

INTEROPERABILITY THROUGH LANGUAGE: ENGLISH TRAINING FOR ROMANIAN CADETS IN NATO CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Interoperability has become a defining operational necessity within contemporary NATO missions, where multinational cooperation depends not only on compatible technologies and procedures, but also on efficient linguistic communication. In this context, English acts as the primary working language of the Alliance, making language proficiency a strategic capability rather than a purely educational goal. The present paper thus examines the role of English language training in fostering interoperability among Romanian cadets preparing for participation in NATO-led operations. Drawing on NATO doctrinal frameworks, the STANAG 6001 language proficiency scale, and theoretical perspectives from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and military pedagogy, the paper argues that effective language training must go beyond general linguistic competence and move towards operationally situated communication skills. The paper also discusses the specific challenges faced by Romanian military institutions, such as heterogeneous proficiency levels, institutional constraints, and the need to balance linguistic accuracy with communicative effectiveness in high-stakes environments. By emphasizing scenario-based instruction, intercultural communicative competence, and task-oriented learning, the paper proposes a pedagogical framework where language training actively contributes to operational readiness and multinational cohesion. Last but not least, the paper discusses English not just as a medium of instruction, but as a force multiplier essential to NATO interoperability and mission success.

KEYWORDS: interoperability, English for Military Purposes, NATO, Romanian cadets, STANAG 6001

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1. Introduction

In our contemporary security environment, military effectiveness is increasingly shaped by the capacity of the armed forces to operate jointly and cohesively within multinational frameworks. In the case of NATO member states, interoperability is doubtlessly a key principle influencing training, doctrine, as

well as operational planning. Although interoperability is often associated with technical compatibility and standardized procedures, its linguistic dimension remains just as important. Communication failures, misunderstandings, or uneven language proficiency can negatively affect coordination, decision-making, and in the end even mission success. In what NATO is

concerned, English assumed the role of primary operational lingua franca, acting as the shared medium through which multinational units plan, execute, and evaluate missions. As a result, language proficiency is no longer a peripheral skill but an operational necessity. As Coleman notes, in military contexts “*language ability is directly related to operational effectiveness, safety, and leadership*” (2014, p. 4). For Romanian cadets, who are increasingly expected to participate in multinational exercises, peacekeeping missions, and joint command structures, English language training thus becomes a central component of professional military formation.

The Romanian Armed Forces’ integration into NATO structures greatly increased the demand for standardized and functional language competence. This demand is institutionally reflected in the adoption of the NATO STANAG 6001 framework, that provides a common scale for assessing listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiency. Nevertheless, achieving certified proficiency levels does not automatically guarantee communicative effectiveness in real operational settings. As research in military linguistics and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) shows us, formal language knowledge must be complemented by context-sensitive, task-oriented, and culturally informed communication skills. Furthermore, from an applied linguistical perspective, English for Military Purposes can be placed within the broader domain of ESP, that emphasizes learner needs and situational relevance. Hutchinson and Waters define ESP as “*an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning*” (1987, p. 19). In the military context, this reason is clearly operational: cadets must be able to brief, negotiate, report, and cooperate effectively under conditions of pressure, uncertainty, and cultural diversity.

Thus, the present paper explores the intersection between language training and interoperability, by focusing on English instruction for Romanian cadets in NATO contexts. It argues that language education within military academies should be viewed as a strategic investment in interoperability, rather than an additional academic requirement. By integrating NATO doctrinal expectations with ESP theory and military pedagogical practice, the present paper tries to demonstrate how targeted English training can enhance multinational cooperation and operational readiness. We also examine NATO approaches to interoperability and language policy, followed by a discussion of STANAG 6001 and its implications for military education. The paper then places English training for Romanian cadets within ESP theory, while also addressing pedagogical challenges and proposing instructional strategies suitable for NATO operational realities.

2. Interoperability and Language in NATO Doctrine

Interoperability is central to NATO’s operational doctrine. According to NATO, interoperability is defined as “*the ability to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve Allied tactical, operational and strategic objectives*” (NATO Interoperability Policy, 2009, p. 2). This definition shows interoperability not just as compatibility of hardware or software, but as operational effectiveness across multinational forces. Moreover, NATO doctrine states that interoperability “*enables forces, units and/or systems to operate together, communicate with each other, utilize common procedures, infrastructure and bases, all based on shared common doctrine*” (NATO Interoperability Policy, 2009, p. 2). In other words, beyond shared equipment and procedural alignment, successful interoperability depends on shared understanding, including a common operational language.

