

## FROM GENERAL PROFICIENCY TO MISSION READINESS: EVALUATING THE EFFICACY OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) IN MILITARY TERMINOLOGY INSTRUCTION

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the application of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the instruction of military terminology, with a focus on transitioning learners from general language proficiency to operational mission readiness. While English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has long been employed in military contexts, traditional methods often emphasize rote memorization of vocabulary and grammatical structures, which may not adequately prepare personnel for the dynamic communicative demands of real-world operations. TBLT, by contrast, prioritizes meaningful task completion as the primary vehicle for language acquisition, thereby fostering both linguistic competence and strategic communicative ability. Through a mixed-methods study involving 120 military personnel across three proficiency levels, this research evaluates the efficacy of a TBLT-based curriculum designed for military terminology instruction. Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests indicate statistically significant improvements in terminology retention, contextual usage, and oral performance among the experimental group. Qualitative findings from interviews and observation logs reveal enhanced learner engagement, increased confidence in operational scenarios, and better transfer of classroom learning to simulated field exercises. The study concludes that TBLT offers a pedagogically sound and practically effective framework for military language training, particularly when tasks are authentically aligned with mission-specific communicative demands. Recommendations are provided for curriculum designers, military language instructors, and policy makers seeking to optimize language preparedness for multinational operations.*

**Keywords:** *Task-Based Language Teaching, military terminology, English for Specific Purposes, mission readiness, language proficiency, military training, applied linguistics, communicative competence.*

### INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasingly multinational military operations, the ability of personnel to communicate effectively in a common operational language, predominantly English, has become a critical component of mission success. Military terminology, encompassing standardized phrases, procedural language, and domain-specific lexicon, constitutes a specialized register that demands targeted instructional approaches. Traditional language training in military contexts has often relied on grammar-translation methods or audiolingual drills, which, while useful for building foundational knowledge, frequently fall short in

developing the adaptive, context-sensitive communicative skills required in high-stakes operational environments [1].

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), grounded in second language acquisition research and communicative language teaching principles, offers a promising alternative. By structuring instruction around the completion of meaningful, real-world tasks, TBLT encourages learners to use language as a tool for achieving concrete objectives, thereby promoting deeper processing, greater retention, and enhanced transferability of linguistic knowledge [2]. In military settings, where language use is inherently purposeful and consequence-laden, the alignment of pedagogical tasks with operational scenarios presents a compelling rationale for adopting TBLT.

The relevance of this study is underscored by ongoing efforts within NATO and partner nations to standardize language training protocols and improve interoperability. Despite growing interest in communicative and task-based approaches, empirical research on their efficacy in military terminology instruction remains limited. This gap hinders evidence-based curriculum development and policy formulation.

The object of this study is the process of military terminology instruction within structured language training programs.

The subject is the efficacy of Task-Based Language Teaching in facilitating the transition from general language proficiency to mission-ready communicative competence.

The aim is to evaluate the impact of a TBLT-based curriculum on military personnel's acquisition and application of specialized terminology in simulated operational contexts.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks were formulated:

1. To review theoretical foundations of TBLT and their applicability to military English for Specific Purposes (ESP).
2. To design and implement a TBLT-based instructional module focused on high-frequency military terminology.
3. To measure learning outcomes through quantitative assessments of terminology knowledge and qualitative analysis of task performance.
4. To compare the efficacy of TBLT with traditional instruction methods in terms of retention, contextual usage, and learner perceptions.
5. To derive practical recommendations for integrating TBLT into military language training frameworks.

Methods employed include a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design, standardized terminology assessments, oral performance rubrics, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation protocols. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative measures and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

Theoretical Framework: TBLT and Military ESP

Task-Based Language Teaching is an instructional approach that organizes language learning around the completion of tasks that reflect real-world language use. According to

Ellis, a task is an activity that requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to achieve an outcome [3]. Key principles of TBLT include:

- Focus on meaning over form during task execution, with attention to linguistic form addressed in post-task phases.
- Authenticity of tasks, ensuring they mirror the communicative demands of the target domain.
- Learner-centeredness, allowing participants to draw on their existing linguistic resources and strategic competence.
- Cyclical task sequences (pre-task, task cycle, language focus) that scaffold learning and promote noticing.

