Lucie RADKOVÁ
Jarmila MÁDROVÁ
Michal MÍSTECKÝ
Ostravská univerzita

DOI: 10.14746/bo.2022.3.4

Mission, or no mission: factors behind knowledge of military language among Czech soldiers[1]

Keywords: military language, NATO base, Afghanistan, questionnaire survey, chi-square testing, boxplot

Abstract

The goal of the study is to analyse the outcomes of a questionnaire survey which concerns understandability of military language used on former Afghanistan missions. Two groups of respondents took part in the survey – 50 soldiers with experience from a foreign mission, 50 soldiers without such experience. The data have indicated that when it comes to decoding randomly generated expressions, an important role is mainly played by the soldiers' other foreign missions, professional specialisations, length of service, and close contact with the participants of the Afghan missions.

1 Introduction

The primary goal of the present research is to find out possible differences between mission and non-mission soldiers regarding their understanding of the specific expressions used on former missions in Afghanistan. Given the number of participants – 100 soldiers –, we consider our research a first probe into an under-investigated field of Czech linguistics. The probe took place from 15 May 2021 to 15 June 2021 and included the equal number of mission and non-mission respondents. Their permanent place of service is the garrison of the 53rd regiment of reconnaissance and electronic fight, seated in the city of Opava, the garrison of the 153rd engineer battalion, seated in the city of Olomouc, and the 72nd mechanized batallion, seated in the municipality of Přáslavice.

As aforementioned, studies on mission military language are rather infrequent in Czech linguistics (cf. Chaloupský 2005; Mádrová 2020; Radková, Místecký 2021; Radková, Mádrová, in the review process B), as more attention is paid to psychological and sociological consequences of missions upon a soldier's personality (cf. Šabaka 2011; Zacpalová 2012; Blahuš 2013; Stehlík 2014, 2017; Štrobl 2018). The present probe focuses on investigating the following assumptions:

1 Mission participants show better knowledge of the specific lexis than their non-mission colleagues.
2 The non-mission army members who are successful in decoding the expressions are in close contact with the mission participants.
3 Length of service is a non-negligible factor behind successful understanding of the expressions.
4 The respondents' specializations play an important role in decoding the expressions.

2 Methods and Material

The data were collected via a questionnaire survey. The print included three questions on sociodemographic characteristics[2] – length of service, professional specialization, and mission participation. In the next part, it was investigated whether the respondents consider the Afghan military language understandable, whether they are able to decode it, and what the source of their knowledge is. The choice of the words was based upon our non-standardized interviews with the soldiers who had been deployed in Afghanistan at least once. Having

[1] The paper was funded by the project SGS05/FF/2021 *Language Devices of the Participants in Military Missions Abroad II.*

[2] Given the fact that there were only two women participating in the research, we did not take into account the factor of sex.

analysed these interviews, we gained approximately 300 sociolect expressions covering 10 semantic fields, out of which we randomly generated 2 expressions per field. The questionnaire thus included 20 specific expressions that were to be completed with meanings by the soldiers.

The data were processed in multiple ways. In some cases, we used chi-square testing of independence (cf. Chráska 2016; Radková – Mádrová, in the review process A and B) and traditional bar charts. To visualize some differences better, we opted for boxplot diagrams, which avoid the disadvantages of using mean values solely. In the boxplots, the box represents interquartile range (IQR; between the 1st and 3rd quartiles), the terminal points of the vertical lines ("whiskers") equal the distances of 1.5 times the IQR above the 1st quartile and below the 3rd one, "x" stands for the average, and a horizontal line within the box for the median (cf. McGill, Tukey, Larsen 1978). In the paper, the boxplots are always completed with the table summarizing their cardinal points: maximum, 3rd quartile, median, 1st quartile, minimum – the five-number summary – and average.

In the analysis of the meanings, we opted for using Kendall correlation coefficient, the purpose of which is to find out a possible correlation in two sets of data. Kendall coefficient is rank-based, it thus does not necessitate the normal distribution of data (Kendall 1976; de Vaus 2002). The computation was carried out via the Free Statistics Software (Wessa 2021).

