

## TEACHING FRENCH TO ROMANIAN CADETS IN 2025: PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES

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**Abstract:** *The instruction of French to Romanian military cadets in 2025 is both a linguistic necessity and a strategic priority within the framework of Romania’s NATO obligations and its deepening defense cooperation with France. Despite the Latin roots shared by Romanian and French, cadets often fail to attain fluency, mainly due to outdated pedagogical models that emphasize grammatical accuracy over practical language application. This article analyzes the effectiveness of using scenarios based on the framework of Operational Language Readiness (OLR), an innovative approach to language instruction tailored for military contexts. Grounded in task-based language teaching (TBLT), Speech Act Theory, and situated learning, OLR prioritizes scenario-based simulations, micro-immersion techniques, and mission-specific communication tasks to prepare cadets for multilingual operations. By aligning language education with the communicative demands of multinational military missions, OLR prepares cadets to think, react, and lead effectively in French. This article presents the theoretical foundations, practical challenges, and recommendations that make OLR a transformative model for military language education in Romania and beyond.*

**Keywords:** Operational Language Readiness, language education, task-based language teaching, French instruction

### 1. Introduction

Teaching French to Romanian cadets is a strategic imperative that supports Romania’s role in NATO and enhances its bilateral defense partnership with France. As an official language of both NATO and the European Union, French remains vital for operational interoperability, particularly in joint missions conducted in Francophone regions such as West Africa. Romanian participation in multinational coalitions like Eurocorps and EU-led military operations demands linguistic and cultural fluency in French. Moreover, the ability to communicate effectively in French strengthens doctrinal alignment and deepens

integration into Francophone defense structures. For Romanian cadets, mastering French is not just an academic goal—it is an essential component of their operational readiness and leadership capacity within international missions.

Despite this importance, French language instruction in Romanian military academies faces several obstacles. English, which dominates NATO’s operational language environment, often overshadows French instruction, reducing institutional support and cadet motivation. Existing pedagogical approaches also fail to address the real-world demands of military communication. Grammar-heavy curricula, limited

immersion opportunities, and outdated assessment methods contribute to a persistent gap between academic language proficiency and operational fluency. Addressing these deficiencies requires not only curricular reform but a comprehensive pedagogical realignment toward functional, mission-oriented language training.

The traditional foundation of language instruction—communicative competence—includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic abilities [1]. While valuable for general language acquisition, this framework does not adequately prepare cadets for the linguistic rigors of military missions, which require fast, precise, and culturally sensitive communication. In high-stakes operational environments, delays or miscommunications can have serious consequences.

To bridge this gap, a pedagogical framework that shifts the teaching focus from passive language knowledge to active, performance-based communication is necessary. Rooted in task-based language teaching [2], Speech Act Theory [3],[4], and situated learning [5], Operational Language Readiness (OLR) prepares cadets to perform mission-critical tasks in French. It emphasizes the use of authentic tasks—such as delivering briefings, issuing commands, or negotiating with allies—to cultivate both linguistic proficiency and operational effectiveness. In this approach, language is not only a medium of communication but also a form of action—essential for leadership, decision-making, and coordination in multilingual environments.

## **2. Challenges in the Romanian Military Context**

Romanian cadets face a range of linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional barriers to achieving operational fluency in French. Linguistically, Romanian cadets do not often have opportunities to communicate in French. They expect to learn it fast due to the shared Latin roots of Romanian and French, which proves to be both a benefit and a drawback. While lexical similarities

may accelerate vocabulary acquisition, they also lead to confusion due to false cognates and grammatical transfer. For example, cadets might misinterpret the French verb *rapporter* (to bring back) as having the same meaning as the Romanian *a raporta* (to report), resulting in operational misunderstandings.

Pedagogically, the post-pandemic reliance on digital tools has altered the instructional landscape. AI-based applications and e-learning platforms, while accessible and scalable, often focus on grammar drills and vocabulary memorization, lacking the interactivity and contextual engagement necessary for language performance. Cadets frequently report low engagement and limited practical application in these digital environments. Moreover, there is a shortage of immersive learning opportunities, such as exchanges with French-speaking military institutions or joint training exercises, which are critical for developing real-time communication skills.

