

THE SCOPE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A MILITARY-SPECIFIC LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM

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Abstract. *In a global geopolitical scenario Spanish soldiers are faced with the strategic challenge of developing linguistic and intercultural communication competence. This paper provides an account of the design process of military-specific materials which seek to equip these learners to become interculturally competent speakers of English. Drawing on a previous needs analysis of the profession, the design of materials discussed here seeks to integrate an intercultural dimension to an ESP- oriented program for military students. A genre- and task-based approach was adopted with a view to engage military learners in a dual rhetorical and intercultural consciousness raising process which equips them with linguistic and intercultural skills. The goal was to select written and oral texts and to design tasks which foster critical thinking skills acquisition and to promote awareness of intercultural communication challenges. The approach taken lends credence to the view that authentic resources and tasks are loaded with the values of the discipline along with those of the culture it represents. Further, it illustrates how an ESP program can contribute to help learners raise awareness of the linguistic and cultural diversity involved in the use of English as an international language of professional communication in multilingual and multicultural contexts.*

Key words: *materials design, intercultural communication, English for specific purposes, military, needs analysis*

1. MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE MILITARY

The present geopolitical scenario in the military has been defined by the participation of armies in global military operations worldwide. Cultural differences are a cause of strained relations, particularly with the local population and, with that, of decreased mission effectiveness (Abbe 2008; Mackenzie 2014; Rassmussen and Sieck 2012; Selmesky 2007; Wunderle 2006). Lessons learnt in missions in Iraq or Afghanistan have led militaries around the world to adopt a gentler approach to culture (Jager 2007), which in many ways suggests that the success of a mission greatly depends on the ability to communicate with foreign individuals, organizations, or militaries. This approach can be seen in US President Obama's 2009 speech¹ where he claimed that "in the 21st century, military strength will be measured not only by the weapons our troops carry, but by the languages they speak and the cultures they understand". In line with this view, it can be argued that for the military the need to avoid cultural offence and conflict does not only affect civilian-military relations

in the Operational Theatre but also the relations of members within coalitions, increasingly characterized by their linguistic and cultural diversity. As it is the case for other professional contexts (e.g. Ladegaard and Jenks 2015; Potosky 2016; Voss, Albert, and Ferring 2014), cultural differences can substantially impact workplace adaptation and adjustment.

The growing emphasis on population-centric approaches has emphasized the need for increasing intercultural competence (or cross-cultural competence, the preferred military term) in army members (Culhane et al. 2012; Howard 2011; Selmeski 2007). Selmeski defines cross-cultural competence as “the ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively engage individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect” (p. 12); even if, as this author further adds, the culture of the others might contradict one’s cultural beliefs. This definition underpins the pragmatic view that understanding the cultural terrain, developing mutual understanding and avoiding prejudice, discrimination and intercultural conflict are strategic elements for the advancement of international security (Abbe 2008; Mackenzie 2014; Wunderle 2006). The development of cross-cultural competence undoubtedly increases not only operational success but also institutional strength and professional well-being (Selmeski 2007) equips the military with the competence of successfully interacting with comrades, sister services, allies, adversaries and non-combatants (civilians, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc.).

In this context, military studies have sensibly advocated for the adoption of a “culture and language strategy” (Abbe 2008), one that involves the development of language proficiency, culture awareness and regional knowledge and expertise. Being aware of the need to provide soldiers with new attitudes, skills and knowledge of both languages and culture (Visión 2025ⁱⁱ), the Spanish Armed Forces have implemented ambitious culture and language training programs at all levels of the military structure, in military academies as well as in professional units. However, language teaching and culture-awareness programs have been to date independent and disconnected. Aligning with those voices advocating the integration of an intercultural dimension in language teaching (Bocanegra-Valle 2015; Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Corbett 2003; Little and Simpson 2003; Pulverness and Tomlinson 2013,) seems sensible to “embed” the intercultural dimension in ESP materials in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching materials.

The design of the materials discussed below sought to address the dual goal of helping Spanish soldiers to acquire linguistic and intercultural competence. The goal of this paper is to share ‘a personal story’ (Feak 2010, p. 256) of the considerations, reasoning and knowledge beneath these self-designed ESP learning materials, of the decisions taken on the basis of a needs analysis of the military profession and of the selection of resources and on the design of activities and tasks.

2. THE PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

The ‘story’ of these materials originated, as it is the case with so many other ESP material developers, from the need to address the lacks and necessities of a specific group of students, by definition the basis of ESP teaching (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998; Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Swales 1990). Finding the adequate materials for the linguistic and disciplinary needs of these learners became the first challenge (Feak 2010; McDonough 2010; Tomlinson 1998). Added to the inadequacy of published textbooks to address the gap in linguistic proficiency, the mixed abilities or the different levels of work experiences and

knowledge of the military profession, meeting the needs of intercultural awareness-raising posed a further challenge. The approach to intercultural communication in available materials has also been criticized for their assumption of a native-speaker readership, which marginalizes international students' experiences, for the construction of intercultural communication situations as problems, or even for the use of intercultural communication as a sales booster (Barker and Matveeva 2006). No single set of materials was available that could meet the learning needs and at the same time provide the flexibility and adaptability needed by these very diverse group of learners, hence the need to develop specific materials.