The Alliance's official public explanation of interoperability reflects similar aspects. NATO states that interoperability "*encompasses far more than simply plugging in the same equipment or using compatible software,*" and requires aligning "*doctrine, training, procedures, and culture*" among Allied and partner nations (NATO Allied Command Transformation, 2025). This definition highlights that human factors such as training and shared vocabularies are as important as technical compatibility in creating an interoperable force. Thus, interoperability is framed by NATO through multiple complementary dimensions. The Alliance explains that it includes: 1. Technical interoperability, referring to systems' ability to exchange data and services; 2. Procedural interoperability, meaning aligned doctrines and tactics; 3. Human interoperability, which encompasses shared terminology, training, and language skills (NATO Interoperability Policy, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, we could state that language training and the adoption of common linguistic standards are explicit elements of NATO's interoperability framework.

Standardization agreements (STANAGs) are a practical mechanism by means of which NATO codifies and implements interoperability requirements across doctrine, procedure, and human factors. As articulated in NATO's standardization policy, a standard provides "*rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context*" (NATO Standardization Terminology, 2021, Section 2.1). Standardization plays a key role in enabling interoperability by ensuring that participating nations adopt common definitions, procedures, and communicative practices. Within these standardization frameworks, language proficiency is linked to interoperability requirements. The

STANAG 6001 agreement states that its aim is "*to respond to the following interoperability requirements*" by providing "*the common standard ... for language curriculum and test development, for recording and reporting Standardised Language Profiles (SLPs)*" (STANAG 6001, Edition 5, 2023, p. 1). Thus, language proficiency standards are not peripheral educational benchmarks, but are codified interoperable requisites used across NATO-member military education, assessment, and operational readiness reporting. Operational manifestations of interoperability in NATO extend into training and exercises which integrate multinational forces. For example, NATO's Coalition Warrior Interoperability eXploration, eXperimentation, eXamination exercise (CWIX) is described as a premier event that "*drives interoperability forward*" by facilitating testing and integration of capabilities from allied forces, which implicitly involves human communication and shared procedures (NATO Allied Command Transformation, 2025). The emphasis on federated interoperability at CWIX reflects the importance of aligning not just equipment and networks, but common communicative practices, so that multinational units can effectively coordinate under operational conditions.

Official NATO documentation, we could thus state, consistently integrates language and communication within the broader interoperability agenda. The interoperability definition itself, the inclusion of language training as an interoperability requirement in STANAG 6001, and the focus on shared procedures in multinational exercises show us that language competence is treated as a structural enabler of coherent Alliance action, rather than an optional supplement. For Romanian cadets preparing for NATO contexts, this means that English language training is not simply an academic pursuit, but a strategic imperative. Membership in

NATO requires alignment with multinational doctrines, procedures, and communicative standards, with English serving as the predominant operational language for multinational planning and execution, a reality reflected repeatedly in NATO's interoperability frameworks and exercises.

3. STANAG 6001 and Military Language Standardization

The NATO Standardization Agreement STANAG 6001 is the main framework through which language proficiency expectations are codified and implemented across Alliance militaries. This agreement was created in order to respond directly to interoperability requirements, by providing a common standard for language curriculum, test development, and the reporting of Standardized Language Profiles (SLPs) (STANAG 6001, Edition 5, 2023, p. 1). Its strategic role is not just academic: it also creates a shared linguistic benchmark which enables allied forces to communicate effectively in multinational environments.

STANAG 6001 begins with a clear statement of purpose: *“The aim of this NATO standardization agreement (STANAG) is to respond to the following interoperability requirements ... To be used as the common standard (construct) for language curriculum and test development, for recording and reporting Standardised Language Profiles (SLPs).”* (STANAG 6001, Edition 5, 2023, p. 1). Therefore, the very first article of the document links language proficiency standards clearly to interoperability, illustrating that language ability is treated as a functional requirement within multinational operations rather than an optional educational outcome. It also defines language proficiency as *“an individual's unrehearsed, general language communication ability”* (STANAG 6001, as reproduced in source documents; see also NATO language proficiency descriptors).