Assessment practices also contribute to the problem. Current evaluations primarily emphasize written proficiency and grammatical accuracy, neglecting oral performance and situational adaptability. This creates a disconnect between the academic metrics of success and the actual communication demands of multinational missions.

As Chapelle [6] emphasizes, effective language assessment must be grounded in argument-based validation that links test tasks directly to the target language use domain. In the context of Operational Language Readiness, this means assessments should simulate real-world military communication scenarios to ensure that performance on the test reliably reflects a cadet's ability to function in operational environments.

## **3. Building a Case for Operational Language Readiness**

Operational Language Readiness (OLR) offers a comprehensive response to these

challenges by aligning language instruction with the functional realities of military life. Theoretical underpinnings of OLR draw on Speech Act Theory, which views language as performative, a tool for action. In military contexts, speech acts such as commands, clarifications, or warnings have immediate consequences. Training cadets to perform these acts in French reinforces both linguistic precision and leadership authority.

Situated learning supports this approach by emphasizing the importance of context in acquiring knowledge. Through scenario-based simulations, such as multilingual briefings, negotiation exercises, and tactical planning, cadets practice language in environments that mirror their future roles. This "learning by doing" model not only improves retention but also fosters confidence and cultural fluency.

Task-based language teaching provides a methodological foundation for OLR. Instead of relying on abstract grammar exercises, TBLT promotes active engagement through tasks that replicate real-world activities. Romanian cadets, for example, might be tasked with drafting a bilingual situation report or role-playing a command exchange during a NATO mission. These exercises integrate language acquisition with professional readiness.

Pedagogical innovations such as "Francophone Days" where cadets, instructors, and military experts use French in formal and informal academy activities, offer low-cost immersion that strengthens linguistic proficiency and cultural sensitivity. Research supports these micro-immersion strategies, showing their efficacy in developing communicative competence, even in resource-constrained environments.

While digital tools cannot replace human interaction, they have a role within the OLR framework when used strategically. AI-powered applications can provide pronunciation feedback and progress tracking, while virtual exchanges with

Francophone military personnel can enhance conversational skills. Blended learning approaches that combine technology with instructor-led simulations to support task-based, real-world communication offer the optimal conditions for comprehensive language development. "Language teaching methods are most effective when they integrate meaningful communication with the systematic practice of language skills, especially when learners are actively involved in tasks that reflect real-world language use." [7]

#### **4. Findings**

To apply the OLR approach, instructors should adopt curricula that reflect operational realities and incorporate materials based on actual mission reports, field communications, and NATO directives. Instruction should focus on oral interaction, situational awareness, and cultural competence. In addition, partnerships with Francophone military institutions should be expanded. Initiatives such as online exercises, short-term deployments, and virtual exchanges can provide valuable exposure to authentic French usage in military settings. Assessment methods must be updated to evaluate practical communication abilities. Oral proficiency interviews, role-based evaluations, and performance tasks aligned with CEFR [8] military descriptors should become standard components of the assessment process. Such changes are conditioned by basic linguistic knowledge, instructors' involvement in designing various contexts, and a shift in educational culture - from grammar-centered instruction to communication-oriented performance.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In 2025, teaching French to Romanian cadets will no longer be simply an academic endeavor - it will be a strategic requirement for national defense and international cooperation. As global

security operations become culturally complex, Romania's military must ensure that its cadets are not only proficient in English but also capable of using the language effectively in real-world missions. Designing classes according to the Operational Language Readiness framework offers a transformative model for military language education. By integrating theory with practice, technology

with human interaction, and linguistic proficiency with strategic utility, OLR aligns French instruction with the communicative demands of multinational military operations. For Romania to fulfill its NATO commitments and strengthen its defense partnerships, adopting OLR is both a pedagogical necessity and a strategic investment in its future military leadership.

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