



Special Operations Forces Mission-related Language Requirements: What skills should be tested?

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Slide 1

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- Overview of Special Operations Forces (SOF) community
- Present a small percentage of the evidence accumulated since 2004 for these questions:
 - *What attitudes do SOF operators and leaders have about language testing?*
 - *What are SOF mission-related language requirements?*
- Conclusion: *What is the best test(s) for SOF?*

Overview of Testing & NA History



	Test	Data Collections
Prior to 2003	DLPT Defense Language Proficiency Test Reading and Non-participatory Listening	
2004		Special Operations Forces (SOF) Language Needs Assessment
2005		
2006		
2007		
2008		
2009	STANDARD CHANGE	Special Operations Forces (SOF) Language and Culture Needs Assessment
2010	OPI Oral Proficiency Interview Speaking or Speaking and Participatory Listening	Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Training Needs Assessment (TNA)
2011		
2012		Air Force Special Operations (AFSOC) TNA
2013		Special Forces (SF) TNA; Marine Corps Special Operations Forces (MARSOC) TNA



- DoD Instruction allows for the Services to modify certain requirements to qualify for the bonus; therefore, FLPB policies for SOF operators vary across SOF Service components
 - USMC pays MARSOF for speaking at ILR Level 1, 2, and higher DLPT or OPI
 - USN pays NAVSOF for speaking at ILR Level 1 and higher; pay for ILR Level 2 and higher requires DLPT5
 - USA pays ARSOF for ILR Level 1 (2 Skill OPI or DLPT5) and higher; pay for ILR Level 2 and higher requires DLPT5
 - USAF pay AFSOF at ILR 1/1 and higher in any two modalities



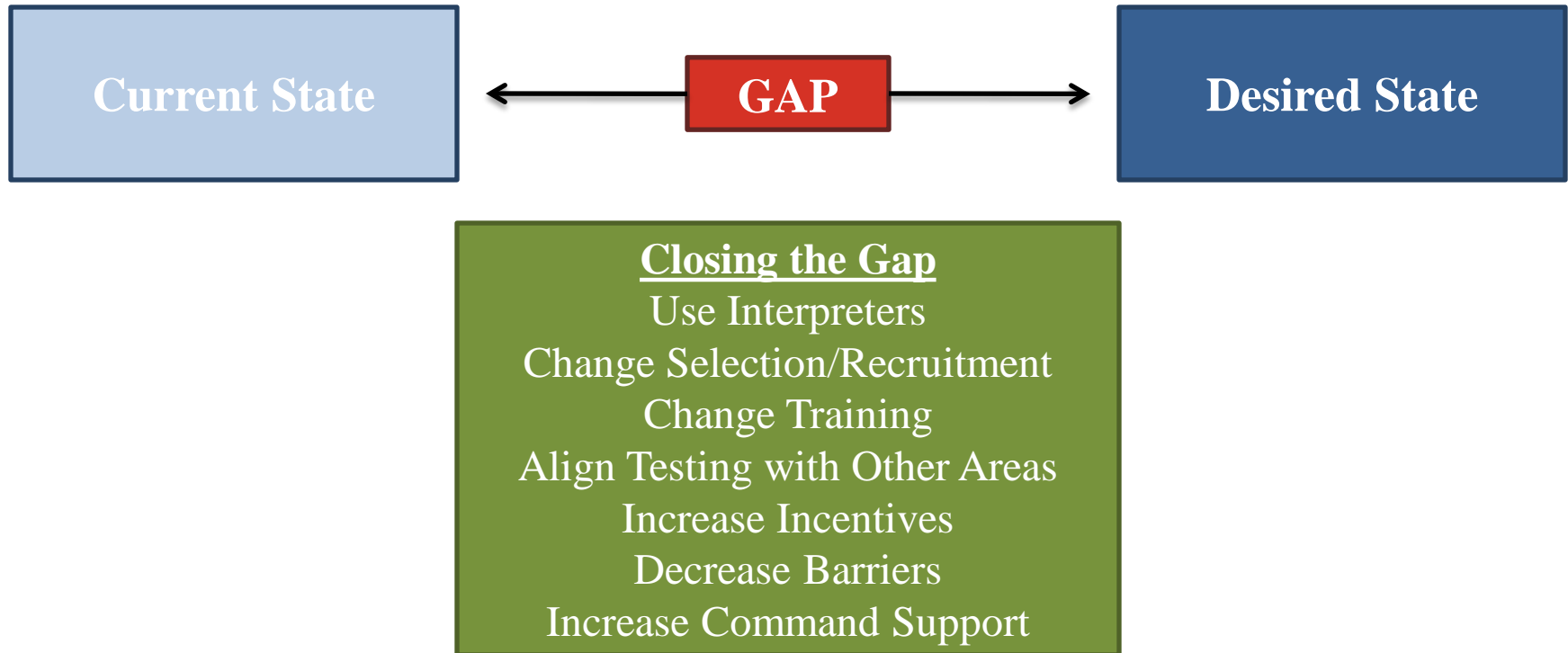
What attitudes do SOF operators and leaders have about language testing?

