
Language and Cultural Learning in the Military: “vital aspects in International contexts”

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1. Introduction

The South Atlantic conflict in 1982 represented an important milestone for the servicemen's education in our country. Malvinas War revealed the language communication difficulties manifested by many of the Argentine servicemen during and after that conflict. Consequently, new policies and urgent decisions were necessary in the educational planning of foreign languages. The emphasis

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was mainly on the English language because it is the most widely used language in different joint military operations such as peacekeeping (Bowyer, 2016). In other words, English is a must for an effective communication in multinational scenarios where the military are required to comply with their duties. Only by having accurate language training they will be able to interoperate linguistically with their foreign counterparts and build relationships with the local populations. International military missions require more adaptive, flexible and mobile forces to deal with a broad range of tasks (Tresch, 2019). As Castillo (2017:22) points out, "the need for effective communication is particularly acute in international missions where linguistic misunderstandings risk leading to mistakes, which might, in a worst case scenario, result in casualties".

The teaching of foreign languages, in which English has developed as the language of choice for military personnel worldwide, became a very important aspect in the academic formation of our servicemen in the different military training institutes. The active deployment in peacekeeping missions, the large number of exchanges courses abroad and the participation in different international military operations made members of our national armed forces be prepared to the demand of the new world.

Languages and culture understanding play a crucial role in war, conflict and peacemaking, intelligence gathering and evaluation, pre-deployment preparations, operations on the ground, and supporting refugees and displaced persons (Laugesen and Gehrman, 2020). Therefore, our servicemen during their duties have to cooperate intensively with the armed forces of other nations in an international environment.

Facing this international context, followed up by the process of a modern uninterrupted democracy that relied on legal, normative and educational reforms prompted significant changes in the operational and academic education of the Argentine military personnel since the early 1990s.

In view of the above, the aim of this paper is to revise the learning of foreign languages in the Argentine military as well as the cultural awareness servicemen need before their international deployment.

2. Multicultural military missions and their language demands

Over the course of the twentieth century, military forces became increasingly aware of the need for preparations for war to include the support of linguists, and for language and cultural training to be undertaken (Laugesen, et al, 2020). Therefore, in modern military deployments, the need for effective communication is particularly acute. Scholars such as Hillary Footitt and Michael Kelly (2012) have asserted that language plays a crucial role in armed

conflict, peacekeeping, humanitarian operations, troops training and support to refugees.

This is the main reason why the English language training for the Argentine military has greatly gained in importance in the last three decades. This notable evolution is mainly based on post-cold war defence relations and in the increase of international military actions and operations since 1991. The new context and the active participation in United Nations led Argentine servicemen to be deployed with a large number of troops and equipment that were part of multinational and multicultural United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKO). Although our country has been participating in UN missions since 1958 with the first Military Observer in Lebanon (Libro Blanco de Defensa, 2015), it has only become a troop contributing country (TTC) since 1991 with a large deployment in the Balkans conflict and then in Cyprus. Within these contexts, as Niculescu, Obilişteanu and Dragomir (2019) state, linguistic and cultural interoperability is of paramount importance, being in fact a "*sine qua non*" condition to interoperability at all levels. In other words, the importance given to the teaching of foreign language as the vehicular language for the military in international missions only occurs in our country after Malvinas War.

Since then, the English language has become increasingly important among members of Argentine armed forces. Hopefully, it has been understood that it is de facto language in a global world in which relations between countries are increasingly important (Montesino, 2013). Consequently, the relevance of this lingua franca raised a number of issues in the improvement of education. In the army, for example, the Language Department was created in 1993 while the Joint Training Center for Peace Operations (CAECOPAZ) followed in 1995.

The language school has as the main objective the teaching and assessment of foreign languages, which includes English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese and Spanish for foreigners. The assessment of all these languages is established on a six-level knowledge scale while CAECOPAZ origin is determined by the necessity to have a national center in the region to train peacekeepers prior to their deployment in UN missions. The new roles of the military and changes in defense relations after the Cold War converted Argentina into one of the most prominent TCC for United Nations in which military forces were increasingly deployed on humanitarian assistance and peace operations (King, Walden, Mellor-Clark and Altamirano, 2004).

