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# Improving Listening Skills for Romanian Navy Students Within the NATO Linguistic Requirements Framework

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**Abstract.** This paper explores strategies for enhancing the listening comprehension skills of Romanian Navy students within the context of NATO’s standardized linguistic requirements, particularly STANAG 6001. As peacekeeping operations increasingly rely on clear and accurate communication among multinational forces, listening proficiency becomes a cornerstone of interoperability and mission success. The paper identifies current challenges faced by Romanian military learners, analyzes the role of listening in operational effectiveness, and proposes a set of pedagogical interventions, including task-based learning, authentic audio exposure, and technology-enhanced language training. Through a focused approach grounded in military-specific communication needs, this study offers actionable solutions for aligning Romanian Navy language education with NATO's peacekeeping standards.

**Keywords:** listening skills, STANAG 6001, interoperability, task-based learning, technology-enhanced language training.

## 1. Introduction

In today’s complex security landscape, effective communication is vital for the success of multinational military operations. For NATO forces, this communication is governed by a standardized set of linguistic requirements known as STANAG 6001. Romanian Navy personnel, as part of their integration into NATO structures, are expected to meet these standards, especially in listening comprehension, which is essential for coordination, situational awareness, and command execution during peacekeeping missions.

This paper addresses the importance of listening skills in a military context, the challenges faced by Romanian Navy students in developing these skills, and practical strategies to align language training with NATO requirements.

In the evolving landscape of global security, effective multilingual communication is paramount for the success of multinational military operations (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Within NATO forces, communication proficiency is guided by the NATO Standardization Agreement (STANAG) 6001, which sets clear expectations for language abilities across speaking, listening, reading, and writing

(Davies, 2013). Listening comprehension, in particular, is critical for Romanian Navy personnel who are tasked with participating in peacekeeping and operational missions.

This paper examines the role of listening skills in military contexts, identifies challenges faced by Romanian Navy students, and proposes evidence-based strategies aligned with contemporary TESOL research and NATO requirements.

## **2. NATO Linguistic Requirements and STANAG 6001**

STANAG 6001 establishes proficiency levels from Level 1 (survival) to Level 4 (expert) across five skill areas (NATO, 2016). Listening proficiency is especially emphasized, as real-time understanding of radio transmissions, commands, and briefings directly affects operational success (Trim, 2012).

Romanian Navy students are generally expected to attain at least Level 2 (functional) or Level 3 (professional), requiring them to comprehend military-specific conversations with limited repetition and manage information under operational conditions (Harding, 2014).

## **3. Challenges in Developing Listening Skills**

Research in second language acquisition highlights several obstacles to listening development in military learners:

### *3.1 Limited Exposure to Authentic Audio*

Overreliance on textbook dialogues, lacking in authentic pace, accents, and register (Field, 2008). One of the foremost challenges Romanian Navy students encounter is their limited exposure to authentic military audio. Field (2008) emphasizes that “scripted dialogues lack the spontaneity, hesitations, and redundancy of real-life communication,” leading students to struggle when confronted with authentic operational discourse. Many language programs rely heavily on sanitized textbook dialogues, which fail to simulate the rapid exchanges, accent variations, and idiomatic expressions common in actual NATO missions. Without continuous exposure to genuine communicative input, students are ill-prepared for the unpredictable nature of real-world interactions, where comprehension failures can lead to critical misunderstandings during missions.

### *3.2 Lack of Immersive Environments*

Insufficient interaction with native and near-native speakers reduces adaptability to real-world conditions (Gilmore, 2007). Another key barrier is the absence of immersive language environments. Gilmore (2007) observes, “authenticity is the single most important factor in successful language acquisition,” stressing the need for genuine linguistic interaction. Romanian Navy students often lack access to native-speaking environments or opportunities to participate in multinational exercises where English is operationally used. This limited immersion prevents students from adapting their listening strategies to diverse accents, speeds, and discourse norms typical of NATO operations, which can impair real-time decision-making during deployments.

### *3.3 Cognitive Load*

The presence of specialized vocabulary, military jargon, and background noise increases processing difficulty (Brindley, 1998). Military communication imposes an inherently high cognitive load on learners. As Brindley (1998) explains, “learners must deal with complex information while simultaneously decoding linguistic input,” a burden intensified by operational stress, technical vocabulary, and environmental noise. Romanian Navy students must not only comprehend English but also navigate an array of acronyms, procedural terms, and contextual nuances. This dual burden of content and language increases the risk of miscommunication under field conditions, underscoring the need for specialized training that addresses both linguistic and cognitive demands.

### *3.4 Test-Specific Anxiety*

Training narrowly focused on STANAG exam formats may lead to fragile listening strategies that do not transfer to field communication (Chung, 2002). Finally, test-oriented language training often exacerbates anxiety without building functional listening competence. Chung (2002) warns that “when students are trained solely for test performance, they develop superficial strategies that collapse under authentic listening conditions.” Romanian Navy students frequently prepare narrowly for the STANAG

6001 exam formats, leading to proficiency that may not transfer effectively to real operational environments where communication is less predictable and more critical.

#### **4. Effective Strategies for Enhancing Listening Skills**

Modern TESOL research offers multiple pedagogical interventions relevant to military contexts:

##### *4.1 Task-Based Listening Activities*

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasizes goal-oriented listening (Ellis, 2003). For Romanian Navy students, simulations replicating mission orders, briefings, and naval coordination tasks develop operational listening skills. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a solution by grounding listening practice in operationally relevant tasks. Ellis (2003) asserts that “language learning is most effective when it is goal-directed and involves real-world communication tasks.” For Romanian Navy students, activities such as mission simulations, operational briefings, and naval coordination drills provide both a linguistic and functional framework for listening development. By focusing on tasks resembling peacekeeping operations, learners can bridge the gap between language training and real-world mission readiness.