3 Results

The first investigation focuses on the estimated knowledge of military language. The soldiers were asked whether they think they would understand the specialized speech. The results were subject to chi-square testing, which did not prove that mission service and knowledge are connected ($\chi^2 = 3.47$, p 0.05). This outcome may have been caused by the fact that both the groups articulated their subjective opinions and may have tended to hesitate. See Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of answers concerning knowledge of military language

	Mission	No mission
No	8	7
I don't know	18	27
Yes	24	16

As for understanding individual military language samples (see Table 2 and Figure 1), the knowledge of specialized language – as expected – is more profound and widespread among the soldiers who participate in missions; using the vocabulary and phrases is part of military folklore and typifies a very important community-building feature (cf. Chaloupský 2005, Štrobl 2018; concerning the reasons for using specialized expressions in isolated environments, see Radková 2012). This way, our assumption 1 seems backed up with evidence. On average, a mission soldier knows the meanings of nine expressions out of twenty, with the interquartile range being 7–11. It is noteworthy that even though these soldiers fought abroad, the maximum of the correctly guessed meanings is 15; the reason behind this finding can be the fact that they did not participate in the very Afghan mission.

As to non-mission soldiers, there are two outliers, one of them showing virtually zero knowledge of military language. The detailed analysis has shown that the successful decoders from this group were in close contact with the Afghanistan-deployed soldiers (76%, 38 persons), who tend to feel the need to share their emotional experiences with their closest friends (cf. Radková, Mádrová, in the review process B). Assumption 2 (see Introduction) thus proves reasonable.

Table 2: Knowledge of specialized language among mission and non-mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	Mission	No mission
Maximum	15	14
3rd quartile	11	8.75
Average	9.14	7.3
Median	9.5	7

1st quartile	7	6
Minimum	2	0

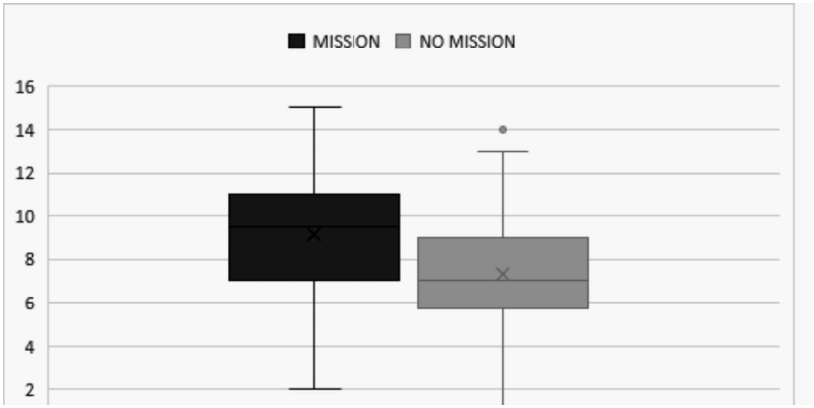

Figure 1: Knowledge of specialized language among mission and non-mission soldiers

Decoding the words can also be seen from their own perspective (see Figures 2 and 3).[3] The y-axis shows the success rate of guessing the meanings of the given words (e.g., the meaning of "snajperka" was correctly indicated by 96% of the mission soldiers). In both groups, the first places were taken by expressions denoting weaponry and equipment of soldiers, the site of the mission, accommodation, and catering. It is visible that both the mission and non-mission soldiers tend to know – or not to know – the same expressions (see Figure 4); this trend was confirmed by the result of the Kendall correlation coefficient (0.74), which indicates a very strong correlation (cf. de Vaus 2002). The outcome is surprising, as the mission participants were supposed to be more familiar with the vocabulary connected to the Afghan environment.

[3] A list of the words and their English translations is given in the Appendix to the study.