SOF-WIDE ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Organizational Needs Assessments



- Organization-level Needs Assessments
 - 2004 Language Needs Assessment
 - 2009 Language and Culture Needs Assessment
- *Current and Desired States* as well as related *factors* that influence the *Gap*



2004: Perceptions of Language Need



- Across all different types of missions, SOF operators reported ***using speaking and listening skills more frequently than reading and writing skills.***
- SOF operators and leaders ***disagreed*** with the statement: “The content of the DLPT is clearly related to what I (our operators) do during deployment.”
- SOF operators and leaders ***agreed*** with the statement: “The OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) is more related to mission performance than the DLPT.”
- SOF operators’ evaluations of DLPT’s relatedness to deployment tasks were related to evaluations of proficiency pay’s fairness. ***Those who felt that the DLPT was not related to their job duties also believed FLPP policies to be unfair.***

2009: Perceptions of Language Need

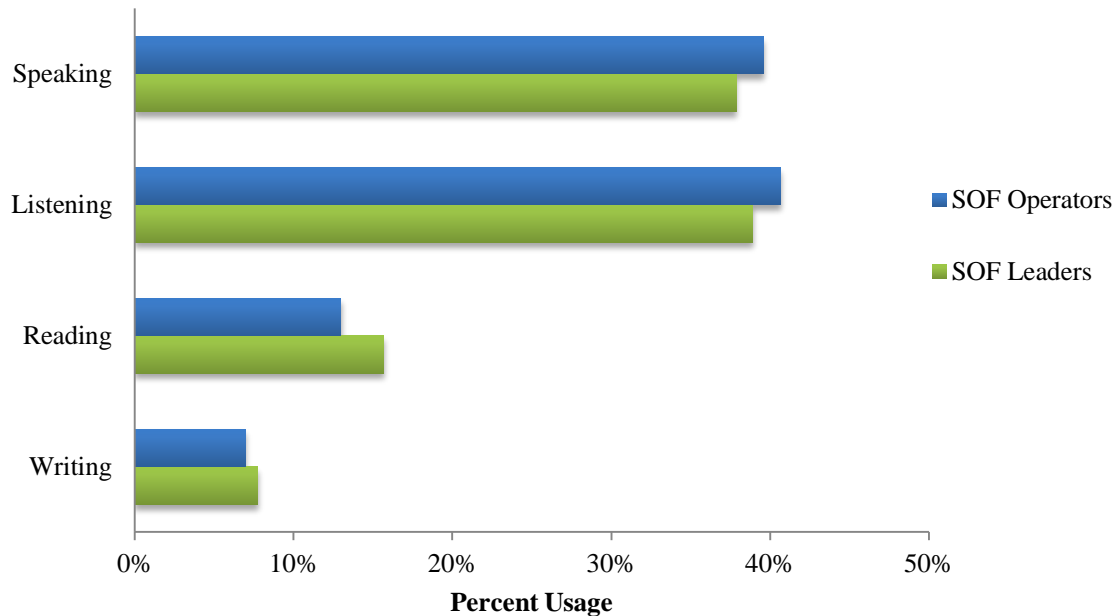


- Across all different types of missions, SOF operators reported ***using speaking and listening skills more frequently than reading and writing skills.***
- SOF operators and leaders ***disagreed*** or ***strongly disagreed*** with the statement: “The content of the DLPT is clearly related to what I (our operators) do during deployment.”
- SOF operators and leaders indicated that the OPI is ***moderately related*** to ***very related*** to job requirements.
- SOF operators and leaders indicated that the DLPT was ***not related*** or only ***slightly related*** to what SOF operators do on the job