Feak (2010) maintains that the design of these materials on solid research, rather than on intuition. Thus the first step taken was to consider the stakeholders' needs (Tomlinson, 1998). Previous findings from survey research on the use of English as the international language of communication in the Spanish Military (Author, 2013) provided relevant information on the attitudes and views of professional soldiers about the use of English in the Spanish military profession., specifically on a) the importance, and decisiveness, of English for the military, b) the need to equip learners to deal with the variety of disciplinary discursive practices and procedures, and c) the personal and institutional necessity of acquiring intercultural communication competence.

The 421 questionnaires completed and the 15 follow-up interviews conducted confirmed the strategic role of English as a language for communication in the military profession. The integration of the Spanish Armed forces in supranational organizations like NATO has made English the de facto language of interoperability, that is, the shared workplace language in multilingual coalitions. Linguistic proficiency certification, one of the criteria for soldiers seeking promotion, international positions or higher remuneration, is a mandatory professional requirement. As all member states of NATO do, the Spanish Armed Forces expect their soldiers to have their Standardized Language Profile (SLP) assessed on the basis of the Standardization Agreement (STANAG) 6001. However, the difficulties experienced to reach the expected linguistic certification level was recurrently mentioned as a source of concern and therefore as the first major need to be satisfied by any course design addressing the military.

The survey results further provided evidence on their engagement in a number of discipline-specific communicative practices, for which the source design should train future professionals. As the ubiquitous vehicular workplace language English is the language of the STANAGs, doctrine publications, norms or operational procedures that soldiers need to be able to read and write. As regards oral interaction, it was found that their professional practice involves participation in meetings, negotiations or social conversations with other soldiers or with the local population of the areas to which they have been deployed. Respondents claimed that oral and written communication was marked by the Internet, the source of information, knowledge or commercial interaction, and by technology-mediated communication, no longer simply a personal choice but a professional requirement (Bloch 2013). Understandably, the need to acquire not only linguistic literacy but also digital literacy was identified.

The survey results further indicated that as users of English as the international language of professional communication, military speakers face the challenge of communicating in multilingual and multicultural contexts, with other armies, with organizations and institutions, with the media or with the local population in conflict areas. Underlying this lies the strategic importance of intercultural communication and with that the concern of armies worldwide about showing cultural awareness and sensitivity to local peoples and cultures.

As mentioned, the military need of developing a gentler approach to culture should become a transversal pillar of a specific foreign language course design.

These three professional needs laid the foundations of materials design, which was defined by a dual competence profile – linguistic and intercultural competence –, as illustrated in Figure 1. The focus of these materials designed to enhance intercultural awareness was not to facilitate a culture training per se but rather, to embed the intercultural dimension in ESP materials (Bocanegra-Valle 2015; Candel-Mora 2015; Lario de Oñate and Vázquez Amador 2013; Lindner 2010). In this respect, the design of materials drew inspiration on Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey's (2002) proposal that the reading and listening resources selected and the tasks developed require learners to apply a critical view on cultural issues, to raise awareness of self and other's culture, to interpret and analyze, to ask further questions and to make comparisons.

The materials design thus sought help learners to meet the requirement of language proficiency certification by providing opportunities to practice the CEFR B2 level skills in reception written (RW) and spoken (RS), production written (PW) and spoken (PS), and interaction written (IW) and spoken (IS) (see van Ek & Trim, 2001). An ESP approach was deemed optimal so as to make the goal of second language acquisition compatible with the acquisition the lexico-grammatical, rhetorical and generic knowledge of their discipline. Helping soldiers acquire intercultural competence became the third pillar of these materials design.

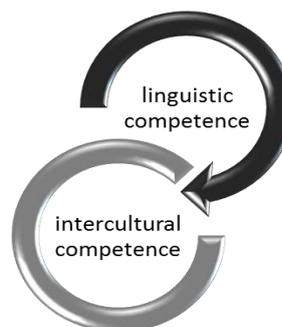


Fig. 1 A multicompetence skills profile

3. INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE SKILLS

The theoretical underpinning for intercultural awareness-raising materials design was found in the growing body of scholarly research which has explored the development and measurement of intercultural communication competence (ICC) (Bennett 1993, 1998; Berardo and Deardorff, 2012; Byram 1997; Deardorff 2006; Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003; Kramsch 2001; Lieberman and Gamst 2015; Lustig and Koester 2003; Scollon and Scollon 1995). The acquisition of ICC has been viewed by Bennet (1993, 1998) as a gradual transition process from ethnocentric orientations (Denial → Defense → Minimization), where one's culture is experienced as central to reality, towards ethnorelative orientations (Acceptance → Adaptation → Integration), where one's culture is experienced in the context of other cultures. Adopting this approach the goal of intercultural awareness-raising materials was thus to help learners understand how the perceptions of their own culture and that of other people influence the success of intercultural interaction.

For its methodological roots attention turned to proponents of the integration of an intercultural dimension in language teaching (Planken, van Hooft, and Korzilius 2004; Pulverness and Tomlinson 2013; Sercu, Méndez García, and Castro Prieto 2004) and very especially to the influential work of the Council of Europe (Byram 1997; Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Lázár et al. 2007). Their premise is that in order to deal effectively and appropriately with linguistic and cultural diversity, it is essential to equip learners with both the linguistic competence they need to communicate orally and in writing and the

intercultural competence they need to understand and accept diversity and to interact with people of other cultures.