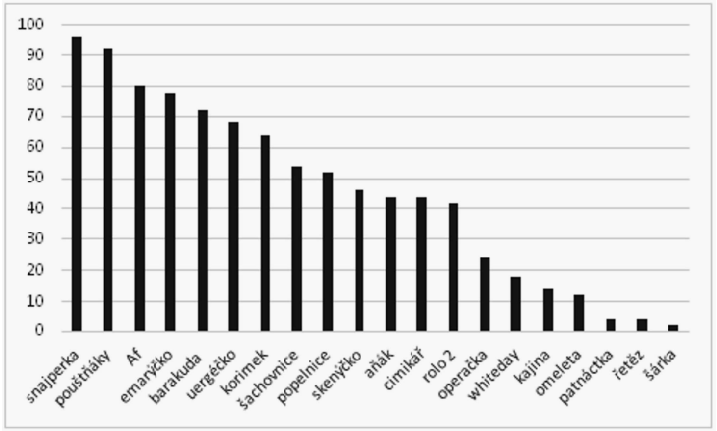

Figure 2: Knowledge of military language (mission soldiers)

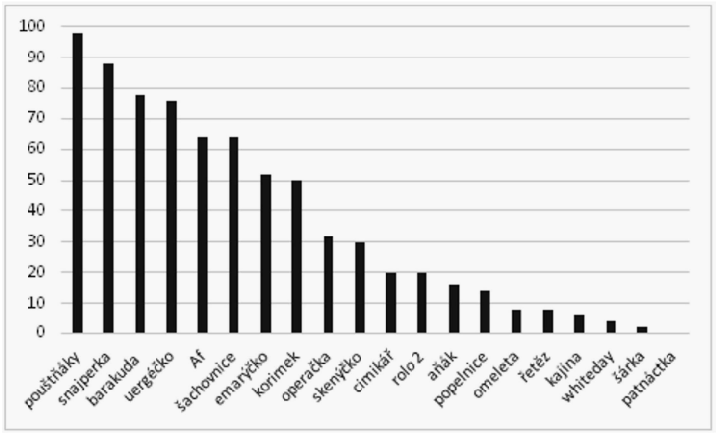

Figure 3: Knowledge of military language (non-mission soldiers)

In the forthcoming analyses, we studied knowledge of military language in relation to selected factors. In order make the data more robust, we pooled several categories. The first field to analyse was the mission locality (in this research, we investigated the mission soldiers only).

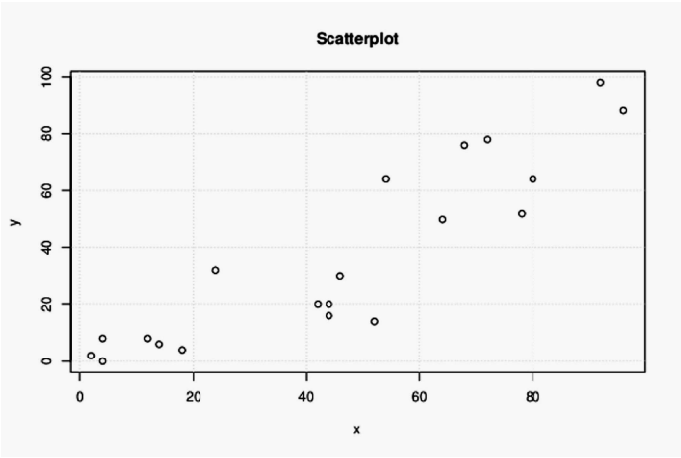

Figure 4: Scatterplot of correct meaning guesses by mission (x-axis) and non-mission (y-axis) soldiers

The missions the soldiers participated in took place in different states (Lithuania, Mali, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq). For the needs of our research, we pooled the answers of those taking part in missions in the non-NATO states and compared them to the soldiers who joined the mission in Lithuania. It seems there is a palpable difference between the two – first, the Lithuania participants have guessed fewer meanings than others, and second, there are substantial differences in knowledge when it comes to the second group of soldiers. This may be due to the fact that their missions may have taken place a long time ago, and the meanings may have thus become blurred in their memories (see Table 3 and Figure 5).

