

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN CADETS: A FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT APPROACH

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Annotation: This article explores how formative assessment strategies can be used to develop communicative competence in military cadets studying English. Emphasizing the importance of oral proficiency in operational and intercultural military contexts, it discusses the principles of formative assessment and provides practical classroom applications. The article advocates for performance-based, feedback-driven activities to improve cadets' speaking abilities in real-world scenarios.

Introduction

Effective communication in English is a mission-critical skill for modern military personnel, particularly for cadets in training who may engage in international cooperation, peacekeeping missions, or joint exercises. In military academies, English is taught not only as an academic subject but as a functional tool for professional command and control. Traditional methods of language assessment—largely reliant on grammar-based tests and written outputs—often fail to capture real-world communicative demands.

This article argues that **formative assessment**—a feedback-driven, learner-centered approach—can play a transformative role in developing **communicative competence** among military cadets. It examines how formative speaking assessments can be practically implemented and how these methods support cadets in becoming confident and competent English communicators.

Main Body

1. Defining Communicative Competence in Military English

The concept of **communicative competence**, introduced by Canale and Swain (1980), encompasses grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. In a military context, communicative competence refers not only to speaking correctly but also to adapting language use based on rank, situation, clarity, and intercultural awareness.

Example:

A cadet addressing a superior must use formal and precise language (e.g., “Requesting permission to proceed”), whereas interacting with peers may involve more casual but still accurate forms. Miscommunication, especially in high-stakes environments, can lead to operational errors.

Incorporating real-life military scenarios into speaking tasks—such as giving briefings, issuing commands, or participating in negotiations—prepares cadets for authentic language use.

2. The Role of Formative Assessment in Language Development

Formative assessment refers to continuous, informal evaluations that provide students with feedback to improve learning. Unlike summative assessments, which judge performance at the end of a course, formative assessment supports growth by identifying strengths and areas for improvement in real-time.

Formative assessment methods in teaching speaking skills include:

- **Instructor feedback during speaking activities**
- **Peer and self-assessment using rubrics**
- **Audio/video recording for reflective analysis**
- **Observation checklists during simulations**

Example:

During a mock peacekeeping scenario, cadets role-play dialogues with foreign counterparts. The instructor observes, takes notes, and provides oral and written feedback focusing on pronunciation, clarity, and register. The same task is repeated a week later to track progress, encouraging iterative learning.

3. Practical Implementation in the Cadet Classroom

For formative assessment to be successful in a cadet environment, it must align with both pedagogical principles and military discipline. Teachers can implement the following strategies:

• Simulation and Role-Play Activities

Cadets simulate tactical briefings, command instructions, or joint mission planning, followed by structured peer feedback sessions.

• Speech Portfolios

Cadets record speaking tasks throughout the semester and reflect on their progress, noting improvements and setting personal goals.

• Rubric-Based

Feedback

Using rubrics that assess fluency, accuracy, appropriateness, and pronunciation helps cadets understand where they need to improve.

Example:

A speaking rubric might include categories such as “Command Clarity,” “Tactical Vocabulary,” and “Pronunciation under Stress.” After each speaking task, cadets score themselves and receive scores from peers and the instructor.

Additionally, using apps like **Flipgrid** or **Vocaroo** allows cadets to submit recorded responses to prompts. Teachers can respond with time-stamped feedback and model correct expressions. Table 1:

Table 1

Speaking Formative Assessment Rubric

Category	Description	Scoring Criteria (1–5 Scale)	Formative Tools & Activities
Command Clarity	Ability to issue commands or instructions clearly and unambiguously	<p>1 – Unclear, hesitant</p> <p>3 – Mostly clear with minor errors</p> <p>5 – Clear, confident, and precise</p>	<p>- Real-time feedback during simulations-</p> <p>Instructor modeling</p>
Tactical Vocabulary	Use of accurate, field-specific	1 – Rare use of correct terms	- Vocabulary lists reviewed in

Category	Description	Scoring Criteria (1–5 Scale)	Formative Tools & Activities
	terminology appropriate to military contexts	3 – Moderate use 5 – Accurate and context-appropriate terms	drills- Peer review sessions
Pronunciation Under Stress	Ability to maintain intelligible pronunciation under pressure or in urgent situations	1 – Hard to understand 3 – Mostly clear with some mispronunciations 5 – Clear and consistent	- Role-play under time constraints- Video/audio playback feedback
Fluency	Smooth flow of speech with minimal hesitation or filler words	1 – Frequent pauses 3 – Some hesitation 5 – Natural, uninterrupted speech	- Recorded monologues via Flipgrid/Vocaroo- Time-limited tasks
Situational Appropriateness	Appropriateness of language used according to rank, audience, and context	1 – Inappropriate tone/language 3 – Mixed formality	- Scenario-based speaking drills- Guided self-reflection sessions