Set against this context, culture has been viewed as the fifth language skill (Tomalin 2008). It is claimed that in intercultural encounters not only lexis, pronunciation or grammar are the causes of miscommunication, but rather it is failure to adjust to the social and cultural context of language use (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Kassis Henderson and Louhiala-Salminen 2011; Scollon and Scollon 1995). Traditional approaches to teaching culture as a single monolithic product (the property of the native speaker) have been questioned and a reformulation of communicative competence has been demanded (Alptekin 2002; Canagarajah 2007). Thus, the design of materials would underlie a new, more diverse and more egalitarian conception of culture in order to prepare learners for their professional reality, in which culture is a hybrid construct with global, national, local, and individual components.

As recommended by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002), the first step for the inclusion of an intercultural dimension to language learning materials is to determine the skills an intercultural competent person should possess (see Kealey 2015 for an overview). For Che and Starosta (2000) three elements define an intercultural sensitive individual: the understanding of cultural behaviors, open-mindedness towards cultural differences, and behavioral flexibility in host culture. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) use a tripartite repertoire of abilities a competent intercultural speaker should develop:

- Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own, knowledge and skills)
- Knowledge of social groups and their products, practices and interaction in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country
- Skills to interpreting cultural events

Stier (2006, pp. 5–6) expands the specific learning goals of intercultural awareness-raising training, including content and processual competencies (summarized in Table 1):

Table 1 ICC course specific learning goals

Content competencies	knowledge of history, language, non-verbal behavior, world-views, 'do's and don'ts', values, norms, habits, customs, taboos, symbols, behavioral patterns, traditions or sex roles, inter alia
Processual competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ placing oneself in the position of the other ▪ viewing oneself 'from the outside' ▪ alternating between, and acting according to, 'insider' and 'outsider' roles <p>Intrapersonal -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ coping with problems originating in intercultural encounters <p>Cognitive & emotional skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ keeping an open, receptive mind and noticing cultural peculiarities, without valuing them automatically and uncritically ▪ understanding why feelings occur and their implications ▪ coping with diverse feelings (e.g., xenophobia, uneasiness, uncertainty, ambiguity, frustration, anger, ethnocentrism) ▪ preventing these feelings from automatically determining one's actions or interpretations of behavior or events <hr/> <p>Interpersonal -</p> <p>Emotional skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ detecting and accurately interpreting variations in non-verbal cues, subtle signals and emotional responses ▪ mastering verbal and non-verbal language, turn-taking, and cultural codes surrounding conversations ▪ being aware of one's own communication competence ▪ adequately responding to contextual meanings

Another underlying rationale of the materials design was provided by those who have taken a social-justice approach to intercultural communication (Gamst and Liang 2013; Sorrells 2015). This approach explores how intercultural communication engages individuals in imagining, creating, and enacting a more equitable and socially just world in the context of globalization. Sorrells (2015) introduces the concept of intercultural praxis, a process of critical, reflective thinking and acting which allows learners to address the complex, contradictory challenges of intercultural communication both at the individual and at the global levels. Awareness of global challenges and the development of critical thinking are thus central in fighting racism, sexism, discrimination or poverty and thus in managing intercultural conflict (Miller and Tucker 2015) and hence the materials design ought to take those aspects into account.

4. DESIGNING TASKS: MEETING THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

With the learning goals established, a total of twenty different learning tasks were created, arranged in three learning areas: i) *Me & the others*, ii) *Me & communication*, and iii) *Me & the world*. These areas follow Sorrells (2015) and aim at exploring intercultural communication in three interrelated levels: (1) the micro (individual level = me), (2) the meso (the group level = the discipline and their interlocutors), and (3) the macro (the broad geopolitical scenario = the world) (Figure 2).

Block 1 Me & the others	
Question 1.1. Who am I?	Task 1.1.1. Identity
Question 1.2. Who are the others?	Task 1.2.1. Judging by appearances Task 1.2.2. Judging by race Task 1.2.3. Judging by gender
Question 1.3. What is culture?	Task 1.3.1. The cultural iceberg Task 1.3.2. Home & nation Task 1.3.4. Food Task 1.3.5. Cultural briefing
Block 2 Me & communication	
Question 2.1. What is professional culture?	Task 2.1.1. Workplace military culture Task 2.1.2. Workplace protocol & etiquette
Question 2.2. What is professional intercultural communication?	Task 2.2.1. Verbal & non-verbal communication Task 2.2.2. Cross-cultural communication
Block 3 Me & the world	
Question 3.1. What is my job?	Task 3.1.1. Fitness & sport Task 3.1.2. Crime & crime fighting Task 3.1.3. Deployment: Peacekeeping & humanitarian missions
Question 3.2. How do I see the world?	Task 3.2.1. Seeing the world Task 3.2.2. A world in danger Task 3.2.3. The rich & the poor Task 3.2.4. Fighting the challenge

Fig. 2 The three learning areas of materials

The *Me & the others* area was designed to raise awareness of issues of identity and culture. The design is thus methodologically rooted in the theoretical tenets of ICC studies (Bennett 1993, 1998; Byram 1997; Deardorff 2006; Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman

2003; Kramsch 2001; Lieberman and Gamst 2015; Lustig and Koester 2003; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Stier 2006), which postulate that exploring the learners' own identity and the identity of the others should help them develop the ability to deal with stereotypes and prejudice based on appearance, race or gender. The introduction of issues such as home and nation, traditions and celebrations or food seeks to equip learners with content competencies (Stier 2006). The acquisition of knowledge of social groups and their products (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002) is expected to foster learners' awareness of the concept of culture so that they can be better prepared to deal with those intercultural situations they might encounter. The design of this area benefits from the significant coincidence of language learning and intercultural awareness-raising activities. An activity based on Hall's (1976) culture iceberg metaphor, common in intercultural awareness development courses, was adapted for oral communication practice purposes. The *Deserted Island* activity, a popular ice-breaker used in language learning courses to practice the conditional tense, helps learners explore how the choice of the item one would take to a deserted island reflects their identity.

The second area, *Me & communication*, asks learners to understand "small culture" (Holliday 1999), the culture of the military discipline. The exploration of workplace protocol and etiquette and the development of verbal and non-verbal communication skills were deemed as essential interpersonal competences (Stier 2006) for the military profession. The area borrowed its approach from the professional communication field and activities such as the design of a workplace etiquette quiz would be suitable for other professional contexts. Here too the goal was to tailor the approach to the specific case of the discipline with activities such as the Spanish military workplace survey design, which challenges learners to interpret the topic of workplace culture in their specific professional or academic context.

In the *Me & the world*, through tasks, learners are asked to understand how specifically professional activities can become opportunities to fight the world challenges. The area nurtures from a social justice approach to intercultural communication (Gamst and Liang 2013; Sorrells 2015) and seeks to engage learners in a critical thinking process of the world's global challenges. To develop intrapersonal activities (Stier 2006), the activities involve learners in writing a text to persuade soldiers to engage in a humanitarian project, debating on the social, geographical or religious implications and perspectives of the globalization of crime, reading about the testimonies of soldiers of different nationalities deployed abroad, or giving a presentation on a technology or gadget which can create a better world. In these tasks learners are expected to familiarize with the linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions of their professional discourse (persuasive discourse, presentation skills, etc.) and to improve knowledge of their profession (global crime, technology, deployment, etc.).

The next step was then to focus on the design of the specific tasks which could integrate the goals of helping learners acquire linguistic and intercultural competence. The approach taken follows those who have consistently argued for the effectiveness of genre- and task-based instruction in EAP courses (Swales and Feak 2009) and, more broadly, ESP education (Belcher 2006; Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998; Feak 2010; Swales 1990). As adult learners, soldiers find it particularly discouraging when asked to carry commercial textbook tasks clearly designed for teenagers like, for example, talking about their ideal job (They already have a job!) or about the kind of clothes they like wearing (They wear a uniform!). In the past I had had to adapt or simply skip many of those exercises to design other tasks which learners could feel as professionally authentic, and therefore more motivating. The practical, problem-solving nature of military professionals was thus expected to benefit from a methodological approach which mirrors their present or future work style.

Following the CEFR B2 level (van Ek and Trim 2001), each task requires learners to perform speaking, writing and presentation activities, essential in developing their written and oral production and interaction skills (the criteria to be reached by each activity are explicitly mentioned). The acquisition of presentation skills, for which learners are expected to mobilize their writing and oral skills, is not only a requirement of the B2 level but is also justified by the academic and professional relevance revealed in the survey. To allow learners to practice their written and oral reception skills, and at the same time provide information, orientation, models and tips, the tasks are scaffolded by reading and listening materials. The approach taken, which addresses the three learning goals (proficiency level certification, specialized orientation and intercultural communication competence) is illustrated with the example of *Food*, one of the tasks in the *Me & the others* area which explores culture-related topics. As shown in Figure 3, learners are asked to do several oral activities (conversing with a guest, talking about food preferences or exploring food habits around the world), a writing exercise (writing a comparison and contrast essay), and a presentation on the results of a contrastive study on field rations around the world.

Task 1.3.4. Food	
Activities	
Speaking	Speaking 1.12. You are my guest Speaking 1.13. Other foods and me Speaking 1.14. You are what you eat? Goals IS 3 – Conversation (IS 3.1 / IS 3.3) IS 4 – Informal discussions (IS 4.2 / IS 4.3 / IS 4.5) IS.8 – Information exchange (IS 8.1 / IS 8.2)
Writing	Writing 1.9. Comparison & contrast essay: MREs around the world Goals PR.2 – Creative writing (PR 2.1 / PR 2.2) PR 3 – Reports & essays (PR 3.1 / PR 3.3 / PR 3.4)
Presentation	Pr 1.8. Comparison & contrast presentation: MREs around the world Goals PR.2 – Creative writing (PR 2.1 / PR 2.2) PR 3 – Reports & essays (PR 3.1 / PR 3.3 / PR 3.4) PS 3 – Sustained monologue (Putting a case, e.g. in a debate) (PS 3.1 / PS 3.2 / PS 3.3) PS 5 – Addressing audiences (PS 5.1 / PS 5.3)
Resources	
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How the other half eat</i> (dailymail.co.uk) • <i>The eat of battle: How the worlds armies get fed</i> (theguardian.com) Goals RW 3 – Reading for orientation (RW 3.1 / RW 3.2) RW 4 – Information & argument (RW 4.1 / RW 4.2 / RW 4.3)
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A taste of Tongren</i> (Peace Corps) • <i>The killer American diet that's sweeping the planet</i> (TED Talk) • <i>Inside an MRE</i> (YouTube) • <i>Civilians try military food</i> (YouTube) • <i>Drinking around the world</i> (BBC) Goals RS 4 – Listening to radio audio & recordings (RS 4.1 / RS 4.2)