Table 3: Knowledge of specialized language according to the missions: the five-number summary and the average

	Lithuania	Non-NATO states
Maximum	12	15
3rd quartile	10	12
Average	8.59	9.48

Median	8.5	10
1st quartile	7	7
Minimum	6	2

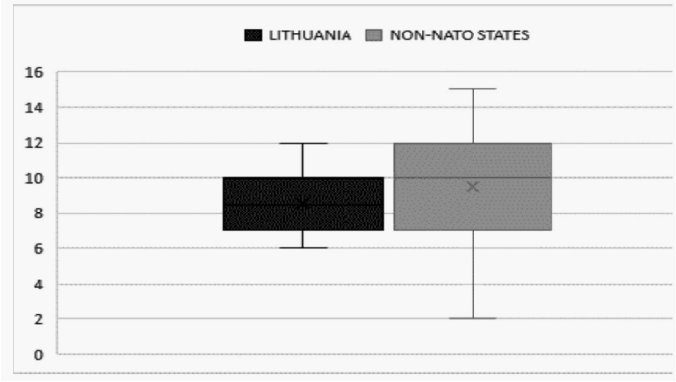

Figure 5: Knowledge of military language according to the missions

In both groups of soldiers, age appears to have played a role regarding knowledge of military language, as the older army members tend to score better in the indicator. A rather big maximum-minimum span is also seen in the results of the younger non-mission soldiers. In this case, contact with mission soldiers or jobs of the people may have influenced the outcome. See Tables 4 and 5, and Figures 6 and 7.

Table 4: Knowledge of specialized language according to age of mission participants: the five-number summary and the average

	18–35	36–60
Maximum	15	14
3rd quartile	10.5	11.5
Average	8.90	9.53
Median	9	10
1st quartile	7	8
Minimum	5	2

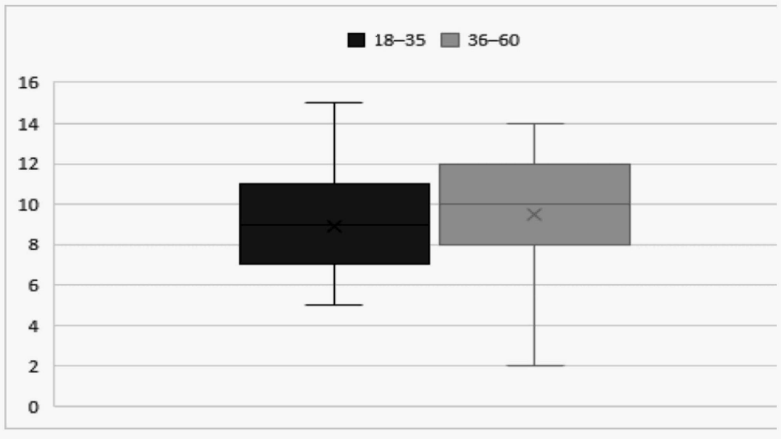

Figure 6: Role of age in military language knowledge (mission soldiers)

Table 5: Knowledge of specialized language according to age of non-mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	18–35	36–60
Maximum	14	12
3rd quartile	8.5	8.5
Average	7.29	7.32
Median	7	8
1st quartile	5	6
Minimum	0	1

Quite unexpected results occurred when the role of education was visualized. In general, outcomes are quite varied, which may indicate that education is not the decisive factor determining knowledge of military language. Even more surprisingly, mission soldiers with tertiary education tend to score less, which may be explained by the low number of these participating in the survey. As to the non-mission soldiers, the direct proportion between education and rising knowledge of military language holds good. See Tables 6 and 7, and Figures 8 and 9.

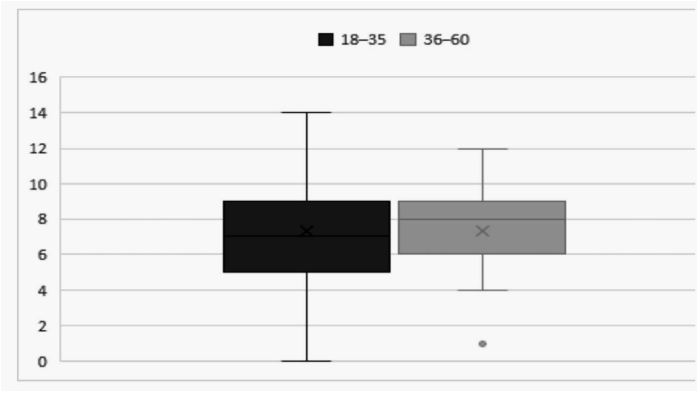

Figure 7: Role of age in military language knowledge (non-mission soldiers)