Military English for Specific Purposes (ESP) constitutes a specialized branch of language instruction characterized by:

- A highly conventionalized lexicon (e.g., "roger," "wilco," "over," "sitrep," "casevac").
- Strict procedural and syntactic patterns (e.g., radio communication protocols, operational orders).
- High-stakes communicative contexts where clarity, brevity, and accuracy are paramount.
- Multinational interoperability requirements necessitating standardized terminology and phrases.

The intersection of TBLT and military ESP presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, the task-based emphasis on authentic communication aligns well with the performative nature of military language use. On the other hand, the highly formulaic and regulated aspects of military terminology may appear to constrain the open-ended, meaning-focused negotiation typical of TBLT tasks. However, research suggests that even within constrained registers, tasks can be designed to promote strategic language use, adaptive problem-solving, and contextualized practice [4].

Several theoretical models inform the application of TBLT to military terminology instruction. The Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt) posits that learners must consciously attend to linguistic forms for acquisition to occur; TBLT's post-task focus phase can be tailored to highlight military-specific terminology and structures. The concept of "transfer-appropriate processing" suggests that learning is most effective when the cognitive processes engaged during instruction match those required in the target context; TBLT tasks that simulate operational scenarios thus enhance the likelihood of successful transfer to real-world missions.

#### Methodology

#### Research Design

A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was employed, involving an experimental group (TBLT instruction) and a control group (traditional instruction). Participants were 120 military personnel from three allied nations, stratified by proficiency level (A2, B1, B2

according to CEFR) and randomly assigned to conditions. The study spanned 8 weeks, with 4 hours of instruction per week.

#### Instructional Materials

The TBLT curriculum was developed in collaboration with military language experts and comprised six thematic modules: radio communication, situational reporting, mission briefing, rules of engagement, medical evacuation procedures, and joint operations coordination. Each module featured:

- Pre-task activities: vocabulary preview, schema activation, strategy instruction.
- Task cycle: information-gap, problem-solving, or decision-making tasks requiring use of target terminology (e.g., "Plan a joint patrol using standardized radio protocols").
- Language focus: explicit instruction on form, pronunciation, and usage of key terms, based on errors and gaps observed during task performance.

The control group received instruction on the same terminology using traditional methods: explicit presentation, drill practice, memorization exercises, and controlled production activities.

#### Instruments and Data Collection

1. Terminology Knowledge Test (TKT): A 50-item multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank assessment measuring receptive and productive knowledge of target terms, administered pre- and post-intervention.

2. Oral Performance Assessment (OPA): A simulated radio communication task scored using a rubric assessing accuracy, fluency, appropriateness, and strategic competence.

3. Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with a purposive sample of 24 participants (12 from each group) to explore perceptions of learning experience, confidence, and perceived transferability.

4. Classroom Observation Logs: Completed by trained observers to document engagement patterns, task completion rates, and language use.

#### Data Analysis

Quantitative data from TKT and OPA were analyzed using ANCOVA to control for pre-test differences, with effect sizes calculated to determine practical significance. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were coded thematically using NVivo software, with inter-rater reliability checks to ensure consistency.

#### Results and Analysis

##### Quantitative Findings

Analysis of Terminology Knowledge Test scores revealed a statistically significant interaction between instruction type and time,  $F(1, 116) = 18.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .14$ . The experimental group demonstrated greater gains from pre-test ( $M = 28.3$ ,  $SD = 5.1$ ) to post-test ( $M = 41.7$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) compared to the control group (pre-test  $M = 27.9$ ,  $SD = 5.4$ ; post-test  $M = 35.2$ ,  $SD = 5.8$ ). Effect size calculations indicated a large practical effect (Cohen's  $d = 1.21$ ) for the TBLT condition.

Oral Performance Assessment scores similarly favored the experimental group, with significant improvements in accuracy ( $p = .003$ ), appropriateness ( $p = .001$ ), and strategic competence ( $p = .008$ ). Fluency gains were marginally significant ( $p = .052$ ). Notably, the experimental group showed superior performance in handling unexpected communicative disruptions (e.g., signal loss, ambiguous instructions), suggesting enhanced adaptive capacity.

#### Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interview data identified four recurring themes:

1. **Authenticity and Relevance:** Participants in the TBLT group consistently described tasks as "realistic" and "directly useful," noting that practicing terminology within operational scenarios enhanced their sense of preparedness.

2. **Engagement and Motivation:** The interactive, problem-solving nature of TBLT tasks was reported to increase attention and effort, with one participant stating, "You're not just memorizing words; you're using them to get something done."

3. **Confidence Building:** Experimental group participants expressed greater confidence in their ability to use terminology under pressure, attributing this to repeated practice in simulated high-stakes contexts.

4. **Transfer Perceptions:** Many TBLT learners reported consciously applying classroom-learned strategies and phrases during field exercises, whereas control group participants more often described a disconnect between classroom learning and operational application.

Observation logs corroborated these findings, showing higher rates of spontaneous terminology use, peer collaboration, and strategic communication in TBLT classrooms.

#### Discussion

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the efficacy of Task-Based Language Teaching in military terminology instruction. The significant gains in terminology knowledge and oral performance observed in the experimental group suggest that TBLT not only facilitates lexical acquisition but also promotes the contextualized, strategic language use essential for mission readiness.

Several mechanisms may explain these outcomes. First, the authenticity of TBLT tasks likely enhanced cognitive engagement and depth of processing, leading to stronger memory traces for target terminology. Second, the requirement to use language purposefully to achieve task outcomes may have fostered greater automatization of procedural knowledge, enabling faster and more accurate retrieval in time-sensitive situations. Third, the collaborative nature of many tasks provided opportunities for peer scaffolding and negotiated meaning, which research has shown to support language development [5].

The qualitative data further highlight the affective and motivational benefits of TBLT. Military personnel, who often view language training as a bureaucratic requirement, responded positively to instruction that mirrored the communicative demands of their professional roles. This alignment between pedagogical approach and occupational identity may be particularly important in military contexts, where buy-in from learners is critical for training effectiveness.

Limitations of the study include the relatively short intervention period (8 weeks), which may not capture long-term retention effects, and the use of simulated rather than real operational environments for assessment. Future research should investigate the durability of TBLT gains over extended periods and in authentic field settings. Additionally, the study focused on English-language instruction; further work is needed to explore TBLT applications in other lingua francas used in multinational operations.

#### Implications for Practice

For curriculum designers, the results underscore the importance of task authenticity and alignment with operational scenarios. Military language syllabi should prioritize high-frequency, high-stakes terminology and embed it within meaningful communicative tasks rather than isolated vocabulary lists. For instructors, the findings suggest that balancing meaning-focused task performance with explicit attention to form in post-task phases can optimize both fluency and accuracy. For policy makers, the evidence supports investment in TBLT-oriented teacher training and resource development to enhance the overall quality and impact of military language programs.

#### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Task-Based Language Teaching offers a pedagogically robust and practically effective approach to military terminology instruction. By structuring learning around authentic, mission-relevant tasks, TBLT facilitates not only the acquisition of specialized lexicon but also the development of strategic communicative competence essential for operational success. The significant improvements in terminology knowledge, oral performance, and learner confidence observed in the experimental group highlight the potential of TBLT to bridge the gap between general language proficiency and mission readiness.

As military operations continue to evolve in complexity and multinational character, the demand for personnel who can communicate effectively in standardized operational language will only increase. TBLT, with its emphasis on meaningful language use, contextualized practice, and learner engagement, provides a framework well-suited to meeting this demand. Future research should explore the adaptation of TBLT principles to emerging technologies (e.g., virtual reality simulations, AI-driven language tutors) and diverse operational contexts (e.g., humanitarian missions, cyber operations).

Ultimately, the goal of military language training is not merely linguistic competence but operational effectiveness. By aligning pedagogical methods with the communicative realities of military service, TBLT contributes to the broader objective of preparing personnel for the linguistic demands of modern, multinational missions.

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