Category	Description	Scoring Criteria (1–5 Scale)	Formative Tools & Activities
		5 – Fully appropriate for context	
Self and Peer Assessment	Reflective scoring and comments from self and peers post-task	1 – Incomplete or vague feedback 3 – Some detail and relevance 5 – Detailed and constructive	Rubric - checklists- Structured peer feedback templates

How This Is Used in Class:

- **Cadet Role-Play:** Each cadet presents a tactical briefing or gives orders in a mission simulation.
- **Rubric Application:** After the task, cadets fill out the rubric for themselves and exchange feedback with a peer.
- **Teacher Feedback:** The instructor reviews the rubric, adds comments, and uploads time-stamped audio/video responses if using Flipgrid or Vocaroo.
- **Reflection:** Cadets compare their scores and reflect on improvements for next time, keeping a portfolio of progress.

4. Challenges and Recommendations

Implementing formative speaking assessment with cadets can face several challenges:

- **Time Constraints:** Military curricula are dense, and time for reflection or revision may be limited.
- **Cultural Barriers:** In hierarchical settings, cadets may hesitate to give or receive peer feedback.
- **Lack of Training:** Language instructors may be unfamiliar with formative assessment strategies, especially in military contexts.

Solutions include integrating formative tasks into regular drills, training educators in reflective pedagogy, and normalizing peer assessment as a leadership development tool. Table 2:

Table 2

Integrated Drill Plan for Speaking Development

Drill Name	Objective	Format & Frequency	Formative Element	Leadership & Reflection Focus
Command Relay Drill	Practice giving and receiving clear, structured commands	Weekly (15–20 minutes)	Instructor gives on-the-spot feedback on clarity and language use	Peer leader rotates each week; cadets reflect on clarity and tone used
Situation Briefing Drill	Present mission updates or intelligence reports	Biweekly (5-minute presentation per cadet)	Rubric-based peer and teacher feedbackVideo recordings for later reflection	Cadets evaluate one another's language precision and confidence

Drill Name	Objective	Format & Frequency	Formative Element	Leadership & Reflection Focus
Radio Protocol Simulation	Practice real-time two-way communication (e.g., radio ops)	Weekly (10–15 minutes)	Teachers record sessions and provide timestamped feedbackChecklists used	Cadets reflect on handling stress & use of proper call signs and code words
Tactical Role-Play Conversations	Simulate real interactions: negotiations, orders, debriefs	Biweekly (team-based)	Peer and self-assessment with simplified rubricsFeedback session follows	Encourages leadership in role enactment; peers assess situational appropriateness
Reflection & Feedback Circle	Build critical reflection skills through discussion	Monthly (20–30 minutes)	Cadets discuss personal strengths, weaknesses, and goals after several drills	Develops self-awareness, constructive criticism, and leadership voice

Drill Example: "Command Relay Drill" (15 minutes)

Setup:

- Cadets stand in two lines facing each other.
- One cadet gives a command (e.g., “Advance 50 meters and establish a perimeter”).
- The listener repeats it with correct structure or reformulates it.

Formative Assessment:

- Instructor walks around with a rubric or notes sheet.
- Immediate verbal feedback is provided.
- Common issues are addressed with the whole class at the end.

Reflection Activity:

- Cadets write or share one thing they did well and one aspect to improve.

Peer Assessment Normalization Tips

- **Use rotating roles:** Assign cadets as "Feedback Leader of the Week" to lead assessment and model proper critique.
- **Normalize error:** Encourage an environment where feedback is part of growth, not punishment.
- **Tie feedback to leadership:** Emphasize that effective leaders must give and receive feedback constructively.

Conclusion

Formative assessment, when applied effectively, serves as a powerful tool in helping cadets achieve **communicative competence** in English. By creating structured opportunities for feedback, reflection, and targeted improvement, instructors can move beyond passive learning models and foster real speaking confidence. In doing so, they help shape cadets into linguistically capable officers ready to perform in complex, multilingual military environments.

Formative assessment is not merely a teaching technique—it is a **philosophy of learning** that prioritizes growth, feedback, and learner autonomy. As the military world becomes increasingly global, the ability to communicate clearly and confidently in English is more than a skill—it is a strategic asset.

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