This definition underlines the operational focus of the standard: it concerns unrehearsed, real-world communication, not just classroom knowledge. By framing proficiency in this way, STANAG 6001 aligns with practical communicative demands faced by military personnel in multinational contexts, where scripted or rehearsed language use may be insufficient.

The essence of STANAG 6001 is the six-level proficiency scale, coded 0 through 5, which applies uniformly to the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to the agreement, level 0 = No proficiency, Level 1 = Survival, Level 2 = Functional, Level 3 = Professional, Level 4 = Expert, Level 5 = Highly-articulate native. These definitions are presented in the official standard and reproduced in multiple NATO-affiliated sources. The fact that proficiency levels are defined along a continuum from survival to professional and beyond reflects a realist understanding of language in operational contexts. A functional level may allow for basic communication, but professional or expert levels are necessary for advanced tasks such as detailed briefings, negotiations, or complex mission coordination.

STANAG 6001 also introduces the concept of the Standardized Language Profile (SLP), a four-digit code used to record an individual's proficiency across all four language skills. The profile is structured in the sequence Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, with optional plus (+) indicators when proficiency substantially exceeds the base level but does not consistently meet the next level's criteria (e.g., Level 2+). Profiles are noted as SLP XXXX, e.g., SLP 3321 indicates Listening = 3, Speaking = 3, Reading = 2, Writing = 1. The use of SLPs allows NATO and its member nations to compare and communicate language proficiency in a standardized way, which is crucial for assignments on multinational staffs,

operational planning teams, and joint headquarters. It also enables interoperability in personnel assignments because language capability becomes a transparent, comparable metric across national forces.

Although STANAG 6001 establishes a common framework, implementation remains a national responsibility. Participating nations agree to adopt the standard and report their implementation decisions to NATO's standardization authorities, meaning that each state can integrate STANAG 6001 into its own military education and testing structures. The standard notes that "*the national decisions regarding the ratification and implementation of this STANAG are communicated to the NSO [NATO Standardization Office] ... and recorded in the NATO Standardization Document Database (NSDD)*" (STANAG 6001, Edition 5, 2023, p. 1). This combination of shared structure and national implementation creates flexibility while also maintaining interoperability. For example, while Romania adapts STANAG 6001 within its own language training and certification programs, the resulting SLP scores remain comparable with those of allied personnel when serving in NATO contexts.

Moreover, by providing a standardized structure for language curriculum and assessment, STANAG 6001 influences both training design and operational readiness. Language testing seminars approved by NATO, such as the Language Testing Seminar (LTS), are specifically aimed at norming the application of STANAG 6001 descriptors among language professionals, a fact that ensures consistency in testing and reporting across allied nations. Practically, we could state that STANAG 6001 thereby shapes instructional priorities: curriculum developers and instructors focus on helping learners achieve targeted SLP outcomes,

while commanders and planners use SLPs to assign personnel to roles where specific proficiency profiles are required.

4. English for Military Purposes (EMP)

English training for Romanian cadets in NATO contexts can be most coherently described within the paradigm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for designing language instruction that is directly aligned with professional, institutional, and operational needs. Rather than treating language as an abstract system detached from context, ESP defines language learning as goal-oriented and functional. A good definition of ESP is provided by Hutchinson and Waters, who note that ESP is not a particular type of language or methodology, but rather "*an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning*" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19). This learner-centred orientation is particularly relevant in military contexts, where the purpose of language learning is neither general social interaction nor academic abstraction, but the ability to perform clearly defined communicative tasks under operational constraints.

From this viewpoint, English for Military Purposes (EMP) appears as a specialized branch of ESP, shaped by the communicative realities of military life. These realities include briefing and debriefing, issuing and interpreting orders, participating in multinational planning processes, and engaging in professional interaction across hierarchical and cultural boundaries. As Hutchinson and Waters state, ESP is driven by necessity: "*What distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need*" (1987, p. 53). In the case of NATO interoperability, this need is institutionally

articulated through doctrine, standardization agreements, and operational requirements.