Therefore, since 1992 Argentina has steadily played a very active role in these missions, significantly contributing to the achievement of world peace and stability (Libro Blanco de Defensa, 2015).

Facing this new scenario, the importance of foreign language training for the Argentine military was a must as they started working and training with armed forces from different countries. Watson (2015: 95) reinforces this idea by quoting

that "a good management of foreign languages gives the military the skills to interact with actors from other cultures and to understand operational cultural realities that are extremely important". However, there were specific reasons why military personnel focused to learn English in particular. To begin with, the essential role of English as the workplace language makes it vital for communication (Castillo, 2018); secondly, there are many specific reasons why military personnel need to learn this language which will vary according to their service, job experience, specialization and rank (King et al., 2004). A few examples to illustrate these language demands are as follows:

- A senior officer of the armed forces appointed to an Argentine Embassy abroad. Although English might not be the first language of the designed country, members from other embassies use English as a means of communication.
- A sergeant deployed to a multinational headquarters (peacekeeping mission). He or she is a driver who will need to understand different driving instructions and must know how to address properly to senior military officers and civilians.
- An officer/Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in training is going abroad to complete a course in a Military Academy/ College or Regiment. They will live and train alongside men and women from the host country and other comrades from different parts of the world.

In other words, the importance of the English language in the Argentine military is an immediate and a fundamental issue in the education of people in the forces. Thus, speaking a foreign language with an appreciation of local culture is a potent tool in influencing a mission's outcome whatever the mission is (US Army Research Institute, 2008).

3. Cultural awareness in international contexts

Since the end of the Cold War cooperation within armed forces and the relation in military defense have expanded and deepened worldwide. As stated by Tresch (2007, p:34), "the end of the Cold War, which saw an increase in multinational forces accompanied by downsizing of armed forces, low military budgets, and new threats and combat missions". However, although multinational military operations in themselves are nothing new, since the end of the Cold War military multinationalism has acquired a new dimension.

The new interaction among members of different nations due to operational training brought about the interaction and understanding of servicemen of different origins. In addition, the end of this War caused the expansions of new peacekeeping missions or multinational peacekeeping operations made up of armed forces of different countries (Mays, 2022).

The Argentine military have become part of these changes and consequently cultural awareness capabilities for our armed forces play at the

tactical, operational, and strategic levels a relevant role in the understanding of a foreign culture. In this aspect, Watson (2016) highlights the importance that the military must have language and culture training before their deployment. Following the same idea (Cosentino, Azzollini, Depaula and Castillo, 2016: p.286) point out that “it is important for the Argentine military to have a further training about the cultural differences between the country of origin and the host country”.

Multiculturalism in military organization is then a key factor that every member of our national forces must be aware of in order to avoid misunderstandings. The lack of cultural awareness might lead to embarrassed or critical work situations. As stated by multiculturalism is absolutely nothing new, but under conditions of progressive globalisation mechanism its importance has been appreciated. Barriers of time and space have been broken, that is why we experience cultures living next to each other (Brudnicka, 2015)

Today's operations increasingly require our forces to operate with coalition and alliance partners and interact with foreign populations, in a variety of regions, with diverse languages and cultures. Culture and foreign language capabilities have become essential enablers for conducting military operations. The peacekeeping operational environment requires an agile and dynamic force, both today and in the future. The Argentine armed forces must be capable of operating across the full spectrum of missions, in an increasingly multicultural environment.

In short, it is clear that the prevailing multiculturalism has an impact on the Argentine troops, since they must act in diverse contexts between actors from different cultures. Participation in these multinational scenarios requires compliance with international standards, which can only be achieved through adequate preparation and careful selection of the personnel to be deployed (US Army Research Institute, 2008). In other words, cultural Awareness capabilities are essential for successful cooperation, humanitarian efforts and social interaction wherever Argentine military are deployed.

