

National University of Public Service
Faculty of Military Sciences and Officer Training
Doctoral School of Military Sciences

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**THE IMPACT OF THE NATO STANAG 6001
STANDARDS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING
ENGLISH**

ON THE BASIS OF THE VIEWS OF TEACHERS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF OFFICERS
SERVING IN OPERATIONS ABROAD

PhD Dissertation Summary

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Budapest, 2015

DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Hungary's membership in NATO and the EU and its participation in peace operations has made it necessary for the personnel of the armed forces to attain an acceptable level of English proficiency. As a requirement for multinational operations and other international staff appointments, the level of English proficiency is defined according to the STANAG 6001 language proficiency scale. In Hungary, testing according to the NATO STANAG 6001 descriptors started in 1997 and in 2005 the exam developed by the Hungarian testing team became a certified language exam for specific purposes.

Language exams – especially if the stakes are high – can exert an influence on the process of teaching and learning, which is referred to as the washback effect by language testers. This washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful depending on whether it promotes or impedes the accomplishment of educational goals held by learners. Since obtaining the required STANAG proficiency level is of utmost importance for the test population, the NATO STANAG 6001 standards are expected to engender a powerful effect on English language teaching in the armed forces and at the National University of Public Service.

The NATO STANAG 6001 can play a major role in fostering innovation in language teaching in the armed forces. As teachers tend to concentrate on the language elements and skills measured by the test, the requirements will define the language learning process. Now, the question arises whether the characteristics and requirements of the Hungarian NATO STANAG 6001 exam really do exert any impact on teaching and learning, and if so, what the nature of that effect is.

MAIN RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The NATO STANAG 6001 is a proficiency language test, with the purpose of certifying officers, NCOs and civilian employees for working in multinational operations. Thus the requirements of the exam are supposed to promote the learning of the real-life language needed for the test population. In view of these statements, the main research objectives of this dissertation are as follows:

1. To analyse the characteristics of the NATO STANAG 6001 developed by the Hungarian testing team and to provide a detailed description of the nature of the washback effect related to the test design.

2. To survey the teachers' views and attitudes towards the test and their opinions about the influence of the NATO STANAG 6001 exam on their teaching.
3. To investigate to what extent the requirements of the Hungarian NATO STANAG 6001 reflect the needs of the target population based on interviews with nineteen officers serving in operations abroad.
4. To obtain information from the target population and from the teachers who prepare students for the exam and to draw conclusions on how the received information could be used as feedback by the Language Testing Centre of the National University of Public Service.

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to achieve my research objectives, I applied several research methods:

1. I studied and analysed the printed and electronic literature available on language testing, specialised language testing and ESL teaching, including dissertations and articles exploring the topic of military language teaching and testing within the Hungarian context.
2. I studied the Hungarian Government Decrees and regulations dealing with language testing.
3. I studied and analysed the international NATO STANAG 6001 descriptors and the documents of the Language Testing Centre of the National University of Public Service, with special emphasis laid on the specification and exam materials of the NATO STANAG 6001 exam.
4. I compiled a questionnaire and carried out an exploratory survey among those teachers who prepare students for the NATO STANAG 6001 language exam. Through empirical research I wished to gain an understanding into their experience, views and attitudes towards the exam.
5. I conducted face-to-face interviews with nineteen Hungarian officers, whom I asked what they perceived the language needs of the target population to be, also looking at the language skills of the Hungarian servicemembers possessing a NATO STANAG 6001 certificate and what their views were on the exam.

6. I analysed the data collected in the survey with statistical methods. When processing and assessing the responses to the questions of the interview I used qualitative analysis.
7. When analysing and synthesising the research results, drawing conclusions and making recommendations, I applied my own experience gained in the field of both military language testing and teaching.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

In accordance with my research objectives, the dissertation is divided into five chapters.

In **Chapter 1** I make an attempt to define the concept of language knowledge by providing an outline of the evolution of language teaching methodology and analysing the most influential models of communicative competence. Then I explore the concept of language testing, illustrate the main stages of language testing methodology and outline the types, functions and main qualities of communicative language tests.

In **Chapter 2** I synthesise the results of research into the washback effect. I present the different interpretations of the concept and examine their characteristics and factors. I analyse and compare the most significant models of washback and identify the areas to be investigated in washback studies.