2009: Perceptions of Language Need



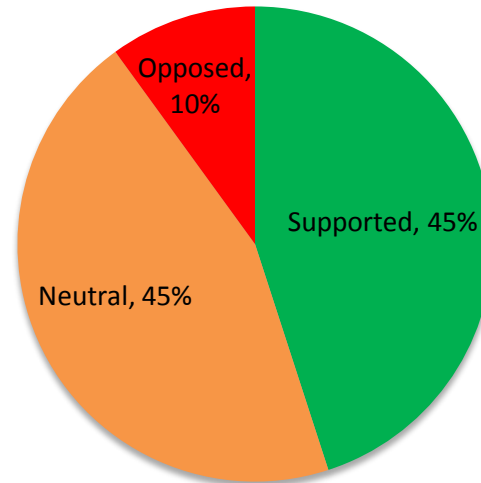
- Time spent using each modality on inside AOR deployments



“The purpose of language for all soldiers is to make them capable of engaging locals to effectively accomplish the mission. Nothing could be more important in regards to language than listening and speaking skills.”

SOF Leader, 5th SFG

Standard Change: DLPT → OPI



- Compared to the DLPT, the OPI was considered:
 - More job-related
 - More related to deployment
 - More accurate reflection of ability to use language
 - A better indicator of successful use of language on missions
 - A more accurate reflection of ability to perform in the target language
- Neither DLPT nor OPI covered all tasks required on deployment

Standard Change: DLPT → OPI



“It is practical to change the [testing] format to a listen and speaking. This is what the bulk of the operators will engage in while on their deployments.”

SOF Leader, 7th Special Forces Group (SFG)

“it [the DLPT] is not what SOF soldiers need to be effective on the modern battle field. reading and writing have nothing to do with what I have done on 4 deployments”

SOF Operator, 5th SFG

“The DLPT accurately measures an operators overall ability in a given language but it does not accurately measure the operator's ability to use the language to accomplish a given military mission down range”

SOF Leader, 3rd SFG

Summary of 2004 and 2009 Findings



- Speaking and listening are the most frequently used modalities for deployed SOF operators
- SOF operators and leaders believe the OPI is more job relevant than the DLPT for SOF operators. But, OPI is not viewed as the perfect assessment by SOF operators
- There is a lack of alignment between what is required by the mission, what is tested, and what is incentivized
- **Need to align what is trained, tested and compensated with the mission requirements:**
 - *Paying for the DLPT and not the OPI creates competing objectives, leads to maladaptive behaviors (e.g., teaching to the test) and undermines mission capability and readiness*



What are SOF mission-related requirements?

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS: SUMMARY OF SOF LANGUAGE NEEDS



- Need to align systems (training, testing, compensation, etc.) to provide the capability needed to perform organizational missions and accomplish objectives (Surface, 2012)
- Training Needs Assessment (TNA)
 - Uses multiple techniques and subject matter experts (SMEs) to identify and specify training requirements
 - Training requirements will guide course standards, curriculum, materials and assessment development
 - TNA's goal is to align capability exiting training with performance requirements
 - Phases of TNA
 - Mission/task analysis: Operational SMEs
 - Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other Characteristics (KSAO) analysis: Operational and language SMEs
 - Develop training requirements, etc.