Needs analysis represents the methodological cornerstone of ESP and, by extension, EMP. Hutchinson and Waters define needs analysis as an attempt to determine “*what the learner has to do to function effectively in the target situation*” (1987, p. 54). In military education, the target situation is rarely hypothetical: cadets are prepared for real participation in multinational exercises, missions, and staff roles where English functions as the principal medium of communication. Most importantly, military needs analysis must take into account not only linguistic forms, but also communicative conditions. As the authors note, target needs are commonly broken down into necessities, lacks, and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 55). For Romanian cadets, necessities are defined by NATO operational requirements and STANAG 6001 proficiency descriptors. Lacks emerge from uneven prior exposure to English and varying educational backgrounds; wants may include individual aspirations for international deployment or staff positions. This triadic model highlights a central tension in military language education: while institutional standards emphasize measurable proficiency levels, effective communication depends on the ability to adapt language use to unpredictable, high-stakes environments. Consequently, we argue that EMP instruction must prioritize functional communicative competence rather than purely formal accuracy.

It has to be noted also that ESP scholarship constantly underlined the importance of genre and task in professional language use. Hyland notes that genres are “*abstract, socially recognized ways of using language*” which are shaped by the communicative purposes of specific communities (Hyland, 2004, p. 7). Within the military context, genres such as situation reports (SITREPs), operational

orders (OPORDs), and briefings follow highly conventionalized patterns that must be mastered for effective participation in multinational settings. EMP instruction thus must expose cadets to the genres they will encounter in NATO environments and train them to interpret and produce these texts appropriately. This aligns with Hyland’s idea that genre knowledge enables learners to “*participate more effectively in particular communities*” by understanding both linguistic form and communicative function (2004, p. 8). Task-based approaches serve to reinforce this orientation. Rather than isolating grammar or vocabulary, tasks simulate real communicative activities, encouraging learners to make use of language strategically. In operational settings, where clarity, speed, and accuracy can have serious consequences, task-based learning offers a pedagogical bridge between classroom instruction and field application.

What also has to be pointed out is that military communication in NATO contexts is inherently intercultural. Even when English proficiency levels are comparable, differences in communicative style, pragmatics, and cultural assumptions may lead to misunderstandings. Byram states that effective communication in international contexts requires more than linguistic competence, it involves “*the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language*” (Byram, 1997, p. 34). This broad concept of intercultural communicative competence is particularly relevant for Romanian cadets operating in multinational units. EMP training must thus include cultural awareness, pragmatic sensitivity, and discourse conventions alongside language skills. Without such integration, even high STANAG 6001 scores may fail to translate into effective cooperation in joint operations.

In what Romanian military education is concerned, adopting an EMP framework

grounded in ESP theory means re-conceptualizing English not as a general academic subject, but as a professional operational skill. Needs-based curriculum design, genre-focused instruction, and task-oriented practice allow language training to align more closely with NATO interoperability requirements. As Hutchinson and Waters show, ESP succeeds when it remains flexible and responsive: “*ESP must be seen as an approach, not as a product*” (1987, p. 19). For Romanian cadets, this approach ensures that English training supports not only certification goals under STANAG 6001, but also the broader objective of functioning confidently and effectively within NATO’s multinational operational environment.

5. English Training for Romanian Cadets: Institutional Contexts and Challenges

English language training for Romanian cadets is shaped by a complex combination of institutional expectations, NATO standardization requirements, and local educational realities. Being a NATO member state, Romania has formally aligned its military language policies with Alliance standards, especially through the adoption of STANAG 6001 as the primary means for assessing language proficiency. Within military academies and training centres, English is thus positioned as a core component of professional formation, closely linked to operational readiness and international deployability. Nevertheless, the translation of NATO-level requirements into effective classroom practice presents several structural and pedagogical challenges. One of the central issues here is the heterogeneity of proficiency levels among cadets. Incoming cadet groups often display significant variation in prior exposure to English, ranging from near-fluent speakers to learners whose competence remains at survival or lower functional levels. This heterogeneity

complicates curriculum design, pacing, and assessment, particularly in group-based instruction, where standardized outcomes are expected within fixed training timelines.

