

Tactical Latin and The Power of Language

By Brian C. Hartman

While the official number is not known, it is estimated that there are between 750,000 and 1,000,000 different words in the English language. And while one of those words is in fact *“indescribable”* it is a relatively safe assumption that we can find a word to describe every action, every area of interest, quantify or qualify a problem or give direction. That being said, it is imperative that we, being critics of ourselves, are using the BEST word or words for this task.

Latin is a dead language and the likelihood of it making a comeback is quite low. Yet in tactical circles, we have needlessly created a complex lexicon of our own that is known to few and of questionable simplicity.

For this article, we will define BEST as: fastest to learn, simplest to use, simplest to comprehend, safest to employ, most reliable under stress and easiest to articulate or defend to those outside our professional sphere. Let's assess 4 areas where we most commonly go wrong.

UNECESSARILY REDESIGNATING - *Conditions and Types*

The US Military are big fans of calling the *status of load* amongst weapons by a classifier known as it's CONDITION, while miscellaneous incurred malfunctions are distinguished by their TYPE. So, John can have a CONDITION 2 rifle, Frank can have a TYPE 3 malfunction, & most everyone is confused. This eats time in memorization, instruction, execution on the range, and more importantly, does little (to nothing) for us in the fight. First off, a weapon is either fully cleared, half loaded (magazine inserted/tube loaded no rounds chambered), or fully loaded. That's it. Period.

As for malfunctions, if we were referring to the AR platform, we have 1) failure to fire, 2) failure to eject (shallow, medium, deep), 3) failure to extract, 4) double feed, 5) failure to feed, 6) failure to cycle, 7) brass over bolt/charging handle impingement, 8) case separation, 9) obstructed bore, 10) trigger group impingement/blown primer.

Users must be able to (at a minimum) identify each as well as fix them under in-fight stress (to include incoming fire), on the run and in the dark. Here's a novel and revolutionary proposal: what if we referred to them not as TYPE _____, but instead as exactly what they are? An obstructed bore is just that, while a double feed is in fact called a *double feed*. The speed and simplicity of information absorbance is undeniable.

THE 1-VERB DILEMMA - *Transition, Transition, Transition*

"For this next drill you will have two threats in front of you. On the initiate command, starting at the 25-yard line, you will engage the left threat and then transition to the 15-yard line. On the way, you will transition your weapon to your support side and approach the barricade. There, you will transition to the right threat until your carbine goes empty at which time you will transition to your handgun. Engage the right threat then transition the handgun to the support hand while transitioning to the opposite side of the barricade while transitioning back to the left threat."

As abhorrent and confusing as this sentence is, it is frightfully common. The instructor is using one word (TRANSITION) to describe five separate and very different desired actions. Aside from being weak and unreadable, it is outright reckless in a weapons-based training or operational environment where confusion can equal injury. Let's try an alternative approach:

"For this next drill you will have two threats in front of you. On the initiate command, starting at the 25-yard line, you will engage the left threat and then advance to the 15-yard line. On the way, you will transfer your weapon to your support side and approach the barricade. There, you will traverse to the right threat until your carbine goes empty at which time you will transition to your handgun. Engage the right threat then transfer the handgun to the support hand while re-exposing on the opposite side of the barricade while traversing back to the left threat."

Opening a door via knob, kick, ram, halligan, shotgun, cutting torch or explosives are all VERY different. Mean what you say and say what you mean.

VOLATILITY OF LABELING - *African Wars and Waiting for Headshots*

Practitioners of modern combative handgun skills are familiar with the practice of engaging an adversary with two rounds delivered to the body followed by one round to the head. This practice most commonly goes by one of two names: *The Mozambique or Failure Drill*.

Imagine being forced to engage a suspect utilizing lethal force, which you do successfully employing the Mozambique. Now imagine being cross-examined in a hostile manner during a criminal or civil proceeding wherein you must explain that the engagement is so-named in reference to a civil war involving mercenaries in Africa. Appropriate? Liable to be misinterpreted?

Now imagine instead, we call it a "*Failure Drill*," which is short for "*Failure to Stop*." But the engagement is on video, cell phone or bodycam. And the time elapsed between the body shots and the headshot is .25 seconds. Did the body

shots truly “*Fail to Stop*” the adversary??? Could a civil attorney make an argument that to truly be a “*Failure Drill*” we must wait for the body rounds to fail before elevating to the head? While we do not hold that opinion and consider it a stretch solely intended to inflame, that is not the point.

Instead we prefer the term “Standard High Response,” with an **additional** headshot as well. It’s standard... we go up to the head... and it is a response to adversary actions. No mention of insurrection, or failed body shots. No artificially imposed timelines and as such a far more articulable position.

We don’t “*stick*” adversaries, we strike them with batons. We don’t “*thump or pound*” adversaries, we deliver elbow or knee strikes. We don’t “*choke out*” adversaries, we may elect to employ a carotid restraint. This matters. We have even seen spontaneous utterances or misstatements by officers (post-use-of-force) be misunderstood at best and warped to imply wrongdoing at worst.

Educated and articulate students of ours who are savvy to proper articulation technique have expressed greater success with conveying state of mind and course of action to public, judge & jury.

ACRONYMS – “*Knowing When to Say When*”

ADCOMSUBORDCOMPHIBSPAC currently holds the title of “*reigning champion for longest acronym in the English language*.” It stands for: **Administrative Command Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet, Subordinate Command**. Now say that with a straight face.

Acronyms are a fantastic tool, that allow us to compress language into concise, compact form. However, they fail when they are overly used, become excessive in length or are used when speaking to people who are not part of a team, unit, profession or culture.

“Load your SBR’s into your POV’s onto the MSR and be NRT to the NAI for CQB ops at the LFSH. Ensure that you have PPE for NLTA, 4 NFDD’s each, and a CBRN SCBA for this afternoon’s FMP and CASEVAC.”

Our experience is that acronyms beyond two syllables are pushing the boundaries of reasonable. In short, ***simple, should not be complicated.***

CONCLUSION

Language and dialect is a distinctly human trait that identifies culture, tribe and purpose. Speech, like the atmosphere, is intolerant of a vacuum where words will rush in to fill the void. The request to “*explain it to me*” may be indicative of poor

communication or muddied comprehension. Our words should be part of the solution, not the problem. Be safe.

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