4. Policies implemented in the education of the Argentine military

For more than five decades and in accordance with the principles established in the Charter of the United Nations and International Humanitarian Law, peacekeeping missions have been deployed with the aim of maintaining order and security in places that have been affected by several conflicts (Vergara, 2014).

This participation has led many UN troop contributing countries, whose mother tongue is not English, to take different measures and curricular actions aimed at implementing or improving the teaching of foreign languages. These educational changes were due in principle to the increase in peacekeeping

missions or the invitations these countries received to be part of UN deployments in different parts of the world.

In our country, the Ministry of Defense placed special attention and emphasis on teaching foreign languages for military personnel. The effort had the aim to improve the military education through educational reforms in the different Training Institutes (Libro Blanco de Defensa, 2015).

In the Military College, for example, it has been implemented since this year the so called "over level" teaching of English for those cadets who have a good command of that language and they wish to improve their proficiency. In addition, it has also been introduced the possibility to choose the study of Portuguese as a second foreign language learning.

The improvement in the education of the armed forces, since the return to democracy, and the new policies implemented had their development through a gradual process in which a big interest has been generated on a large part of its members. Indeed, Argentina has experienced changes that have significantly transformed the education of the military (Frederic, 2017). Hence, Motivated by different purposes, military personnel turned massively to the study of foreign languages in order to achieve training and fluency, at least to establish a conversation at an intermediate level. Although the final and common goal among argentine military is to join a peacekeeping mission, there are, however, other reasons that make them study foreign languages: exchanges course abroad, academic training or a vacancy in an Argentine Military Attaché are just, to mention a few, some of the examples.

This growth and interest in the study of different languages, led to the creation of different language learning centers that are really effective and well endowed with human resources, technological resources and very good infrastructure. English and French courses taught at CAECOPAZ, the wide variety of foreign language training available at the Army Language School or the English course related to national defense offered at the National Defense University (UNDEF) are the result of the new policies implemented in the education of the argentine military.

Despite the great changes, efforts and achievements obtained to improve and promote the study of foreign languages, there is a large number of personnel who still continue to face language difficulties when they are chosen to take part in different appointments abroad, but in particular, in peacekeeping missions. However, if this is the case, these personnel will be part of foreign languages "crash course" before their deployment.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this work was to call attention on the changes and improvement of the teaching of foreign languages as well as cultural awareness in the armed forces as an efficient tool for communication. Foreign languages are vital among military to have an effective communication in multinational

structures. As stated by Smolarek (2016:185), “English is the primary language of communication in international military interventions and also the official language that different national contingents use to talk to each other as well as to communicate with headquarters”. Nevertheless, the lack of fluency in this language may cause participants some inconveniences in their daily tasks in the mission.

Also, it has been firstly observed that the end of the south Atlantic conflict in 1982 brought about significant innovations that foster the education of the military which produced significant changes in different fields. Service members must be qualified enough to be engaged in any international deployment in which they have to cooperate intensively with the military of other nations. Secondly, the changing roles of the armed forces made our country participate and be a relevant troop contributing country for United Nations. The events that have been mentioned developed the fluency and preparation of foreign languages and cultural awareness among the professional soldiers and introduced educational mechanisms related to the teaching of languages. In other words, new policies were introduced to achieve the excellence of future military interventions. It is clear that by having a good training it will be possible to have qualified personnel who can handle the different situations in the context of peacekeeping, humanitarian or international operations. The operational success or failure of a multinational context depends on professionalism and attitudes of servicemen, participants of the mission, to a large extend.

We hope that the new citizen soldiers of our armed forces will not only be professionals fully prepared for their specific job but also world citizens who are educated in different foreign languages and culture. Within the context of international missions that now exists across borders, our military members need to be able to communicate not only with members of different national forces but also with civilians of the host country. In other words, foreign language skills and cultural expertise and learning are vital capabilities needed by today’s military to face the challenges of their present duties.

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