Institutional limitations also influence the nature of English training. Military academies operate under compressed schedules, where language instruction must compete with tactical training, physical conditioning, and specialized military subjects. As a result, English courses are frequently allocated limited contact hours, despite the high expectations placed on outcomes measured through STANAG 6001 certification. This discrepancy creates pressure on instructors to prioritize test-oriented preparation, sometimes at the expense of more complex communicative development. Another challenge lies in the tension between certification and operational competence. While STANAG 6001 provides a standardized framework for reporting language proficiency, it does not prescribe specific pedagogical pathways. Consequently, there is a risk that instruction becomes narrowly focused on meeting testing descriptors, rather than encouraging the flexible communicative skills required in real NATO environments. Cadets may achieve satisfactory SLP scores, while still experiencing difficulty in spontaneous interaction, negotiation of meaning, or pragmatic adaptation during multinational exercises.

The military learning environment itself introduces additional issues. Hierarchical structures, formalized communication patterns, and an emphasis on discipline and accuracy can inhibit spoken fluency and risk-taking in the language classroom. Cadets may be reluctant to speak freely in English for fear of making errors, particularly in evaluative contexts. This phenomenon is often referred to in foreign language pedagogy, but gains heightened significance in military settings, where performance is closely tied to evaluation, ranking, and professional

identity. Moreover, English training for Romanian cadets increasingly extends beyond linguistic competence to include intercultural and pragmatic awareness. Participation in multinational exercises exposes cadets to diverse communicative styles, accents, and discourse norms. Even when a shared operational language exists, misunderstandings may arise from differing assumptions about politeness, directness, or authority. Without targeted instructional attention to these aspects, cadets may struggle to interpret intentions accurately or to express themselves appropriately in joint settings.

Despite these challenges, Romanian military education also offers important institutional strengths. The alignment with NATO standards provides clarity of objectives and external validation of proficiency outcomes. Military instructors are often highly motivated and experienced in adapting materials to operational needs, and there is a growing awareness of the need to integrate scenario-based and task-oriented approaches into language instruction. Overall, the effectiveness of English training for Romanian cadets depends on the extent to which institutional practices can combine standardization with flexibility. Fulfilling NATO interoperability requirements requires adherence to common benchmarks, but achieving genuine communicative effectiveness requires pedagogical approaches that reflect the realities of military communication. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is essential, if English training is to function not just as a certification mechanism, but as a strategic enabler of multinational cooperation.

6. Pedagogical Strategies for Enhancing Interoperability through Language Training

Enhancing interoperability through language training requires pedagogical strategies which can bridge the gap between

standardized proficiency frameworks and the communicative realities of NATO operations. In the absence of empirical case studies or survey-based data, this section of the paper adopts a conceptual and practice-oriented approach, drawing on established principles from English for Specific Purposes (ESP), military pedagogy, and NATO training philosophy to outline instructional strategies aligned with operational demands.

A central pedagogical priority in English for Military Purposes (EMP) is the situationalization of language learning. Language instruction that remains detached from operational contexts risks producing proficiency that is measurable, but still functionally limited. As Hutchinson and Waters emphasize, ESP methodology is effective precisely because it is rooted in target situations and communicative purposes rather than abstract linguistic coverage (1987). For Romanian cadets, this implies that classroom activities should be systematically aligned with the communicative tasks they are likely to encounter in multinational settings, such as briefings, coordination meetings, reporting procedures, and informal professional interaction. Scenario-based instruction represents one of the most effective pedagogical tools for aligning language training with interoperability requirements. By embedding language use within simulated operational contexts, scenarios allow cadets to practice communication as a functional activity, rather than as an isolated linguistic exercise. This approach reflects NATO's broader training philosophy, which emphasizes realism, relevance, and transferability across training domains. In language instruction, scenarios can be adapted to varying proficiency levels and institutional constraints. At lower STANAG levels, scenarios may focus on controlled exchanges and predictable communicative patterns, while higher-level learners can

engage in more complex tasks requiring negotiation, clarification, and decision-making. Importantly, scenario-based instruction supports the development of fluency, strategic competence, and confidence, which are essential for effective participation in multinational teams.

Closely related to scenario-based instruction is task-based language learning (TBLT), which prioritizes meaningful communication over formal accuracy. In military contexts, tasks mirror operational communicative acts, such as delivering orders, summarizing information, or responding to unexpected developments. The pedagogical value of task-based approaches lies in their ability to encourage spontaneous language use under constraints which approximate operational pressure. From an interoperability perspective, task-based learning encourages adaptability. Cadets have to process information, select appropriate language resources, and respond dynamically to interlocutors, reflecting the conditions under which communication occurs during multinational operations. This approach aligns with the definition of language proficiency in STANAG 6001 as unrehearsed communication ability, reinforcing coherence between pedagogical practice and assessment criteria.