Table 6: Knowledge of specialized language according to education of mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	Secondary	Tertiary
Maximum	15	12
3rd quartile	11	10
Average	9.21	8.91
Median	10	9
1st quartile	7	7.5
Minimum	2	6

Table 7: Knowledge of specialized language according to education of non-mis- sion soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	Secondary	Tertiary
Maximum	12	14
3rd quartile	8	10
Average	6.88	8.12
Median	7	8
1st quartile	5	6
Minimum	1	0

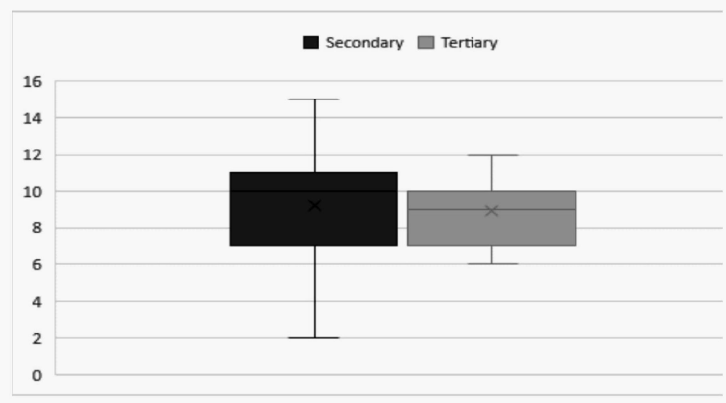

Figure 8: Role of education in military language knowledge (mission soldiers)

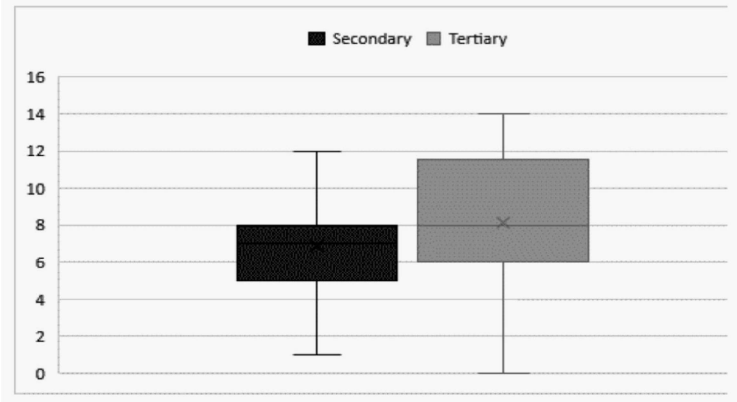

Figure 9: Role of education in military language knowledge (non-mission soldiers)

As anticipated in assumption 3, the rising number of active years goes hand in hand with soaring proficiency in military language; however, there is quite a dispersion in the results in case of non-mission soldiers, where more factors are expected to be at play (e.g., specialization, contact with mission soldiers, education, etc.). From the median perspective, the change between the freshers (1–5 active years) and the more experienced (6-10 active years) is more dramatic in mis-

sion soldiers, as active and possibly multiple missioning may bring about more knowledge in military language. See Tables 8 and 9, and Figures 10 and 11.

Table 8: Knowledge of specialized language according to active years of mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	1–5	6–10	11+
Maximum	15	13	14
3rd quartile	9.5	10	12
Average	8.70	9.00	9.59
Median	7	9	10
1st quartile	7	7.5	9
Minimum	6	6	2

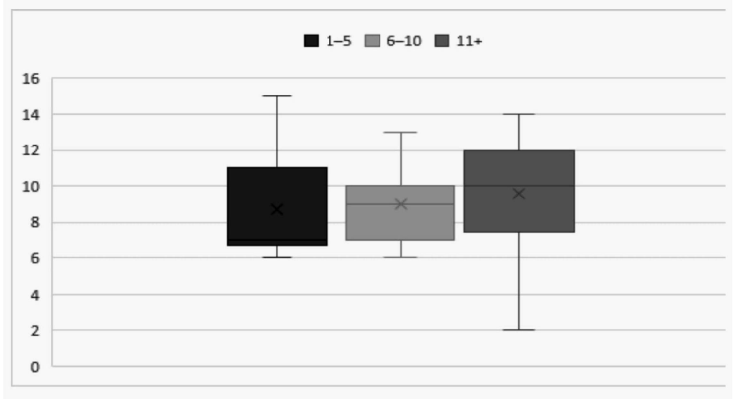

Figure 10: Role of active years in military language knowledge (mission soldiers)