Fig. 3 Task on food

Talking about food habits and preferences is, as attested by the CEFR B2 level descriptors (van Ek and Trim 2001), a common topic in language exams. It is equally common in social conversation; as mentioned, a professional requirement frequently involving peoples from different cultures. Social conversation has been shown to play an essential role in building relations and trust in professional contexts (Pullin 2010). Small talk in situations like a formal meal was recurrently mentioned in the needs analysis as a professional requirement; an extra, yet influential, element of daily life in international Headquarters, while on patrol or in encounters with the local population. With this purpose the *You are my guest* activity seeks to place learners in an interactive communication situation in which to expand their social conversation skills. To foster learners' intercultural awareness, the multicultural scenario created engages them in reflecting about their own culinary culture and the culture of others.

Speaking 1.12: You are my guest

Look at the situations and roleplay receiving an international guest in a professional environment.

Role 1

You are a captain in charge of welcoming a foreign Muslim officer visiting your unit. You have arranged a formal meal in honor of your guest. You want to make sure your guest feels comfortable and gets to know your country and its culinary traditions. You should also recommend local products to try and places to eat.

Role 2

You are a Jordanian captain visiting Spain for the first time. You have been invited to a formal meal in your honor. You are very interested in the country and want to find out about the country, particularly about its culinary tradition. You also need advice on what local products to try, where to eat or what products to bring home.

Food, as a source of signification and as a form of communication (Parasecoli 2011), plays a key role in intercultural communication. It is probably the first, most immediate and most salient elements of intercultural contact. Inspiration for activities on this topic came, in fact, from several testimonies of the survey participants. Food, they claimed, is likely to cause a large number of cultural incidents. Incidents occurred when refusing to accept the tea offered by Muslim hosts as a gesture of friendship or welcome, when using your left hand when eating or when offering pork or alcohol to Muslim base workers were referred. For that purpose an *Other foods and me* oral activity was designed in which learners are asked to discuss their eating habits and attitudes towards food diversity, particularly regarding 'other foods', that is, ethnic or exotic food. Providing input on eating habits invites learners to reflect on their future professional roles and hypothesize on their adaptation to other foods.

Speaking 1.13: Other foods and me

Answer the questions:

1. Do you usually eat foods that are indigenous to my culture?
Why or why not?
What types of foods do you usually eat?
What types of exotic foods do you / would you like to eat?
2. Do (would) find it easy to eat and drink in other cultural contexts?
What do you find most difficult to adjust to (e.g. mealtime procedures, schedules, menus, etc.)?
3. Are you comfortable with the eating habits of other cultures?
Can you name some differences?
Why do you think such differences exist?
4. What do you think you would do if you had to eat exotic or even outrageous food?

Similarly, the *You are what you eat* oral activityⁱⁱⁱ, which uses the example of bread to visually illustrate diversity of dietary habits in different cultures, was created to foster the development of a critical perspective on the differences in consumption of one of the most basic foods across cultures.

Speaking 1.14: You are what you eat?

One specific type of food which is known to most European cultures is bread. Close your eyes and concentrate on the mental image you get when you hear the word "bread". Now draw it.

Now look at the following pictures of types of bread common in other cultures and compare your picture with them. What differences are there in your drawings and descriptions? Have you seen and eaten unusual types of bread abroad?



Finally, read the Worksheet and answer the questions.

To fulfil the goal of training learners to address their disciplinary needs, a *TED Talk* on the risks of the American diet was used to associate food with the professional requirement of fitness, given that physical education and training is one of the pillars of military life. Concurrently, it provided an opportunity to contrast different dietary habits. A writing/presentation activity on field rations around the world, which links the military with cultural diversity (*MREs around the world*), also places its emphasis on the similarities and differences between them and on the socio-cultural, religious, or economic reasons behind their variety.



Writing 1.9: MREs around the world

You have to write a comparison and contrast essay which explores MREs around the world. You should emphasize the similarities and differences between them and hypothesize on the socio-cultural, religious, or economic reasons behind them.



Presentation 1.8: MREs around the world

You now have to present the results of your research on MREs around the world and present your findings to your partners.

Previous teaching experience with oral and written tasks involving a cognitive process of reflecting on one's identity – or on any other similarly complex intercultural issues – proved rather unsuccessful, mainly because the activities were too open ended. To avoid the feeling of 'not knowing what to say', tasks were revised and reading and listening resources were specifically selected. Their goal was not only to be used as class tasks but also to provide inspiration and orientation for the writing and presentation activities or to spark conversation and debate for the oral ones. The resources were thus meant to achieve three interrelated learning goals: the practice of oral and written reception skills, the familiarization of learners with the oral and written genres of their discipline and engagement in an awareness-raising of intercultural issues. For example, before completing a letter writing exercise or recording a self-presentation video, the *Letter from Ahmadou* reading comprehension text is introduced. The text complements the benefit of reading comprehension skills development with the acquisition of correspondence generic literacy while allowing an opportunity to reflect on their own identity and to compare it with the identity of 'the other', a kid from Niger.