Even though all four language skills are addressed in STANAG 6001, spoken interaction and listening comprehension receive particular emphasis in interoperability-oriented instruction. NATO operations rely heavily on oral communication, often under conditions of time pressure, environmental noise, and exposure to diverse accents. Consequently, EMP instruction should prioritize interactive speaking activities and authentic listening tasks. Exposure to a range of English varieties used within NATO environments is very important. Even though standard instructional materials often privilege a limited set of native-

speaker norms, operational contexts frequently involve non-native speakers communicating with other non-native speakers. Developing tolerance for variation and strategies for clarification and repair, contributes directly to communicative effectiveness and reduces the risk of misunderstanding in joint operations. Effective interoperability thus depends not only on linguistic proficiency but also on intercultural communicative competence. As discussed previously, shared language does not guarantee shared meaning. Pedagogical strategies must also integrate awareness of pragmatic norms, institutional culture, and communicative conventions specific to multinational military environments. In practice, this involves guiding cadets to reflect on differences in communication styles, levels of directness, and role expectations across cultures. Such reflection can be included in language instruction through guided discussions, analysis of authentic military discourse, and structured comparison of communicative practices. By doing so, language training contributes to the greater objective of fostering professional interaction which is both effective and culturally appropriate.

A common challenge in military language education is reconciling the demands of standardization with the need for pedagogical flexibility. As we have previously stated, STANAG 6001 provides a shared framework for assessment and reporting, but it does not prescribe specific teaching methodologies. This allows instructors a degree of autonomy to adapt instructional strategies to institutional conditions and learner profiles. From an interoperability viewpoint, this flexibility should be viewed as an asset rather than a liability. As long as training remains aligned with operational communicative needs and proficiency descriptors, instructors can adapt materials and activities to maximize engagement and

effectiveness. Such adaptability is particularly important in contexts where contact hours are limited and learner groups are heterogeneous.

Overall, the pedagogical strategies outlined above view English training as an integral component of operational preparation, rather than as a supplementary academic subject. When language instruction is aligned with NATO interoperability requirements, it contributes directly to mission readiness, multinational cohesion, and professional credibility. For Romanian cadets, this means that English training functions as a strategic enabler, supporting their ability to operate confidently and competently within NATO structures. By prioritizing scenario-based instruction, task-oriented learning, and intercultural awareness, military language education can effectively support the broader institutional objective of interoperability without relying on empirical case studies or survey-based validation.

7. Language, Culture, and Operational Communication in NATO Contexts

Operational communication in NATO contexts is inherently intercultural. Even when a shared working language is available, effective cooperation depends on the participants' ability to interpret meaning, intention, and communicative norms across cultural boundaries. In multinational military environments, English functions not only as a linguistic medium, but also as a site of cultural negotiation, where meaning is shaped by institutional traditions, professional identities, and national communication styles. Applied linguistics has long emphasized that language use cannot be separated from cultural context. Kramsch notes that "*language is a social practice*" and that speakers "*create, maintain, and transform social reality through discourse*"

(Kramsch, 1993, p. 3). In military settings, this social reality is structured by hierarchy, discipline, and operational urgency, which interact with national cultural norms to influence how messages are formulated, interpreted, and acted upon.

The concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is particularly relevant for understanding communication in NATO operations. Byram defines ICC as the ability to interact effectively with people from other cultures by combining linguistic competence with cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills. He states that intercultural competence involves "*the ability to see relationships between different cultures - both internal and external to a society - and to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other*" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). For Romanian cadets operating in multinational environments, this mediating function is highly important. Communication in joint operations frequently requires interpreting indirect meanings, managing differing expectations of authority, and negotiating professional roles. Linguistic accuracy alone is insufficient if speakers are unable to recognize how cultural assumptions shape communicative behavior. Byram also states that successful intercultural speakers are not those who imitate native speakers, but those who can operate across cultural boundaries. He notes that the goal is not "*to become a native speaker*" but to become "*an intercultural speaker*" capable of navigating difference (Byram, 1997, p. 31). This distinction is especially important in NATO contexts, where English is predominantly used among non-native speakers and where mutual intelligibility and pragmatic appropriateness outweigh native-like performance.