Table 9: Knowledge of specialized language according to active years of non-mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	1–5	6–10	11+
Maximum	12	13	14
3rd quartile	7.75	8	10
Average	6.00	6.83	8.27

Median	6	7	8
1st quartile	5	5	6
Minimum	0	3	1

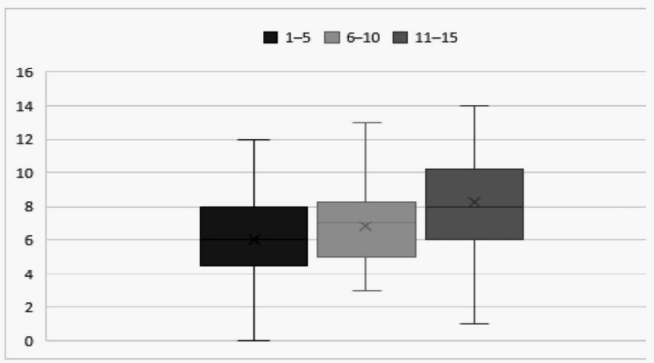

Figure 11: Role of active years in military language knowledge (non-mission soldiers)

Mission and non-mission soldiers also share certain features when it comes to the occupation-knowledge relation. The distribution of the levels of military language is the same in both categories, with the intelligence scoring the best and logistics manifesting the lowest level of knowledge; this may be attributed to the necessity of the former to use military language in their everyday operations. Nevertheless, the mission intelligence shows more varied outcomes, too, which may be due to the high number of these workers participating in the survey. Non-mission soldiers manifest more outliers, but the overall trend copies the one of the mission participants. See Table 10 and 11, and Figures 12 and 13.

Table 10: Knowledge of specialized language according to specializations of mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	Intelligence	HQ	Logistics	Specific Occupations
Maximum	15	10	12	14
3rd quartile	11.75	9.25	7	10
Average	9.85	8.00	7.20	9.00

Median	10.5	8	7	10
1st quartile	8	6.75	6	8.5
Minimum	2	6	5	2

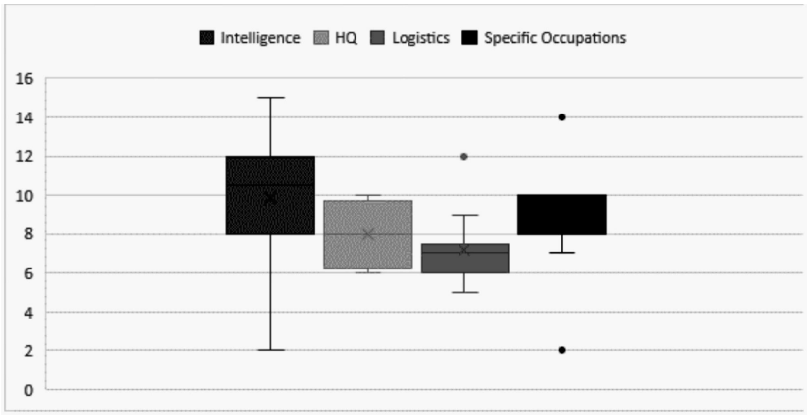

Figure 12: Role of occupations in military language knowledge (mission soldiers)

Table 11: Knowledge of specialized language according to specializations of non-mission soldiers: the five-number summary and the average

	Intelligence	HQ	Logistics	Specific Occupations
Maximum	12	13	14	13
3rd quartile	11.25	7.5	8	8
Average	8.33	6.57	7.15	7.09
Median	8	7	6	7
1st quartile	6.25	5.5	5	6
Minimum	4	0	3	1

The last figure depicts the respondents' answers concerning source of knowledge of the researched specific lexis. The soldiers were to choose from the given range of options, being entitled to select more of them. Almost all the respondents declared their own army experience (including military schooling and talks with colleagues) to be