Writing 1.2: Presentation letter

You want to apply for a language course, professional position, research proposal or international mission participation, for which you need to submit a presentation letter. Write this letter to introduce yourself.



Presentation 1.1: Self-presentation video

You have to record a self-presentation video to be posted in an academic / professional website, in which soldiers from different countries introduce themselves. You can use the models you have read and listened to.

Understanding that the reality of the classroom makes the separation of skills impractical, even undesirable (Goh, 2013; Hyland, 2013), an integrated skills approach was deemed appropriate to respond to the needs of adult learners. Very frequently these adult learners complain when being asked to carry repetitive drills or fill the gaps exercises (No, not the present simple vs. present continuous again!). Reading is used as the “stepping stone” (Hyland 2013) to other skills since it activates knowledge about the language (of the sound system, of grammar, of specific vocabulary or idioms) as well as knowledge of the target community discourse (of their lexico-grammatical, generic and rhetorical conventions). With the same integrative purpose, an activity such as *What would you do if you were the Chief of Staff?* involves reviewing a grammatical aspect, the conditional tense and the *Do’s or don’ts?* activity was designed on the basis of a vocabulary exercise on cultural do’s and don’ts (Wyatt, 2006). These activities relied on a ‘focus on form’ approach (Long 1997) and supported the view of grammar and vocabulary practice in authentic communicative activities.

The needs analysis survey revealed that soldiers turn to online sources for information about conflicts, future areas of deployment or about allied armies. The Internet has been very rightly viewed as a tool for language learning, but also as a communicative space: “a vast field trip that allows students both to gather information and sometimes interact with people all over the world” (Bloch 2013, p. 394). As a source of real, authentic discipline-specific information and, more importantly, as a space for interaction and therefore for intercultural communication (Belz and Thorne 2006), the Internet offers a large variety of perspectives used in the tasks designed to provide learners with an opportunity to access knowledge about other peoples and cultures and to critically explore and interpret them. Indirectly, the use of Internet sources was also meant to provide a source of disciplinary competence: digital literacy, that is, of how the evolving nature of communication entails different forms of discourse and social conventions, and of the complex network of relations of written and oral interactions that learners need to acquire (Shetzer and Warschauer 2000).

Developing critical thinking skills on how the new media portrays aspects of intercultural interaction such as intercultural relationship, intercultural dialogue, and intercultural conflict (Chen 2012) was also considered essential for military learners. Newspapers (or their Facebook or Twitter profiles), professional magazines like NATO Review, blogs and social networks provide a recurrently mentioned source of information and opinion on such current issues as racial prejudice, endangered cultures and peoples, fitness, technology, or international affairs. As a different perspective otherwise not accessible for younger learners, these sites can provide excellent sources of both disciplinary knowledge and intercultural sensitivity. Information about the countries to which they will be deployed, about the conflicts in which they might get involved or about the armies with whom they might collaborate could easily be found in the websites of other armies, especially of the American Army. The websites of non-profit organizations such as the Peace Corps, a volunteer program run by the US government whose mission is to help promote a better understanding of peoples, OXFAM, the international organizations focused on the alleviation of global poverty, or the projects run by *The Wandering Samaritan* organization – the “Army of Good”, the *dosomething.org* campaigns or the *Champions for Peace* initiative of the International Military Sports Council, used to develop listening and reading comprehension activities, also served to introduce the social justice approach to intercultural communication in the ESP classroom (Gamst and Liang 2013; Sorrells 2015).

Another decision taken on the grounds of the needs analysis results was the flexibility and adaptability of the materials designed to address the needs of both cadets and professional soldiers, and their diversity of levels, ages, learning styles, or previous experience in the army or course expectations. Given this, although the materials were originally designed at the CEFR B2 level, the choice of a variety of reading and listening comprehension resources, with different levels of difficulty, and the design of activities with instructions left purposefully open can be easily adapted to different degrees of difficulty. An activity such as the *Cultural briefing*, an awareness-raising exercise into the most salient elements of national and disciplinary culture, was designed to be adapted depending on the needs of the competence level of specific group of learners. It can become an ice-breaker, in which learners are asked to decide which ideas a briefing should include; as an essay or presentation in which learners are asked to create a short briefing; or as a classroom discussion in which learners are asked to compare briefings of different countries. The task was also designed with a view to becoming the final mini-project of a module of national culture understanding, in which the students are asked to create their own field manual with the model of two authentic documents, a field manual with which Spanish soldiers are issued before deployment and, if their proficiency is high, the *International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) Security Force Assistance Guide* (2013) available onlineiv. As examples of the field manual genre, both documents inform literacy development in this professional genre.

Writing 1.10: Cultural briefing



You have to create a written briefing of a foreign country to which you are likely to be deployed. Alternatively you can choose to create a culture briefing of your own country which will become an introductory text for foreign visitors.