Furthermore, military communication is heavily influenced by power relations and institutional hierarchy, that shape how language is used and interpreted. Halliday states that language acts simultaneously to

convey information and to enact social relationships, noting that “*language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people’s lives*” (Halliday, 1978, p. 21). In NATO operations, these functions include issuing commands, coordinating actions, and maintaining authority while fostering cooperation among allied forces. Hence, differences in pragmatic conventions can lead to misinterpretation. For instance, levels of directness considered appropriate in one military culture, may be perceived as abrupt or ambiguous in another. Kramsch observes that meaning in communication often resides “*not in the words themselves but in the context in which they are used*” (1993, p. 67). This insight underlines why shared vocabulary does not automatically result in shared understanding. In operational settings, such pragmatic misalignments can have serious consequences. The ability to ask for clarification, signal uncertainty, or negotiate meaning becomes a crucial component of communicative competence. From an interoperability perspective, training cadets to recognize and manage these pragmatic dimensions enhances both safety and effectiveness in joint operations.

English in NATO contexts functions largely as a lingua franca, used by speakers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Research on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) highlights that communicative success in such settings depends less on adherence to native norms and more on strategies such as accommodation, repetition, and explicitness. Seidlhofer notes that lingua franca communication prioritizes “*intelligibility and effectiveness rather than correctness*” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 17). This perspective coincides with the operational priorities of NATO environments. As we have already shown, in high-stakes situations, clarity and mutual understanding are paramount, even if language use deviates from standard norms. For

Romanian cadets, this implies that English training should legitimize strategic simplification, paraphrasing, and clarification as communicative strengths rather than deficiencies. Recognizing the cultural and pragmatic dimensions of operational communication reinforces the argument that language training for NATO interoperability must extend beyond structural proficiency. As Kramsch states, learners who focus exclusively on grammatical correctness risk overlooking the “*symbolic and cultural dimensions of language use*” (1993, p. 8). In military contexts, these dimensions are inseparable from professional effectiveness. In conclusion, integrating intercultural communicative competence into English training equips Romanian cadets with tools to interpret meaning flexibly, manage ambiguity, and collaborate effectively with allied partners. Such competencies directly support NATO’s emphasis on human interoperability and enhance the practical value of standardized language proficiency frameworks like STANAG 6001.

8. Conclusions

The present paper has examined the critical role of English language training in enhancing interoperability for Romanian cadets participating in NATO operations. Drawing on NATO doctrinal frameworks, STANAG 6001 language proficiency standards, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) theory, and research on intercultural communicative competence, our analysis proves that language proficiency is not merely an academic or administrative requirement, but a strategic capability essential to operational effectiveness.

Therefore, effective English training for Romanian cadets should integrate multiple pedagogical strategies: scenario-based instruction simulates operational conditions, allowing learners to practice language in realistic, high-stakes situations; task-based learning emphasizes

communicative outcomes over formal accuracy, mirroring operational problem-solving; exposure to lingua franca practices prepares cadets to communicate effectively with non-native English speakers in multinational teams, and integration of intercultural competence enables cadets to navigate cultural and pragmatic differences, enhancing human interoperability. These strategies collectively ensure that English language instruction contributes directly to NATO interoperability objectives, rather than serving only as a certification requirement or classroom exercise.

From a policy perspective, we argue that Romanian military education therefore should: maintain alignment with STANAG 6001 while adopting flexible, learner-centered approaches to pedagogy; prioritize operationally relevant communication skills, balancing formal proficiency assessment with functional competence; embed intercultural and

pragmatic awareness as a core component of EMP curricula; foster continuous professional development for instructors to implement scenario- and task-based approaches effectively. By doing this, Romanian military institutions can ensure that English training not only meets NATO standards, but also strengthens operational readiness, cohesion, and mission effectiveness.

In conclusion, English training for Romanian cadets is a force multiplier that enhances interoperability, operational capability, and multinational cooperation. When pedagogy is based on STANAG 6001, ESP theory, and intercultural communication principles, cadets are prepared to operate confidently within NATO environments. Language competence thus becomes both a strategic tool and a professional responsibility, integral to the effective functioning of Romanian forces in alliance contexts.

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