##### *4.2 Use of Authentic Materials*

Authentic input, such as NATO podcasts, operational briefings, and real radio exchanges, improves learner exposure to variability in pronunciation, speed, and discourse (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Peacock, 1997). The integration of authentic materials is another vital approach. Guariento and Morley (2001) emphasize that “exposure to authentic language use enables learners to handle real-life communication challenges with greater confidence and competence.” Including NATO briefings, operational podcasts, and radio communications exposes Romanian Navy students to the unpredictability of live language use, helping them develop coping strategies for dealing with accents, rapid speech, and idiomatic structures encountered in multinational operations.

##### *4.3 Shadowing and Dictogloss*

The shadowing technique fosters real-time listening and speaking integration (Tamai, 1997), while dictogloss activities enhance listening for detail and collaborative reconstruction of meaning (Wajnryb, 1990). Techniques such as shadowing and dictogloss further strengthen listening skills. Tamai (1997) describes shadowing as “an effective method for internalizing the prosody and rhythm of a foreign language.” By repeating spoken input in real-time, students develop greater fluency and accuracy in comprehension. Dictogloss, as outlined by Wajnryb (1990), involves “reconstructing a text from fragments heard,” encouraging learners to focus on meaning while honing their memory and attention to linguistic detail—both critical skills in chaotic operational settings.

##### *4.4 Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*

CALL applications (such as Moodle-based adaptive listening modules) offer interactive, customizable practice in simulated operational environments, supporting autonomous learning and formative feedback (Chapelle, 2003). CALL platforms provide personalized, adaptive listening practice that replicates operational environments. Chapelle (2003) notes that “computer-mediated communication offers opportunities for customized language input, immediate feedback, and learner autonomy.” NATO-approved language labs and Moodle-based listening modules can create mission-like simulations, enabling Romanian Navy students to practice operational listening scenarios under variable stress and feedback conditions, essential for preparing them for real-world deployment.

##### *4.5 Peer-Led Simulations*

Role-playing exercises where peers assume the roles of commanding officers or allied forces mirror authentic chain-of-command communication and intercultural negotiation (Bygate, 1996). Peer-led simulations complement formal instruction by fostering authentic, interactive practice. Bygate (1996) highlights that “oral interaction tasks between peers encourage negotiation of meaning and functional language use.” When students role-play as commanding officers or allied forces, they rehearse the linguistic and hierarchical structures typical of NATO communication chains. This not only enhances their operational readiness but also builds confidence in intercultural communication—a core competence for multinational peacekeeping efforts.

## 5. Curriculum Alignment with Peacekeeping Needs

Curriculum development must explicitly address the linguistic demands of peacekeeping operations, aligning with frameworks like *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Key components include:

- Listening under stress and noisy conditions
- Understanding culturally nuanced instructions
- Rapid information extraction during multilingual briefings

Modules such as “Listening for Naval Command,” “Operational Orders Interpretation,” and “Rules of Engagement Communications” should be integrated to ensure readiness. Curriculum design must align listening instruction with the actual communicative functions required in peacekeeping operations. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that “ESP must be based on an analysis of learners’ needs and the language required by their future professions.” For Romanian Navy students, this involves listening for key information during multilingual briefings, managing instructions under noisy and stressful conditions, and interpreting intercultural messages accurately. Course modules such as “English for Rules of Engagement,” “Operational Orders Interpretation,” and “Listening in Naval Coordination” should be mandatory components to ensure direct transferability from classroom to mission settings.

## 6. Assessment and Feedback

Assessment practices must evolve to reflect real-world listening demands. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) stress that “authentic assessments better capture the complexity of language use in genuine communicative situations.” Listening evaluations should include scenario-based tasks where students make operational decisions based on audio input. Additionally, integrating self- and peer-assessment, as advocated by Oscarson (1989), fosters critical reflection and continuous improvement: “Self-assessment can enhance learner autonomy and awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in language use,” a crucial skill for lifelong competence development.

Formative and authentic assessment approaches are crucial (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Listening assessments should include:

- **Scenario-Based Listening:** Real-time briefings followed by mission-related decision-making tasks.
- **Self and Peer Review:** Encouraging students to critically evaluate their own and others’ listening performance for continual improvement (Oscarson, 1989).

## 7. Conclusions

Improving listening skills among Romanian Navy students is not simply a linguistic challenge but a strategic necessity. Aligning teaching practices with research-based TESOL strategies and NATO operational needs will ensure that Romanian naval forces are linguistically agile, operationally ready, and globally competent. Emphasizing authentic materials, task-based learning, technological integration, and reflective assessment will significantly enhance listening proficiency beyond exam-oriented success.

The strategic importance of listening skills for Romanian Navy students within NATO frameworks cannot be overstated. As Vandergrift and Goh (2012) conclude, “listening is an active, complex process that requires conscious effort and appropriate training.”

By moving beyond exam-oriented preparation toward authentic communicative competence, training programs can better equip personnel for the realities of multinational operations.

Through the integration of authentic materials, task-based learning, technologically enhanced simulations, and reflective assessment, Romanian naval forces will not only meet but exceed NATO’s linguistic expectations, strengthening their operational effectiveness in peacekeeping missions.

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