Presentation 1.9: Cultural briefing

You now have to present the cultural briefing you have created to a group of international soldiers under your command in an international mission. If you chose to create a cultural briefing of Spain, you have to present it to a group of international soldiers visiting your unit. You then have to answer any questions your audience might have.

WS 1.3.5: Elements in cultural briefings



- Attitudes to alcohol
- Attitudes to foreigners
- Dealing with emergencies
- Demography – population spread
- Formality of dress in business
- Geography
- History
- Hospitality
- Housing standards
- Local products
- Meal times
- Military ranks
- Money
- Physical distance between people when they speak
- Political system
- Preparation for meetings
- Public transport
- Regions
- Religion and its importance
- Respect for authority
- Shop opening times
- Silence – its acceptability in conversation and meetings
- Thinking – analytical or intuitive?
- Tipping in restaurants
- Titles – Mrs, Dr, etc. & equivalents
- Uniforms

An issue arising from the use of reading comprehension texts adapted from authentic sources was their lexical and grammatical complexity. However, the needs analysis and previous assessment results had shown evidence that participants are significantly more proficient in their reception skills (particularly reading comprehension) than in their production skills. Authentic texts were expected to challenge learners to go beyond the boundary of their linguistic proficiency level. Supporting autonomous learning, glossaries and dictionaries can be provided to scaffold comprehension and make the task intrinsically motivating. Videos from sources such as *YouTube*, *CNN.com* or UN web TV were limited for the same reason. A clear motivating appeal was the use of authentic military-specific sources (e.g. *Civilians try military food*) which should minimize possible comprehension deficiencies. Other sources of authentic, though adaptable, oral texts were found in *TED Talks*, or *Voice of America News*, for which transcripts are provided. Specific language learning-oriented websites like the *BBC* or the *British Council* offered considerable advantages for less proficient learners.

The design of oral, writing and presentations activities relied on the repertoire of disciplinary genres and communicative events mentioned during the needs analysis survey. The tasks designed were primarily meant to acquire linguistic competence. Indirectly, and pursuing disciplinary competence, they were also designed to fulfill the purpose of familiarizing learners with their future professional roles. For example, the *SALUTE* (an acronym for Size, Activity, Location, Unit identification, Time, Equipment) standard format for reporting enemy information in the military was used in an activity which requires learners to write a report about a security incident, which was expected to elicit generic writing skills and convey authenticity of the writing task:

Writing 3.2: A SALUTE report



You have to write a report about a real or imaginary security incident which occurred while you were on duty or while on patrol. You can also get inspiration from historical events, recent and past accidents, terrorist attacks, particularly those involving different cultural or religious perspectives ... Remember to apply the professional SALUTE format.

Collaborative group task, for example, to organize and decide the design of a calendar of celebrations around the world should anticipate future professional situations like formal and informal meetings involving goal oriented co-operation and transactions. Likewise, the use of class debate on the globalization of crime or the threat to endangered animals, peoples or cultures – a goal of intercultural competence education – provides an opportunity to acquire discussion and persuasion skills. Oral activities also offer many opportunities for conversation on personal and familiar topics such as military life, their own nation, customs, traditions or celebrations. By creating scenarios of real life activities, learners are placed in a situation which shows the authenticity, applicability and justification of tasks, a decisive element of ESP materials design. By way of illustration, the *Reporting* activity asks learners to roleplay a typically professional situation in which they report to a superior after an incident occurred while they were on duty or on patrol.

Speaking 3.2: Reporting

Work with your partner to practice reporting to a superior after an incident which occurred while you were on duty or on patrol.

The same purpose is shared by projects which replicate future professional activities. The authentic US Center for Deployment Psychology's *Faces of Military Culture* project asks learners to compile the profiles of different members of the Spanish army. The goal of the task designed is to comparatively explore elements of military culture in the US and in the learners' own country. The task requires learners to mobilize their linguistic, academic and professional skills and work collaboratively to design protocol interviews, carry the interviews, and finally present the project at a media event in which they answer the questions and comments from the audience.

Writing 1.6: Faces of Spanish military culture

You have to work as a team to create the *Faces of the Spanish military culture* project. Each one of you will have to interview a member of the Spanish military. Then you have to write the profile of the soldier you have interviewed. Your project should cover the diversity of persons and jobs in the Spanish Army.

Presentation 1.5: Faces of Spanish military culture

Now you have to present the interviews you recorded. You have to introduce your interviewee and include the most relevant parts of the interview. If your interview was conducted in Spanish, you need to add subtitles, or a summary, in English. Your presentation should conclude with an analysis of the interview. After the presentation you will have to answer the questions and comments from the audience.

Regarding the discipline-oriented specificity of the tasks, as shown in previous examples, the approach taken does not involve direct training in the specific genres of the profession. The sample of genres used was therefore by no means systematic and representative of the genre repertoire employed by the profession. Yet, it aimed at providing a helpful resource to expose students to a rich input on professional genres such as correspondence, reports, historical texts, technical manuals or professional documents (STANAG, doctrine documents, textbooks, field manuals, etc.). The tasks provide exposure to a wide range of specific vocabulary, both disciplinary terminology and the semantic, lexico-grammatical and rhetorical resources of discipline-specific genres. By this means they seek to raise awareness of communication aspects that are an integral part of their academic and professional lives (cf. also Swales and Feak 2009).