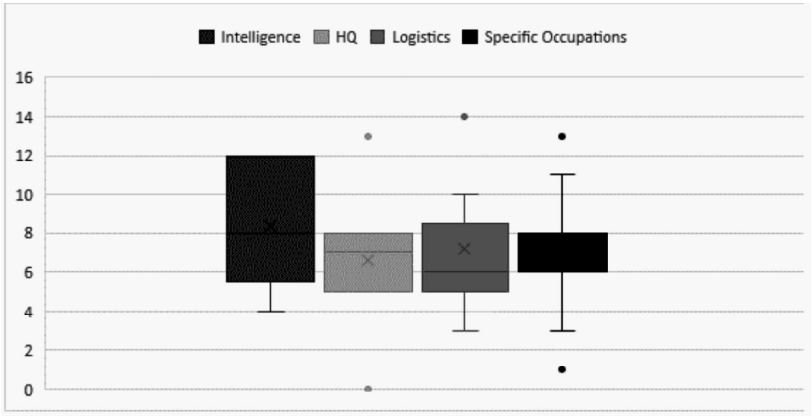

Figure 13: Role of occupations in military language knowledge (non-mission soldiers)

the main intermediary between them and military language. Other answers were very scarce.[4] There was virtually no difference between mission and no-mission soldiers in this investigation (see Figure 14).

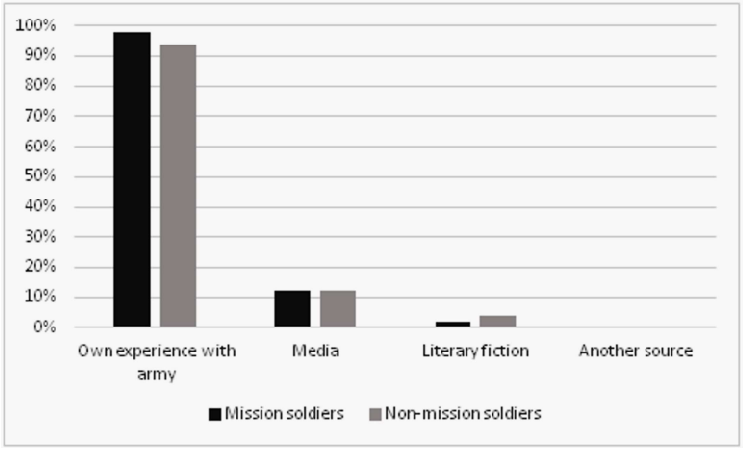

Figure 14: Sources of military language knowledge

[4] If any book was mentioned in this respect, it was Stehlík (2014).

Conclusions

The primary goal of the research was to find out the level of knowledge of specific expressions used on the former Afghanistan mission among two groups of respondents. The data suggested the forthcoming outcomes.

1 As to deciphering the meanings of the specific lexis, the mission soldiers were more successful – especially those who were missioning in politically unstable countries. It has been shown that the mission and non-mission soldiers tend to know – or not to know – roughly the same expressions.
2 Detailed analyses have demonstrated that the non-mission army members who are successful in decoding the expressions are in close contact with the mission participants.
3 A factor not to be neglected for correct identification of the specific vocabulary is length of service years. In both groups, the soldiers serving for more than ten years have shown more knowledge of military language.
4 Soldiers' specializations also play a role in decoding the expressions. In both groups, the intelligence scored best, and the logistics workers were the least successful.

The present data do not bring about exhaustive findings, but they may serve as first insights into the issue and give impetus to further studies in the field. It would, for instance, be of interest to research to what extent the specified lexis of mission participants have penetrated into media discourse (cf. Brown, 2014).

References

B l a h u š, Petr. (2013). *Čeští lvi pod Hindúkušem: Afghánistán-Bohem, přírodou i lidmi zkoušená země za ostnatým drátem*. Praha: Naše vojsko.

B r o w n, David. (2014). Afghan war slang that will come home with the troops. *The Times*. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/afghan-war-slang-that-will-come-home-with-the-troops-7nxdcs37g07 [quoted 21-12-01].

