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# English for the military and security forces: The reason why

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**Abstract.** The importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been increasing in several areas of knowledge. However, there is little information about the meaning of ESP regarding the military and security environment. Due to numerous changes both at a national and international level within the Armed and Security Forces fields, the use of the English language in context has become an essential part in the Curricula of anyone willing to belong to the Portuguese Armed and Security Forces. One of NATO's founding members, Portugal has to participate in several types of military and law enforcement activities like peace keeping operations, joint and combined exercises, fighting piracy, etc. In doing so, it is expected that all participants are up to date in terms of knowledge regarding communication and all its means, types of equipment and operational needs. The Portuguese Military Academy, in Lisbon, is a unique and successful case of teaching ESP: military and law enforcement English. From the three academies of the Armed Forces (Military Academy, Navy School and Air Force Academy) the Military Academy is the only institution that teaches its students ESP for 3 years. The majority of the cadets finish those 3 years with the indispensable knowledge of specific English they will be required to use in their professional lives. Moreover, cadets learn English with materials which are specific and directed to their needs: the course books and CDs Campaign, English for Law Enforcement and material produced and collected by the teachers. In a time of constant change, new types of conflict and new types of opposing forces, must be taken into account and rapidly dealt with. Hence, Military and Law Enforcement English is a branch of ESP that needs to be known and shared by a larger group of researchers in order to be capable to respond to all needs, at all times.

**Keywords.** English for Specific Purposes, defense and security environment, education and training.

## 1. Introduction

Though the importance of English for Specific Purposes has been increasing in several areas of knowledge, we seldom hear people talking about its relevance in terms of applying the language to the field of Defense and Security. In fact, there is not much information regarding what it really means to teach and learn ESP within the defense and security environment.

One might wonder why would there be a need for learning a specific kind of English when people are basically dealing with weapons or police techniques? Maybe we should start from the very beginning to explain why English applied to the military does matter by taking the example of what happens in Portugal, at the Military Academy, where young men and women enter as freshly graduates from high school and leave at the end of five years, fully trained to become Army and Gendarmerie officers.

## 2. The Military Academy in Portugal

The Military Academy, located in Lisbon, is a public higher education institution that develops teaching activities, research and community support, with the main purpose of training the future officers of two distinct forces: the Army and the Gendarmerie.

Academically, the courses are organized in a way similar to other higher education institutions. In terms of military training and behavioral areas, the courses follow the directives of the Army Chief of Staff.

Army and Gendarmerie are two forces that differ in the sense that the Army is in charge of Defense (basically national defense), whereas the Gendarmerie is a force that has military training but performs its task at a police level, in terms of national security.

National security it is meant to be everything that has to do with the community: be it theft crime, search and rescue, domestic violence, public order maintenance, or drug dealing just to mention some of GNR's tasks and activities. Yet, dealing with national security also means knowing about crime scene investigation, legal systems, or even transnational crime.

Still, where does English fit in, within this Defense and Security environment? It fits in in the sense that due to numerous changes both at a national and international level within the Armed and Security Forces fields, the use of the English language in context has become an essential part in the Curricula of every individual who is willing to become part of the Portuguese Armed and Security Forces.

As one of NATO's founding members, Portugal has to participate in several types of military and law enforcement activities such as intervening in armed conflicts (with its armed forces) in order to enforce peace or intervening after that conflict (with the Gendarmerie) in order to build peace, to mention but two of those activities.

It can be stated that, at a political and diplomatic level, the members of NATO have to be able to deal with two languages, so that they can fully understand and communicate with each other, and those two languages are French and English. Still, when we refer to military operations being held within the frame of NATO, that language is unquestionably no other but English.

It is therefore expected that, whenever a country takes part in any type of peace operations; armed conflicts; humanitarian missions or overseas assignments; or when the military forces of a country take part in any joint exercise (by that meaning a multinational level exercise), all participants will have a standardized level of knowledge in terms of communication and performance on common and technical issues like operation orders (the detailed instructions for leading and executing a military operation); or in terms of understanding the tactics to use for a determined situation; or even being prepared to answer questions related with any kind of operational equipment required; or being able to use that same equipment (a radar or a radio, for instance).

Basically, it means that if someone belonging to the Armed and Security Forces is not skilled and proficient enough in terms of using the English language in a multinational environment two things can happen: either he/she will not take part in that particular mission, operation or assignment, or he/she can simply jeopardize that mission or assignment by participating in it without the necessary knowledge and skills.

