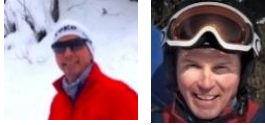


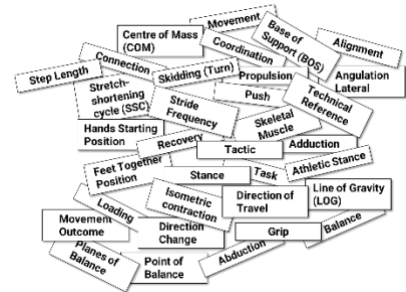
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The Language of a Ski Instructor



“Our COM (centre of mass) moves over our BOS (base of support) so that we can effectively use the joints by applying the stretch-shortening cycle to effectively produce force onto the snow to project the COM forward by the end of the stride phase.” Any questions?

I have been involved in CANSI for more than 45 years. (Wow! That shocked me even as I wrote it!) During this time, I have been required to learn numerous technical terms that people believed were the most effective way to describe the movements used to execute a specific technique. Sometime terms were created, for example, *kick* or *hands start position*, whose actual definition might not be found in a dictionary or science textbook. But everyone started using those terms and they became the term of choice for a while. Other times terms were defined using biomechanical or scientific language, for example, *preload* is now called *stretch-shortening cycle*, and of course we’ve created an acronym for it: SSC.



In addition to CANSI’s adjustment to terms, we also have sister organizations, whom CANSI members may also belong to. Groups like the Canadian Ski Instructors’ Alliance (CSIA) and Nordiq Canada (NC) may use different terms to explain the same movements. So, an instructor begins to get exposed to multiple words used to describe similar movement used in ski technique.

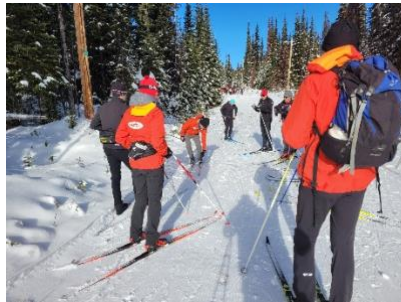
So, what language should I use when I’m teaching? Do I use CANSI’S technical terms? Do I use CSIA’s or Nordiq Canada’s? Do I make up my own? Maybe the correct answer to this question is... **It depends!**



Organizations, CANSI included, spend a lot of time trying to help their members better understand the mechanics of skiing. The formal terms used by an organization are typically created so that we have a common language and application of terms on snow. If the terms

change over the years, then the organization works to get everyone up to speed with new terminology.

But let's look at lessons for members of the public—not other instructors at CANSI courses or refreshers, but people who are paying you for a lesson. What language should the instructor use? Here I default to our **student-centred approach** (SCA) to teaching. The centre of the model is the student, so I believe the correct language to be used is the one that the student finds the easiest to understand.



If I'm teaching a first-time skier who has not been very active in sport before, then the use of our technical terms might be too complex or require a lot of explanation. For example, instead of saying, "Move your centre of mass over your base of support," a more effective sentence for a beginner skier might be "Move your nose over your ski."

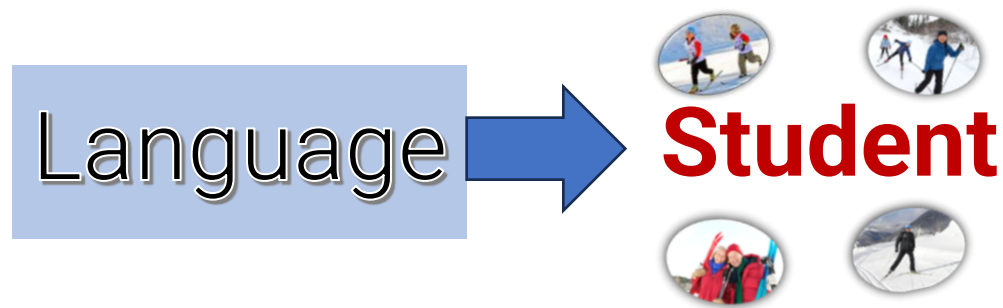
If I am teaching a small group of master skiers who compete regularly, they may subscribe to an online ski site like Nordic Ski Lab or have attended clinics conducted by Nordic Canada coaches. What language should I use here? Again, let's apply the model. The questions I ask in the connection part of the student-centred approach should help me to understand if these skiers have received lessons or clinics in the past and from whom. When discussing movements with students, what terms do they use? Should we spend time correcting or debating their terminology, or should I, as the instructor, adjust my language to theirs?

Now let's look at a CANSI situation. What if I am conducting a CANSI course, refresher or skill development workshop for our members or for someone who is considering a CANSI Level I course? If I apply our student-centred approach and the goal of the session is to ensure that students can be successful in meeting our association's standards, then I need to match the language I use with the language used in our teaching guides and videos. That way there is no confusion. I may also need to help students connect the terms they use or have heard in the past to the terms CANSI uses today, so that they have a clear understanding.



So, what is my point in writing this article? As an organization, CANSI develops a set of terms and descriptions to best describe the movement of efficient skiing. These terms and descriptions may change over time. Other organizations may choose to use terms that match their organization’s philosophy or beliefs. We, as instructors, need to understand our current CANSI terms and what they mean when we ski on snow. We also need to be able to link CANSI’s terms to the terms used by other organizations. Lastly, we need to be able to adjust and adapt the language we use to match the students in a lesson or ski program.

Experienced instructors can do this effortlessly because they understand the movements we are attempting to perform, not just the terms used. They then select the right language based on their students. Sometimes they may decide to use the organization’s terminology; other times they will choose different language to simplify things for the student. This becomes the true skill of ski teaching.



There are some guarantees in life, for example:

- At some point, I will die – guaranteed!
- If I don’t pay my taxes, the government will seize my bank account and/or put me in jail.

Another guarantee you can expect—CANSI and other organizations will change their terms over time. That means we need to be good at learning new terminology when it occurs and be able to understand how to select the right words to match our students’ level of understanding and experience.

Now get out there and use the “right” language when you teach.

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