In **Chapter 3** I examine the characteristics of the Hungarian NATO STANAG 6001 exam that are relevant to studying its washback effect. The chapter starts with the introduction of the NATO STANAG 6001 scale which provides the basis for the Hungarian exam, then gives an overview of the introduction and development of the NATO STANAG 6001 testing in Hungary. On the basis of the test specifications, I examine the communicative competence model providing the theoretical underpinning of the exam and explore the criteria for testing the levels of communicative competence. I examine to what extent NATO STANAG 6001 meets the requirements of ESP testing. With the examination of the test materials, the development and evaluation procedures and the statistical analyses, I explore to what extent the exam meets the criteria of communicative language tests.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the empirical research accomplished, with the objective of exploring the experience of teachers, alongside with the views and attitudes towards the

Hungarian NATO STANAG 6001 exam. It presents the detailed research procedure and the quantitative analysis of the data collected with the questionnaire.

Chapter 5 provides the qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted with a group of the target population, concerning their language needs and their views on the Hungarian NATO STANAG 6001 exam.

In **the Conclusion** I summarise the results of my research and the major findings and make recommendations for their applicability.

THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE RESEARH WORK

Based on my research, I regard the following as my new scientific findings:

1. I compiled a questionnaire for the teachers preparing students for the Hungarian NATO STANAG 6001. With the analysis of the responses I proved that the requirements of the exam play an important role, though not the most important one, in defining the process of teaching. Most teachers teach exam strategies and often refer to the task types and requirements of the exam. However, the exam influences only the content of teaching and not the teaching methods. The evaluation criteria of the exam do not have a significant effect on the classroom evaluation made by the teachers.
2. With the questionnaire I also examined the materials used in the exam preparation courses. The Campaign Military English course book is the most widely used, most teachers prepare materials for their students and use sample exam tasks to prepare their students for the exam.
3. With the analysis of the questionnaire responses I proved that the views of the teachers who are STANAG examiners are significantly more positive about the exam than those of the teachers who do not take part in examining. The teachers who prepare for STANAG 3 also have distinctly more positive opinions of the exam than those who teach only in STANAG 1 or STANAG 1 and STANAG 2 courses.
4. I conducted interviews with nineteen members of the target population of the NATO STANAG 6001, officers who have served in operations abroad. I examined their typical target language-use situations and their views on the face validity of the exam. With the qualitative analysis of the interviews I proved that the

relationship between the requirements of the exam and real-life language use is transparent for the users of the exam and that passing the exam predicts that the person will meet the language requirements in operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE APPLICABILITY OF THE RESEARH

This dissertation can contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of English language courses at the Hungarian armed forces and the Faculty of Military Sciences and Officer Training at the National University of Public Service by enhancing teacher self-reflection.

The operational experience of the target group can assist teachers in planning the content of their teaching by bringing it more in line with the real-life language needs of their students.

The Language Testing Centre of the National University of Public Service can also gain valuable information from the interviews and benefit from it in the item writing process.

This dissertation can provide a basis for further research related to military language testing and teaching.

PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT

- Nóra NÁBRÁDI: *Visszahatás (washback): a nyelvvizsga tanítási-tanulási folyamatra gyakorolt hatásának elméleti áttekintése.* In: Szakmai Szemle, 2009/2, pp. 215–221.
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- Nóra NÁBRÁDI: *Mit mér a STANAG 2 hallásértés vizsga?* In: Hadtudományi Szemle, pp. 2011/3. 149–156.
- Nóra NÁBRÁDI: *Miért szaknyelvi vizsga a NATO STANAG 6001?* In: Szakmai Szemle, 2011/3, pp. 146–160.
- Nóra NÁBRÁDI: *Mit mér a STANAG 2 íráskészség vizsga?* In: Hadtudományi Szemle, 2012/1, pp. 203–209.
- Nóra NÁBRÁDI: *Hogyan hat a nyelvvizsga a tanítási-tanulási folyamatra?* In: Szakmai Szemle, 2012/2, pp. 145–154.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

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2000 MA in French Language and Literature
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Courses

2015 Advanced Statistics Course (Accreditation Centre for Foreign Language Examinations, Budapest)
2013 Advanced Language Testing Seminar (G. C. Marshall Center, Germany, Bureau for International Language Coordination)
2012 Basic Statistics Course (Accreditation Centre for Foreign Language Examinations, Budapest)
2008 Language Testing Seminar (G. C. Marshall Center, Germany, Bureau for International Language Coordination)

Work Experience

2012– Head of STANAG 3 Section –Language Testing Centre, National University of Public Service, Budapest
2007–2012 Teacher of English – Foreign Language Training Centre, Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University, Budapest
2003–2006 Teacher of English – Military Security Office, Budapest
2000–2003 Freelance Teacher of English