Example Mission Tasks

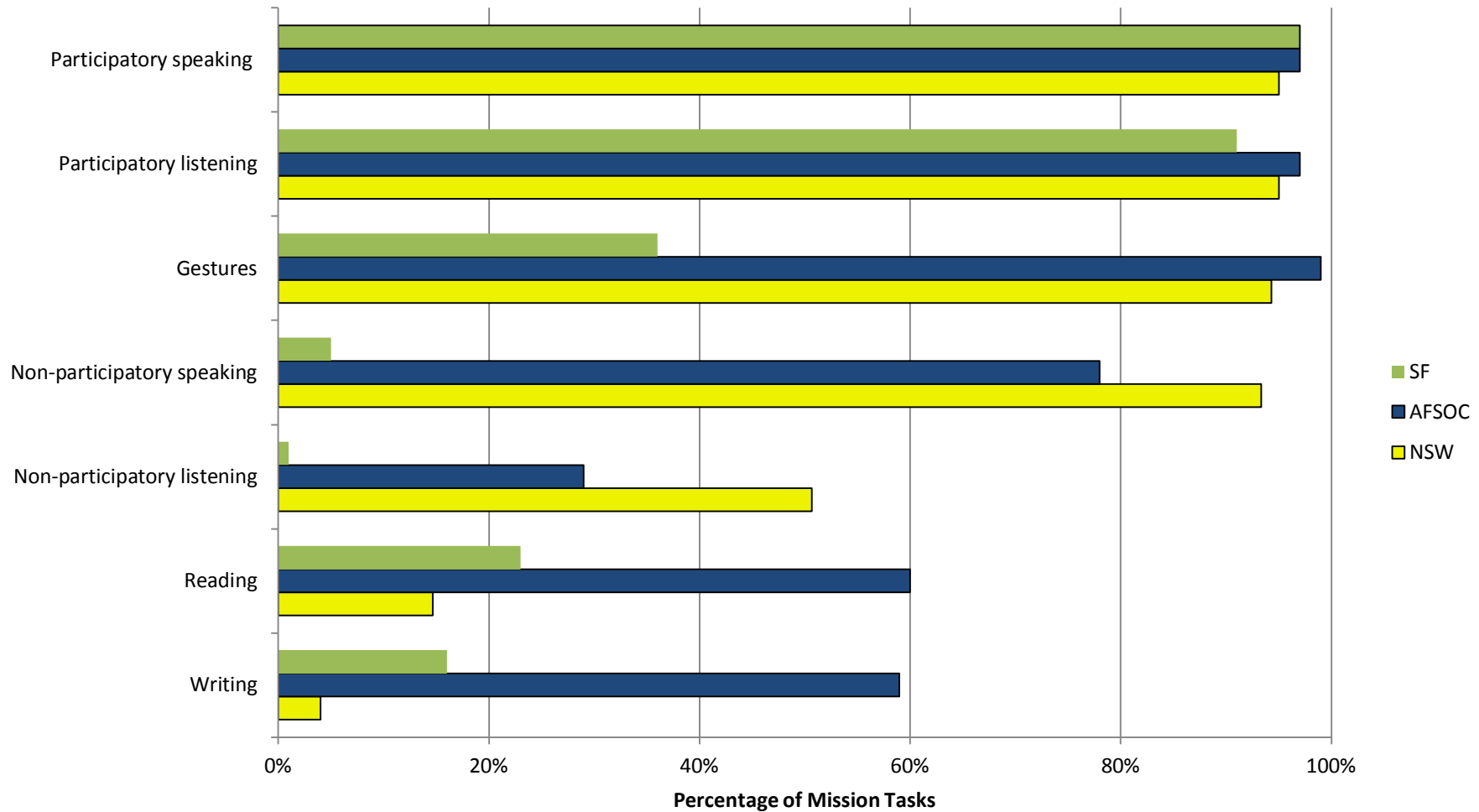


- NSW
 - Conduct full spectrum navigation operations (e.g., determine actions to avoid collisions; calculate set and drift)

- AFSOC
 - Provide intra-theater airlift
 - Conduct tactical airlift
 - Conduct forward arming and refueling point (FARP)

- SF
 - Conduct a local security patrol
 - Coordinate medical activity support
 - Key leader engagements
 - Lead a raid
 - Perform tactical combat casualty care (TCCC)

Communicative Modalities Needed by SOF Operators



Example: SF Mission Tasks that Require Speaking and Listening for 18A/180A



- Tasks applying to military occupational specialties (MOSs) 18A and 180A
 - Build rapport to promote relationships with foreign officers, soldiers, and civilians
 - Conflict management
 - Convey the mission planning process
 - Conversing with military officials (social issues, economics, problems with country, drug laws, family, politics, religion etc.)
 - Key Leader Engagements
 - Logistical planning
 - Training partner forces how to make basic plans (senior level leadership)
- Can do analysis by job, unit, mission or other organizing structure

Consistency of Evidence



- Although we have presented just a very small percentage of the evidence, the evidence is very consistent across SOF components
 - Participatory Listening and Speaking are the focal skills for the communication tasks in SOF
 - They are needed for the majority of the mission and job tasks
 - Other modalities are used but not to the extent and importance; others can vary by component, mission, job and unit



LANGUAGE TESTING POLICY NEEDS TO ALIGN WITH MISSION

Conclusion



- What is the best proficiency test for SOF operators?

Assignment

**Mission
Requirements**

Testing



Training

Incentives

Conclusion



- *Speaking and participatory listening* are the skills most frequently used on the jobs and missions in SOF
- **Need to ensure that training, testing and compensation policies are aligned to produce the needed mission capability—using and paying for proficiency on the appropriate test is key across all Services.**
- Of current tests, the dual modality OPI is the most aligned with SOF needs; All four Services should recognize for pay
- Developing, using and paying based on performance- and capability-focused assessments would improve the alignment



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