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Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future

**PROFESSIONAL CULTURE OF THE MILITARY:
LINGUISTIC, COMMUNICATIVE AND PLURILINGUAL SKILLS**

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Abstract

Foreign languages proficiency and cultural awareness are inseparable components of professional culture of the contemporary military, which help them face the challenges of security in different cultural environments. Until recently there has been no comprehensive, systematic approach to developing intercultural competence of the military men. The military's lack of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills is a part of the larger problem facing education system of the country as a whole. It is shown that learning languages helps understand different cultures and sometimes helps save lives. The authors support the ideas of M. Barrett, who suggested that we should consider linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills as a component of intercultural competence. Most of the cadets believe that modern military men must be trained and ready to fulfil their professional duty using a foreign language as a means of communication. A special questionnaire was offered to cadets of the fourth-year of study at RHACA for self-assessment. There was a group of 50 respondents learning English as the first foreign language and German as the second. The descriptors of the levels of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills were taken from Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The results of the study show that the respondents assess the level of their linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills as advanced – 20% (English) and only 5 % (German). Obviously, developing linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in a second foreign language takes some more time.

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Keywords: Foreign languages, military men, cadets, linguistic skills, communicative skills, plurilingual skills.



1. Introduction

Developing foreign languages as a part of professional culture of the military is a global trend. There is no doubt that foreign language skills and cultural expertise are critical capabilities needed by today's military to face the challenges of the present security environment (Building language skills and cultural competencies in the military, 2008). Promotion of foreign languages in the context of professional education of the military is crucial for tackling such challenges as increases in intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination toward minority ethnic and religious groups, which are higher now in the world than at any time in the past 50 years (Barrett, 2018). Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills may help the military bring peace and stability to different groups of people, to function effectively during peacekeeping and humanitarian operations (Juhary, 2013). Very often there are highly complex relations within military personnel, in culturally diverse society living in the theatre of operation and between all of them (Brudnicka, 2015). It is this specific issue, which the current paper addresses.

2. Problem Statement

Obviously, there are different ways of improving professional culture of the military at a higher education institution. Firstly, it is necessary to organize the educational process in the interdisciplinary paradigm, to develop professionalism of the staff, to implement communication management elements in the military higher education organization as part of a university program of military education innovation process (Baryshnikov & Korzhan, 2016). Secondly, it is highly important to develop cadets' motivation and value orientations, which undergo some transformation throughout the period of their study at military education organizations (Karlova, 2018). Thirdly, it takes time to develop cadets' multicultural tolerance, and ethno-cultural education space of the military institution may be used for that purpose (Sultanbekov & Belovolov, 2017). And finally, future military men should be involved in cross-cultural communication in the academic setting at the higher education institution (Archakova, Archakov, & Belogurov, 2017).

Languages and cultures are closely connected with each other. It is true, that "the language reflects the picture of the world inherent to a certain ethnic culture. In its turn, the language-based picture of the world is reflected in the national logics of perceiving the world, in the worldview of the nation and in the mentality of every single individual representing the ethnic community" (Voevoda, Belogurov, Kostikova, Romanenko, & Silantyeva, 2017, p. 122). The effectiveness of foreign language training in higher education can be solved by means of productive learning of foreign languages and self-educational activity among students (Almazova, Eremin, & Rubtsova, 2016).

It is evident from the statements mentioned above, that it is an urgent issue to investigate the academic and professional language needs of the cadets at a military educational institution and their self-assessment. The present research is aimed at this kind of investigation.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Research question 1: How do the cadets understand the aim of learning foreign languages?

3.2. Research question 2: What is cadets' self-assessment of their level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyse the cadets' understanding of the importance of learning foreign languages for improving their professional culture, to find out how the cadets can explain possible ways of implementing their linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in their future professional activity. The present study also presupposes analysing the cadets' self-assessment of the level of their linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in English as lingua franca and German as a second language.

5. Research Methods

The study is based on the dialogical methodological approach to teaching foreign languages: the ideas of Feuerbach, Buber, Bakhtin, the dialogue of cultures by Bibler. The methods used in the study are theoretical and empirical.

