the operational area.

Figure 1: Multinational Unified Action

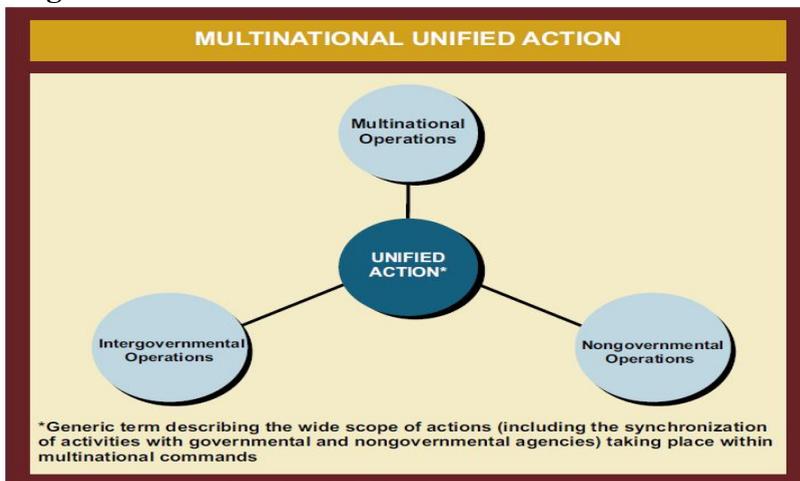


Figure III-3. Multinational Unified Action

Source: (DTIC,2007) http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_16.pdf [Accessed 19.04.2012]

James Owen reports in the National Geographic News (February 22, 2005): The European Union has been operating in 20 official languages since ten new member states joined the legislative body last year. With annual translation costs set to rise to 1.3 billion dollars (U.S.), some people question whether European Union institutions are becoming overburdened by multilingualism. Hence, the role of English in ensuring multinational unified action among the military, governmental and nongovernmental units with reasonable costs is quite obvious. Hence, saving billions of dollars not spent on translation of messages, NATO owes English a lot.

2.2. Culture and intercultural competence in military

In such a rapidly changing world, it is hardly possible to operate successfully in a complex battlefield from a monocultural and monolingual base. After World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower noted that “mutual confidence” is the “one basic thing that will make allied commands work.” Members of the multinational task forces are all supposed to take the following tenets into consideration to ensure missions’ success and unity of effort. Achieving this will certainly require mastery of a common language spoken by every single member of the Multinational Force.

- *Respect.* In assigning missions the commander must consider that national honor and prestige may be as important to a contributing nation as combat capability. Understanding, consideration, and acceptance of partner ideas are essential to effective communication, as are respect for each partner’s culture, religion, customs, history, and values.
- *Rapport.* Commanders and staffs should establish rapport with their counterparts from partner countries. This requires personal, direct relationships that only they can develop. Good rapport between leaders will improve teamwork among their staffs and subordinate commanders and overall unity of effort.
- *Knowledge of Partners.* Commanders and their staffs should have an understanding of each member of the Multinational Force. Much time and effort is expended in learning about the enemy; a similar effort is required to understand the doctrine, capabilities, strategic goals, culture, religion, customs, history, and values of each partner. This will ensure the effective integration of Multinational Force partners into the operation and enhance the synergistic effect of the coalition forces.
- *Patience.* Effective partnerships take time and attention to develop. Diligent pursuit of a trusting, mutually beneficial relationship with multinational partners requires untiring, evenhanded patience. This is easier to accomplish within alliances but is equally necessary regarding prospective coalition partners. (DTIC,2007)

Since building rapport and understanding the partners are essential for a mission to be accomplished, intercultural competence is a vital component of language learning for military personnel. Therefore, as part of their curriculum, learners of English need also to be helped to develop intercultural competence: the sensitivity to other cultural norms and the ability to adapt and function appropriately when

interacting with people from other cultures (Alptekin, 2002). To a large extent, English as a lingua franca is a culture-free language in that it naturally expresses the culture of its speakers, and is therefore may function as a vehicle for a wide variety of cultures. (Alptekin, 2005). Spoken in Europe, North America and Australia core native varieties, being adopted as a second language in many parts of Africa and Asia, English brought the convenience of global communication with various forms all over the globe. Playing an important role in creating a global community and developing planetary citizenship, English as a global lingua franca deserves to be an essential subject to be studied in both civil and military curricula.

3. ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Mastering English language has become a sine qua non for the global military citizens of the new era since they are supposed to operate as part of joint organizational structures coordinating air, land, maritime, space, and special operations. So, foreign language teachers in military education institutions are supposed to adopt content addressing global issues by focusing on cross-cultural comparisons in order to develop students' intercultural competence; and by training students in communication skills that are essential for effective dialogue.

Traditional teacher-centered methods emphasize the role of teachers in class and promote rote memorization, heavy grammar instruction and vocabulary explanation (Jin and Cortazzi 2002, 136). Traditional teaching methods do not position students as the main stakeholders of education, and they also fail to improve students' comprehensive language competence (Zhan, 2008). Today, it is a fact that many teachers still put more emphasis on the delivery of knowledge about the language, while ignoring the development of students' language abilities. This is actually a pure reflection of behaviorist model of learning which assumes that learning occurs by trial and error, repetition, and reinforcement of targeted behaviors. Thus, a corresponding curriculum design focuses on drill and practice, extensive immediate feedback, and a series of small goals or objectives to be achieved.

Unfortunately, up until 1970s many ELT programs were teacher-centered, drill based and discouraged students to become active participants in the learning process. So, for years education has been regarded as being the transmission of knowledge and the job of the teacher is assumed to tell facts to the students from elementary right the way through to advanced level, and for those students then to

be tested on whether they have managed to retain the presented facts, and if they manage to reproduce what the teacher has said, they get a top mark.

Teachers should adjust their views on language and language teaching and use a more student-centered approach. It requires that teachers should talk no more than one third of class time. Language input should be authentic, interesting and practical. Teachers are encouraged to use modern teaching technology to create a better learning environment and develop teaching resources (Wang and Wang, 2000:8).

The rise of learners as unique individuals led to a move from the idea to find the best approach or method to teach a foreign language, to designing one's own specific to the educational environment in which the needs of the learners are to be met. The fact that learner variables such as age, cognition, native language, educational background etc. diverge into numerous areas has gained widespread recognition. As a result, the awareness of various learners' needs, individual learning styles, different educational structures, learners' expectations, conditions of the educational contexts, etc. led many researchers to deal with a special area in ELT; curriculum design. The fact that there is no single instructional strategy that matches all of the objectives of a given course made the specialists match the learning environment with the instructional goals.

So, English language teachers of the military academies trying to fulfill the unprecedented demand for English language competence development, should take the issue of syllabus design seriously and aim at joining both content knowledge and teaching language skills at the same time in order to ensure the effectiveness of foreign language teaching.

4. CONCLUSION

The rise of English as a lingua franca led to; a change in the concept of English as an internationally comprehensible variety of the language rather than a single native model, a change in the instructional goals putting emphasis on intercultural competence and a change in materials and test design, relating to both content and language. Multinational operations carried out on an integrated battlefield via global deployment of troops can only be led by commanders endowed with successful communication skills and acquired intercultural competence through the mastery of the global lingua franca namely English.

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