

SPEAKING UNDER COMMAND: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES FOR CADET ENGLISH TRAINING

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Keywords:

Formative assessment, cadet training, English speaking skills, military communication, oral proficiency, feedback, command language.

Annotation:

This article examines the role of formative assessment in enhancing the speaking skills of military cadets learning English. Focusing on the unique demands of speaking under command, it discusses effective assessment methods that promote oral proficiency, confidence, and accuracy. The study highlights practical approaches such as simulation-based drills, peer feedback, and reflective practices tailored to cadet environments, emphasizing the importance of formative feedback for continuous improvement.

Introduction

Military cadets face unique linguistic challenges when learning English, especially in contexts that require clear, confident, and rapid oral communication under command. Speaking under command involves delivering and responding to instructions with precision, clarity, and appropriate tone, often in high-pressure

situations. Traditional assessment methods that rely primarily on summative tests are insufficient for capturing the dynamic and contextual nature of spoken communication in these scenarios.

This article argues that **formative assessment**—continuous, feedback-oriented evaluation—plays a critical role in developing cadets’ oral proficiency in English. By embedding formative practices into training routines, instructors can foster improved command of language, better stress management during speech, and enhanced communicative competence. The following sections explore formative assessment principles and practical strategies aligned with cadet needs, supported by examples.

Main Body

1. The Nature of Speaking Under Command

Speaking under command in military contexts demands not only grammatical correctness but also **conciseness, clarity, and situational appropriateness**. Cadets must communicate orders, briefings, or reports quickly and unambiguously, often using specialized vocabulary and maintaining a formal register.

Example:

A cadet delivering a radio message might say, “Alpha Team, move to grid 12-34, maintain perimeter security.” This statement must be delivered clearly and confidently, as ambiguity or hesitation can compromise operations.

Because of this, assessments must measure **functional speaking ability** rather than just language knowledge.

2. Principles of Formative Assessment in Cadet English Training

Formative assessment is characterized by its ongoing, supportive, and learner-centered nature. It aims to identify strengths and weaknesses to guide future learning rather than merely grade performance. Key principles include:

- **Frequent, low-stakes speaking tasks** integrated into training.
- **Immediate, specific feedback** focusing on both language and delivery.
- **Peer and self-assessment** to encourage reflection and autonomy.

- **Use of authentic, scenario-based activities** to simulate operational communication.

Example:

During a drill, cadets practice issuing commands to teammates while the instructor notes pronunciation clarity and command structure, providing real-time corrections.

3. Practical Formative Assessment Strategies**a) Simulation-Based Drills**

Simulations recreate realistic military communication scenarios, providing a platform for cadets to practice speaking under command pressure.

Example:

In a “Command Relay Drill,” cadets stand in lines and pass orders along verbally. The instructor observes and gives feedback on accuracy and clarity immediately after the exercise.

b) Audio/Video Recording and Playback

Recording speaking tasks allows cadets to hear their performance, self-evaluate, and identify areas for improvement.

Example:

Cadets submit recorded briefings using apps like Flipgrid. Instructors provide time-stamped comments, highlighting effective phrases or areas needing clearer articulation.

c) Peer Feedback Sessions

Structured peer review sessions foster a collaborative learning environment where cadets critique and learn from one another.

Example:

After role-play exercises, cadets use rubrics to evaluate peers on criteria such as fluency, pronunciation, and command appropriateness, followed by group discussions.

d) Reflective Journals

Maintaining a journal encourages cadets to reflect on their speaking experiences and progress.

Example:

After each oral task, cadets write short reflections on what went well and what challenges they faced, setting goals for next practice.

4. Challenges and Recommendations

Implementing formative speaking assessments in military cadet training comes with challenges:

- **Time limitations** due to dense training schedules.
- **Resistance to peer critique** in hierarchical settings.
- **Instructors' need for training** in formative assessment techniques.

To overcome these, institutions should:

- Integrate short formative tasks into existing drills.
- Foster a culture where feedback is viewed as essential to leadership growth.
- Provide instructor workshops on formative assessment and feedback methods.

Conclusion

Formative assessment is indispensable for developing the speaking skills of cadets trained to operate under command conditions. Its continuous, feedback-rich approach addresses the complexities of military communication by emphasizing clarity, confidence, and correctness in oral interactions. When properly integrated, formative assessment enhances cadets' readiness for real-life English-speaking military environments and contributes to more effective leadership communication. Future research and practice should focus on tailored formative assessment models that respond to evolving military communication demands.

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