The theoretical methods are represented by: analysis, generalization and systematization of documents of the Council of Europe and works of Russian and foreign researchers on the problem of the study. The foundation of the theoretical basis of the research consists of the works on the ideas of foreign language teaching in the context of professional culture (Voevoda, 2015; Kostikova, Prishvina, Ilyushina, Fedotova, & Belogurov, 2018). It is also important to mention here the issues of innovatization of educational process in military higher education institution (Baryshnikov & Korzhan, 2016), value orientations and attitudes of military education institutions' cadets (Karlova, 2018), actualization in the educational work of the ethno-cultural potential of the educational environment of the university (Sultanbekov & Belovolov, 2017). In order to prepare future specialists to communicate and cooperate with different people of the world predicting and preventing social conflicts, it is important to understand the growth of the role of foreign language education as education for global citizenship (Almazova, Khalyapina, & Popova, 2016); principals of cultural diversity should be used in knowledge dissemination (Chernyavskaya, 2016).

The empirical methods include observation and analysis of the students' work during English and German classes; systematization of the authors' personal practical experience of foreign language teaching at Academy; questionnaire; comparative data analysis.

A special questionnaire was developed with the aim of obtaining the most accurate information. It offered open-ended questions about the possible ways of using linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in the future professional activity of the military. The respondents were to express their opinion giving a detailed response. The detailed answers gave a big amount of data, from which we selected those that relate to the ways of implementing foreign languages in the possible future professional activity of the military. The research question was formulated as: How do cadets understand possible ways of implementing linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in their future professional activity?

Appropriate statistical techniques were used to accomplish the research: a descriptive study through frequency analysis was conducted to analyse and classify students' responses on their main features.

A second questionnaire taking into consideration the levels of assessing linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, suggested by "Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture" (2017) was developed to interview the students. Quantitative data were gathered through the analysis of scores of opinions received from questionnaires of 50 respondents learning English as the first language and German as the second, all being cadets of the fourth-year of study at Ryazan Higher Airborne Command Academy named after Margelov.

The data provide the material for comparative analysis of the cadets' self-assessment of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in the context of professional culture of the future military men (Table 01). The respondents were to express their agreement or disagreement and put a tick in the necessary column, according to the key descriptors of the three levels of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills – basic, intermediate and advanced (Council of Europe, 2017, p. 20). A graphical chart was presented to detect correlation between obtained variables (Figure 01).

6. Findings

6.1. Research question 1: How do the cadets understand the aim of learning foreign languages?

The first research task was to analyse the set of data, which contained cadets' view on the ways of implementing linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in their future professional activity. The following data come from grouping the responses according to the ways the cadets used in their answers.

Out of 50 respondents:

- (a) Practically all the respondents 96% (48 respondents) agreed that "modern military men must be trained and ready to fulfil their professional duty and to communicate directly with local armed forces and populations in a foreign language".
- (b) 72% of the rated answers (38 respondents) were: "linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills may save lives and can reduce the risk to the non-combatant populations that the military may be trying to protect".
- (c) 68% of the rated answers (34 respondents) connected foreign languages acquisition with professional culture considering it as "a necessary component of professional culture of the military in cases of training other nations' forces".
- (d) 90% of the rated answers (45 respondents) expressed assurance that "speaking the language and understanding local culture are important for participating in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations."
- (e) 4% of the rated answers (2 respondents) did not make any assumptions.

6.2. Research question 2: What is cadets' self-assessment of their level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills?

Naturally, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the basic concept. The study is devoted to linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, which are required to communicate effectively and appropriately with other people. They include the ability to communicate clearly explaining and clarifying ideas, discussing, persuading and negotiating; the ability to use more than one language or lingua franca to understand another language; the ability to express oneself confidently and without aggression. It also includes the ability to recognise different communicative conventions in communication; the ability to ask questions of clarification in an appropriate manner, the ability to manage breakdowns in communication. It is also important to act as a linguistic mediator in intercultural exchanges, including skills in translating, interpreting and explaining, and to act as an intercultural mediator by assisting others to understand and appreciate the characteristics of someone having a different cultural affiliation from their own (Council of Europe, 2017a).

To answer the second research question a special questionnaire has been developed. It has three levels – basic, intermediate and advanced. The descriptors are borrowed from the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2017b, p. 46).