C h a l o u p s k ý, Ladislav. (2005). *A sociolinguistic interpretation of military slang and vernacular expressions*. Dissertation. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

C h a l o u p s k ý, Ladislav. (2013). Bojovat jako český král – vzájemné ovlivňování jazyků v kontextu společenských změn. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 22(2), pp. 202–218.

C h a l o u p s k ý, Ladislav. (2012). Problematika překladu vojenských hodností. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 21(3), pp. 89–105.

C h a l o u p s k ý, Ladislav. (2002). Vojenský slang a jeho proměny. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 11(4), pp. 134–136.

C h r á s k a, Miroslav. (2016). *Metody pedagogického výzkumu. Základy kvantitativního výzkumu.* 2nd edition. Praha: Grada.

D e V a u s, David. (2002). *Surveys in Social Research*. 5th edition. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

K e n d a l l, Maurice George. (1975). *Rank Correlation Methods*. 4th edition. London: Griffin.

M á d r o v á, Jarmila. (2020). *Lexikum účastníků mezinárodních zahraničních a pozorovatelských misí (terénní výzkum).* MA thesis. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita.

M c G i l l, Robert, T u k e y, John W., L a r s e n, Wayne A. (1978). Variations of box plots. *The American Statistician*, 32(1), pp. 12–16.

R a d k o v á, Lucie. (2012). *Jak se mluví za zdmi českých věznic*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita.

R a d k o v á, Lucie, M á d r o v á, Jarmila. (2022a). Call of Speech: Function of Military Language as Seen by Members of Selected Contingents. *Jazykovedný časopis.* Currently in the review process B.

R a d k o v á, Lucie, M á d r o v á, Jarmila. (2022b). Militärische Missionen in Kriegsgebieten: Funktionen milieuspezifischer Wortschätze. *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie*. Currently in the review process A.

R a d k o v á, Lucie, M í s t e c k ý, Michal. (2021). Words of Warfare: Life of Mission Soldiers in the Perspective of Quantitative Linguistics. *Bohemistyka*, 21(1), pp. 7–26.

S t e h l í k, Pavel. (2014). *Do temnoty: Zpověď českého vojáka v Afghánistánu*. Brno: Computer Press.

S t e h l í k, Pavel. (2017). *Já, voják v Afghánistánu: vzpomínky českých veteránů*. Brno: Computer Press.

Š a b a k a, Petr. (2011). *Dopisy z Kábulu*. Svitavy: Trinitas.

Š t r o b l, Daniel. (2018). *Psychologické aspekty zabití.* Praha: Triton.

W e s s a, Patrick. (2021). *Free Statistics Software, Office for Research Development and Education (version 1.2.1)*. Available at: https://www.wessa.net/ [quoted 21–12.01].

Z a c p a l o v á, Pavla. (2012). *Vliv pobytu v zahraniční misi na osobní život vojáků*. Brno: Diplomová práce. Masarykova univerzita.

Appendix

Af – Afghanistan
kajina – Kabul military base called Kaia
korimek – Portakabin for soldiers
šárka (a Czech female name) – gym (established on the Šárka name day)
omeleta (literally "omelette") – Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT)
patnáctka (literally "the number of fifteen") – QRF team, which must respond to a task within 15 minutes
aňák – member of Afghan National Army
cimikář (literally "CIMIC-ker") – person focused on CIMIC – CIvil MIlitary Co-operation
barakuda (literally "barracuda") – a protective mask scarf (derived from the animal that is capable to change its colour according to the surroundings, merge with it, and thus protect itself)
pouštňáky (literally "desert trousers") – desert uniform
snajperka (literally "sniper gun") – long-distance weapon
uergéčko – assault hand grenade (derived from the Czech abbreviation – URG)
popelnice (literally "dustbin") – armoured personnel carrier
skenýčko – specialized reconnaissance plane equipped with video cameras (ScanEagle)
operačka – operation centre
rolo 2 – hospital (for the moderately wounded)
emarýčko – daily portion of food in a package (derived from the English abbreviation MRE – Meal Ready to Eat)
whiteday – sanitary day (the kitchen being closed on that day, soldiers have to make use of the MRE food)
řetěz (literally "chain") – chain signal sent by a supervisor via a text message (soldiers have to answer whether they are alright)
šachovnice (literally "chessboard") – type of military convoy