Bearing all the above information in mind, and based upon that information, it can be therefore concluded that the knowledge of the English in the Armed and Security Forces environment is nowadays unquestionable and of major importance. Adding to that it is now necessary to say, following that line of thought, the Academia Militar, in Portugal is a unique and successful case of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP): Military and Law Enforcement English.

Of the three academies of the Armed Forces (Military Academy, Navy School and Air Force Academy) the Military Academy is the only institution that provides its students with 4 years of ESP.

### 3. English for the Military and Security Forces

What exactly do the cadets learn in English classes over those 8 semesters? Along with all the vocabulary to do with weaponry, topography, tactics and signals (in the case of the Army); or crimes against property, traffic and vehicles, civil disorder or criminal justice systems (in the case of the gendarmerie), cadets learn how to make briefings (several types of briefings used in different contexts), how to plan and execute operation orders; how to write military

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correspondence and how to communicate on the phone to superiors or subordinates, or via radio, just to mention but some of the topics that constitute their syllabuses.

Moreover, cadets' learning process regarding the English language is facilitated by using materials and course books which are military and law enforcement specific and which are also directly addressed to their needs: at the moment their courses focus upon a course book called Campaign (for the Army), and another book called English for Law Enforcement (for the Gendarmerie), specially designed for the military and law enforcers, along with real material collected by the teachers from military sites, books and other real documents like Field Manuals or the Rules of Engagement used for a particular conflict and theatre of operations. Real material is used and is also always connected with the areas of Defense and Security.

As a result, most cadets finish their 4 years of English tuition with, at least, the essential knowledge of English to communicate in all kinds of situation in his/her daily life; but for sure, with the indispensable knowledge of specific English they will need to use on a regular basis in their professional lives.

Then again, what is the ground to state that cadets are given essential knowledge of English, but the indispensable knowledge of specific English? Bearing in mind that the Portuguese Armed Forces follow all NATO standards and procedures, this is the point where the NATO Standardization Agreement must be referred. This Standardization Agreement is a document with rules and procedures which apply, precisely, to language requirements and procedures: that being called STANAG 6001.

STANAG 6001 addresses all NATO members and concerns any language standards, which are taught and spoken by them. In the following lines, only the English language will be focused upon.

As written in its latest version, dated 2010, STANAG 6001's aim is "to provide NATO Forces with a table describing language proficiency levels", that is to say, it is used to define an individual's language proficiency.

This document provides detailed definitions of all proficiency levels in terms of the commonly recognized language proficiency skills: "listening", "speaking", "reading", and "writing". The Standard Language Profile (SLP) of each student is given and understood by means of a four-digit sequence referring to those four skills.

As far as the Military Academy is concerned and regarding the English language, at the end of their academic course, Portuguese Army and Gendarmerie cadets are expected to reach level 3333 of proficiency. Expected because it is not mandatory yet.

The expression most cadets and not all cadets was used some lines above to describe the kind of knowledge cadets achieve by the end of their English learning process at the Military Academy: it is possible that all cadets learn English, and it is probable that they all manage to learn specific vocabulary in context, even if some of them (a minority, but a reality, too) still will not go far beyond survival English, but it is not likely that everybody can achieve a level of proficiency as high as a level 3 in all four skills.

In any case, although it is a reality that many cadets can now be assessed and reach what can be called "a three", whilst others will still only be capable of reaching a level 2 regarding the four skills, the idea that each and all cadets will - at the end of their courses - be in possession of all the tools to use English applied to the military on a regular basis, that is, to their professional life, is an idea that must surely be reinforced at this point.

Why use the expression "on a regular basis"? For in a time of constant change, new types of conflict and threats and new types of opposing forces, have to be foreseen, taken into account and rapidly dealt with. It is not only and not anymore a matter of being deployed on a mission, or being chosen to take part in some joint exercise across the border.

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The point is that armed and security forces personnel have to always be prepared to respond to whatever unpredictable situations might occur, and they all must be ready to defend not only their own homeland, but in the current globalized world of the 21st century, to defend other people's homelands too and with the same attitude and strength they would use to fight for their own.

This is to say that, security and defense personnel have to be capable of communicating, interacting, and interoperating without hesitations of any kind, without barriers of any type, be it political, economic, or linguistic and to be capable of doing it at any required time.