Table 01. The cadets' self-assessment of the level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills: English as the first foreign language and German as the second foreign language (50 respondents)

No	The level of the skills	The key descriptors	Number of cadets / % English	Number of cadets / % German
1.	Basic	Can express his/her thoughts on a problem	7 (14%)	10 (20%)
		Asks speakers to repeat what they have said if it wasn't clear to him/her	8 (16%)	8 (16%)
2.	Intermediate	Asks questions that show his/her understanding of other people's positions	12 (24%)	19 (38%)
		Can adopt different ways of expressing politeness in another language	13 (26%)	8 (16%)
3.	Advanced	Can mediate linguistically in intercultural exchanges by translating, interpreting or explaining	8 (16%)	5 (10%)
		Can avoid successfully intercultural misunderstandings	2 (4%)	-

The results of the questionnaire revealed differences in cadets' self-assessment. Some of the respondents were very critical assessing their level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills.

As for the English language,

15 respondents (30%) out of 50 indicated a basic level; they believed that they could express their thoughts on the problem and if necessary to ask speakers to repeat what was not clear;

25 cadets (50%) decided that they had an intermediate level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills; they could ask questions showing their understanding of other people's position, and could express politeness in English;

only 10 respondents (20%) considered that they had an advanced level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills. Interestingly, 8 respondents (16%) noted that they could mediate linguistically in intercultural exchanges by translating, interpreting or explaining and 2 respondents (4%) considered that they could avoid successfully intercultural misunderstandings.

As for German which the cadets learned as a second foreign language, the results were a bit different. Obviously, developing linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in a second foreign language takes some more time. The comparison of the levels of cadets' self-assessment of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills in English and German can be seen in Figure 01.

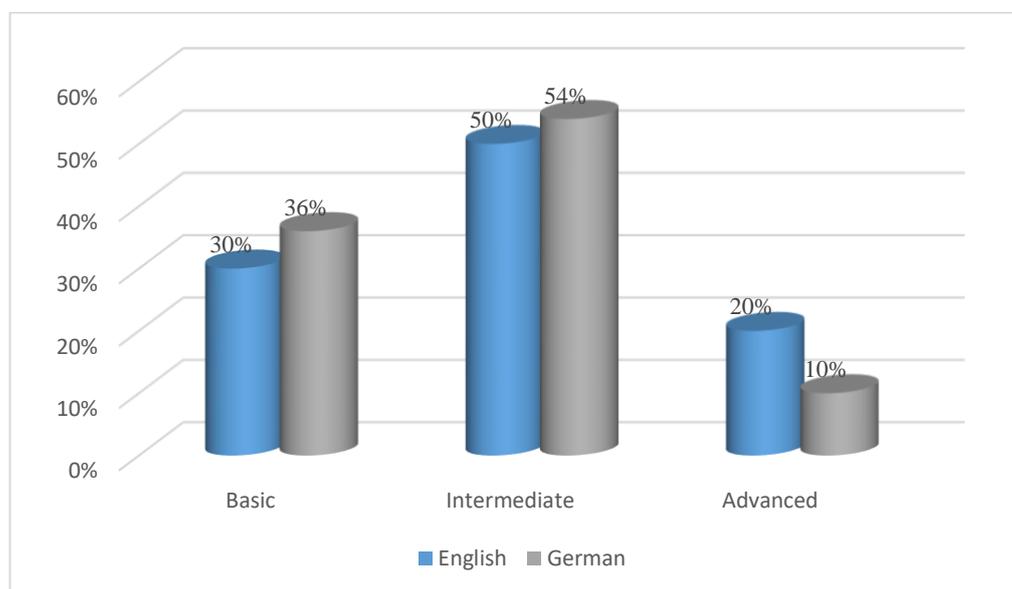


Figure 01. The cadets' self-assessment of the level of linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills: English / German

It is clear that learning a second language, cadets may need some more time to develop their linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills. In any case, speaking the language with an appreciation of local culture is a powerful tool in influencing a mission's outcome in our favor.

7. Conclusion

To sum it up we should say that foreign language proficiency is an inseparable part of professional culture of a modern military man. The cadets of the military institution have a clear understanding of different perspectives for implementing English as lingua franca and any other second language in their future professional activity. It is clear that there is an urgent need for promoting foreign languages at higher military education institutions. A lot has been done and is still being done in this respect. In addition, further studies are required to assess other components of cadets' intercultural competence. A further complication goes alongside with content-based foreign language teaching. As a part of

professional culture of the military foreign languages should be taught in CLIL methodology, in other words, integrating content and language study in higher military education.

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