

Being a new instructor in a military environment – lessons learned

French Air and Space Force

The teaching of the English language in the French Air & Space Force (apart from initial training) is as follows:

- The *CLAS* (Specialized Aeronautic Language Center) has three main missions: training and testing specialized, aeronautical English, the NATO English Proficiency Test for the French armed Forces (creating, administering and testing) and initial training for English instructors.
- The *SELAs* (English Instruction Cells) are located in 13 Air Force bases. Their focus is teaching professional English.

My first mission was to teach aeronautical English to senior mechanics (OR-8 and OR-9). For many years, they used to work on a French manufactured aircraft using documents about maintenance and servicing which were in French only. Those mechanics were recently transferred to a new squadron equipped with another aircraft, for which all documentation, including that on training, was exclusively in English.

The paradox of being a young and inexperienced cadet officer with a high level of English facing highly skilled senior NCOs but with a low level of English was uncomfortable. I had to swiftly acquire aeronautical knowledge, teaching techniques and the assurance and the self-confidence expected from an officer, all simultaneously.

I had to adapt my teaching techniques to a learner-centered and interactive approach. First the learners shared their aeronautical knowledge with me (which I lacked), then I was able to provide the content they needed, and finally they were able to interact in English using professional vocabulary.

The first lesson learned is that teaching professional English cannot be improvised. I also gained precious first-hand aeronautical knowledge, which I could reuse in the future. I realized that getting the learners involved takes the pressure off my shoulders. They were eager to share their professional and technical experience with me and always welcomed my specific questions.

Today, working at the *CLAS*, I am in charge of providing initial training and support in everything linked to pedagogy and teaching techniques to recently enrolled instructors.

The actions implemented and still worked on start with an initial pedagogical training for all new instructors (theory and practice) and aeronautical acculturation. We also organize annual on-site visits as well as an annual seminar for all English instructors. A “teacher training kit” including an online platform with a forum, a wide variety of resources, curricula and other resources is available to all. We provide a specific handbook to all newcomers containing key elements. We strongly encourage new instructors to engage in on-site visits and immersion in squadrons and/or operational units on their respective air bases. We encourage everyone to “think out of the box”, to engage in continuous self-learning and to be creative, show curiosity, open-mindedness and willingness to learn, in order to reinforce credibility.