If one takes the new threats of our times - terrorist attacks, for example, or cyber-attacks - and just think of how fast it is necessary to react in order to be effective, one must also be aware of the fact that the threats of the present can no longer be fought with weapons only.

Current threats armed and security forces have to fight against are now dealt with by means of surgical interventions. And by surgical intervention is saying intervening in very specific spots of a conflict, parts of a city, for example, and not over whole areas, like entire cities.

Besides that, after some terrorist attack or at the end of a civil war for instance, one must bear in mind the type of readiness that forces have to handle in order to be prepared to respond and be in the theaters of operations just in time to assure the populations with at least some words of comfort and affection, or with the necessary strength for putting an end to the chaos left either by an explosion caused by a terrorist attack or the destruction provoked by an earthquake or a tsunami.

The effectiveness that is being described upon these lines does not come from using more powerful weapons or from destroying the enemy by ambushing enemy forces and arresting all of them at once. The effectiveness that is to be highlighted through this paper is the effectiveness that comes from functional multinational operations. The functionality, which means previous preparation in terms of management, politics, training and culture.

Also, the functionality that comprehends a thorough knowledge and good proficiency of a language, in order to be capable of fully interacting with one's peers from different countries, but also to interact with the local populations in the theatres of operations. Current international conflicts and the peacekeeping duties deriving from it imply an enormous amount of means and people involved in it.

Like the mechanism of a machine, for the structure of any joint or combined operation to work in perfect conditions, the pieces that shape the mechanism have to be flawlessly oiled. Which is the same as saying that, along with the military support and personnel taking part in the resolution of conflicts and peacekeeping duties, other factors contribute in equal, if not sometimes major, terms for reaching the final aim of peace. Those factors always include close cooperation amongst friendly forces for which the knowledge and use of a common and shared language stands out as an essential component.

Along with all that was written above, it must also be added that a common language used in military contexts can mean twice as much as it does in daily civilian contexts. A shared language used by the military can work as an ice breaker in terms of cultural barriers, as it does in civilian contexts, but it can also be used as a tool to help building bridges regarding full knowledge and understanding of either concepts of operations, tactics or even local habits which might be essential for the resolution of a conflict or the training of local police or armed forces.

To work using a shared language that is not necessarily your own language, can also mean that everybody involved in that particular mission or assignment has the capacity to work together aiming for the same target of reaching peace, because they all possess the essential communication skills which are necessary to cooperate in an international environment. This is called interoperability and it has become crucial when one talks about multinational forces and all the tasks they have to perform.

Apart from the referred international missions for conflict resolution or for humanitarian reasons, some other tasks which require a good command of the English language applied to the military have to do with the role played by liaison officers, observers (working under the UN umbrella, for instance) and security advisors; the training of local populations' police and armed forces after the conflicts; or even seminars and meetings held with peers from other nationalities, International Organizations, or local NGOs.

Even at a national level there are other tasks requiring some proficiency in the use of English within the defense and security environment that must not be forgotten. That is the case of: border control operations (having to deal with situations of drug smuggling or even human trafficking); search and rescue operations (when the pilots involved are from other countries); tourism support patrolling or joint and combined exercises taking place in national territory.

For all the above reasons, it can be stated that Military English is undoubtedly in increasing demand in the same proportion that forces from different countries are gathering to work together in a multinational and interoperational environment. Hence, the need of more specific English in the field of the armed and security forces is closely connected with their need to adapt to the present changes in the field of defense and security and, ultimately, with the very concept of war.

In the Portuguese Military Academy, cadets realize the importance of learning ESP, especially because they know that learning will be the key to a better preparation and understanding of the large and varied number of tasks they will be facing after graduation. Among which, those tasks include: overseas assignments; humanitarian missions; peacekeeping operations; describing tactics; patrolling; emergency situations; understanding and using international laws relating to conflict; learning to lead and also to be led. Last but not least, the task of dealing and negotiating with local communities and local military leaders or local law enforcers. Situations where English is the language most commonly used.

The increasing importance of ESP applied to the defense and security fields has led to the fact that, as from this school year (2013/2014) onwards, students willing to join the Military Academy have to undergo a mandatory English language test intended to determine both their level of English proficiency and, based on that proficiency, whether they will be able to join the Military Academy or not.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be stated that regarding the Armed and Security Forces sphere, there is currently no doubt that the language working as a key enabler for obtaining the best and fastest results worldwide is the English, and that the more one know in terms of English applied to these areas, the shorter the distance to solutions of peace and understanding gets.

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