

## A NEW CHALLENGE FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS: TEACHING MILITARY VOCABULARY

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**Abstract:** *Teaching military English constitutes a challenge for the Romanian teachers of English, given the fact that a series of both internal and external factors must be taken into account. ‘Military’ vocabulary becomes, thus, an instrument meant to serve the final purpose of communication in a well-defined framework: the military environment.*

**Key words:** *internal factors, external factors, military vocabulary, communication.*

Teaching military English may be included into what the specialty methodology refers to as “Teaching English for Specific Purposes” (TESP, or, ESP) [1]. Nevertheless, the major purpose of teaching is to facilitate communication within the military environment and not to merely familiarize the trainees with the military terminology. Boundaries between the ESP and General English are very vague, therefore teachers of English are challenged to discover and apply whatever methods may serve the development and improvement of communicative skills in military people. According to Tom Hutchinson, “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” [1], while Dudley-Evans defines the concept as an “attitude of mind” [2]. In fact, the answer to what the difference between ESP and General English is may be as simple as that: “in theory nothing, in practice a great deal” [1].

At this point, I would personally interpret this remark as follows: there is no difference between the ESP and General English, in terms of conceptual understanding of both, as long as a strong needs analysis is inexistent. As soon as the teacher of English has identified specific needs in his/her students, the approach to teaching the foreign language should serve the accomplishment of the targeted needs. A series of both internal and

external factors may affect the success of the teaching act. Among the external factors I would mention the amount of specialty knowledge in L1 (mother tongue), the selection of relevant topics and availability of teaching resources, while the internal factors may include personal motivation and language opportunities.

*Specialty knowledge in L1.* The challenge of teaching a certain type of specialized vocabulary in English consists of the fact that the non-native teachers need to establish contacts with professionals in the targeted field. Such contacts do not require of teachers to become experts in any of the military specialties, yet, they will further assist teachers in establishing a priority list of the students’ necessities. Similarly important is for students to possess a certain amount of knowledge in the specialized area of interest in L1. Absence of this knowledge may impede understanding of the process introduced to them in English or may finally lead to the reverse situation of teaching a specialty in English – which is no longer the English teacher’s responsibility.

*Selection of relevant topics.* Topics proposed by teachers must meet the students’ needs and desirably, they should be able to enhance and improve communication in L2 (English). Vocabulary inherent in each topic will thus facilitate access to communication in the targeted language. At the same time, even a well-selected topic may include a large

amount of passive vocabulary, which may be recognizable to students, yet, they do not have the linguistic opportunity of using it extensively. It is only the teacher's responsibility to apply the best methods at hand in order to help students with their vocabulary acquisition. The better the method, the easier the transition from passive vocabulary to active vocabulary will be. Furthermore, the skillfulness of a teacher is being challenged alongside with distinguishing between topics with a general military content versus the more specialized military topics. While the former category relies less on specific military vocabulary and consequently is more accessible to learners, the latter mentioned category uses a variety of specialty notions and understanding of vocabulary, in terms of specific words, is vitally connected with contextual understanding and sufficiently strong knowledge of text mechanics, semantics and syntax. Finally, a good selection of military topics should satisfy not only the needs of communication within the Romanian military environment but should also be in accordance with the military realities worldwide and provide communicative channels with different cultural environments.

*Availability of teaching resources.* Many ESP teachers have become slaves of the published textbooks available, unable to evaluate their suitability based on personal experience, and unwilling to do the necessary analysis of difficult specialist texts to verify their contents. From this perspective, teaching military vocabulary risks to become a painful task for teachers and the reliability of the teaching act in itself decreases or increases at the same pace with the availability of teaching resources. On condition that the amount of specialty knowledge in L1 (mother tongue) and the selection of relevant topics have been met, material selection will only be a matter of teaching artistry. In this respect, specialized magazines and publications and the internet are of great help. Subsequently, the specialized vocabulary may be reliably integrated in authentic written or spoken materials and

teaching it will involve the use of similar methods used in teaching General English vocabulary.

*Personal motivation.* Personal motivation ought to exist among the learners of the specialized language area prior to their contact with the language itself. Both personal and professional interests count for the successful achievement of the final goal: communication in English.

*Language opportunities.* Once the learner is fully motivated to assimilate specific vocabulary and structures in the second language, he/she should be made aware of the opportunities provided by his/her language acquisition. In the military environment any of the English learners may apply a certain amount of acquired knowledge in direct contact with peers from different cultural military backgrounds or, satisfy personal professional needs by accessing specialized materials in English.

To conclude my attempt in establishing the nature of challenge in teaching military vocabulary by non-native English teachers, I would underline, once more, that vocabulary cannot be separated from a well defined context and should not be regarded as a mere linguistic instrument. The teacher's challenge consists of using all his/ her knowledge in teaching the military vocabulary from a communicative perspective and meeting the specific communication needs of students, while the role of the teacher is to facilitate access to communication in the targeted language, by means of introducing specific vocabulary and language structures.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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