Together with generic awareness, the reading and listening comprehension texts were specifically selected to foster intercultural communication awareness, understanding, as contended by Lázár et al. (2007), that all texts, also disciplinary ones, are culturally loaded and charged with the social and cultural values of society, which makes them mediators of intercultural encounters. The goal of reading about the demographical composition of the American Army or about world poverty data is not only to equip learners in the rhetorical

resources to refer to statistics and graph description, but also to offer an opportunity to compare the percentages of minority officers in the American and Spanish armies or to reflect on the decrease of extreme poverty. Hearing about the technical specifications of a cheap all-terrain wheelchair design provides both a source of technology discourse knowledge and of awareness-raising of how mechanical design can help people with disabilities in poorer areas of the world.

7. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper has presented the approach taken to the process of ESP materials design specifically oriented to integrating an intercultural dimension to its language learning purpose (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Corbett 2003; Planken, van Hoof, and Korzilius 2004; Pulverness and Tomalison 2013; Sercu, Méndez García, and Castro Prieto 2004). The aim has been to provide an account of how these materials were developed, of the resources selected, of the methodological approach adopted and on the reflections and decisions taken by the ESP instructor to further integrate an intercultural dimension to an ESP learning program, as also advocated by Bocanegra-Valle (2015).

The approach sought to respond to the professional challenges of using English as the international language of academic and professional communication in the current global context in which not only soldiers but many other professionals work (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Kassis Henderson and Louhiala-Salminen 2011; Scollon and Scollon 1995). In the international multilingual and multicultural arena communication competence has shown to go beyond linguistic competence and culture has been viewed as the fifth skill (Tomalin 2008). It is the integration of language and culture as interrelated skills that makes the acquisition of ICC a professional requirement in this era of globalization. This work has followed previous examples (Bocanegra-Valle 2015; Lindner 2010) in its attempt to design ESP materials which foster ICC and which thus allow professionals to successfully deal with the hybridity of global communication.

A genre- and task-based approach (Belcher 2006; Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998; Feak 2010; Swales and Feak 2009) was adopted which sought to engage learners in a rhetorical consciousness raising process of the broad spectrum of disciplinary genres and communication practices. Informed by the repertoire of genres (correspondence, historical reports, argumentative, persuasive or comparison/contrast essays, reports, articles, etc.), communicative events (negotiations, discussion, debate, social conversation, interviews, presentations, press briefings, etc.), sources of written and oral information (academic, professional or institutional websites, professional magazines, newspapers, radio or TV stations, field manuals, etc.), and knowledge and skills these professionals should acquire, tasks were designed which conveyed their authenticity and professional applicability. If, as stressed by Sorrells (2015), every text is an opportunity for intercultural praxis, the use of discipline-specific authentic texts such as those discussed above underpinned an intercultural dimension to the ESP instruction. In providing access not only to topics but, more importantly, to different perspectives of their discipline and of the world, the use of internet-based sources greatly contributed to an integrative language and culture approach. Aligning with those who have advocated for the design of materials whose goal is neither language learning with a culture component nor culture learning with a language component (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Corbett 2003; Pulverness and Tomlinson 2013), this work has illustrated the design of materials which integrate language learning, specialized knowledge and intercultural awareness learning goals and which thus respond to the pedagogical effectiveness of making

ICC an integral part of the learning experience rather than an add-on (Pulverness and Tomlinson 2013).

The design of language learning materials informed by cultural learning objectives allowed for the ESP classroom to act as a culture mediator or broker for intercultural awareness (Bocanegra-Valle 2015; Pulverness and Tomlinson 2013; Sercu, Méndez García, and Castro Prieto 2004). Requiring learners to develop critical thinking skills and maturity through reading and listening comprehension resources paves the way to reflect on cultural differences and similarities between themselves and the others, to compare and contrast the diversity of procedures, values or norms in different disciplines and cultures, ultimately to equip learners with the content and processual competences of an interculturally competent person (Stier 2006). The focus of these materials design on the development of curiosity, open-mindedness and flexibility towards aspects of intercultural interaction such as intercultural relationship, intercultural dialogue, and intercultural conflict has been shown to elicit awareness of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 2002; Chen 2012; Chen and Starosta 2000; Stier 2006). Intercultural communication competence thus becomes, an essential tool to fight the world challenges of poverty, injustice or global threats; in short, for the creation of social justice (Gamst and Liang 2013; Sorrells 2015). For military students, as for many other professional engaged in international cooperation and exchange, their job represents a privileged position to 'see the world', to face, and hopefully, to contribute to fight its contemporary challenges.

As other ESP materials developing 'stories', the present account has been one of uncertainty, trial and error and very labor intensive, involving many considerations and still in need of improvement and revision upon feedback. Feak (2010, p. 239) sensibly commented that "despite the tremendous amount of time and effort devoted to the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching materials, relatively little information is available about how these materials were in fact created". In sharing my experience as a materials developer I hope to contribute to filling in this gap, to making visible the creative processes of materials in response to particular language needs and, in doing so, to inspiring other ESP practitioners.

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ii <http://www.ejercito.mde.es/noticias/2010/01/667.html>

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v www.ted.com

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