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FORMATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AMONG FUTURE MILITARY OFFICERS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

ABSTRACT

The article differentiates the categories of professional competence, communicative competence and foreign language communicative competence on the basis of Ukrainian and foreign sources. According to the findings, professional competence depends on the specificity of organizational goals and professional functions. Communicative competence is described as the ability to engage into communication with the individual as well as within a group while choosing various tools of communication and ensuring transferring and understanding of the information. Foreign language communicative competence of future military officers is described as important instrument to carry out their professional duties by means of foreign language. The process of formation of foreign language communicative research at the higher military educational establishments has its own characteristics. First of all, the content of foreign language professional training should be related to professional activities and outline the functionality and social role of military officers. Also, effective syllabus and curricula should be objectively approximated to cadets' and/or officers' needs. The assessment of English language proficiency of the military officers is carried out in accordance with the NATO Standardization Agreement. The article analyses Language proficiency levels and didactic activities of those who study. They include receptive (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing) activities. The teacher's professionalism plays the significant role in the learning process but the analysis of foreign experience provides the description of special methodology oriented towards improvement of four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) at the higher military educational establishment. Additionally, the article outlines the guidelines to improve foreign language training designed according to the STANAG 6001 and to reach level 2 by future military officers in Ukrainian military educational establishments.

Keywords: professional competence, foreign language communicative competence, future military officers, STANAG 6001, language proficiency level.



INTRODUCTION

Globalization and integration processes of world community, in the sphere of military affairs in particular, transform qualification requirements to integral professional characteristics of future military officer. Under such conditions, officers' mobility, creativity, high professionalism, ability to establish professional ties with foreign partners within the foreign language environment appear to be very important qualities that are necessary to solve urgent professional problems. Foreign language competence has an important place within the structure of professional competence of a modern military officer in Ukraine. The analysis of legal and regulatory instruments (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, 2016) regarding the requirements to military unit commanders' professional readiness shows that they should interact with representatives of foreign armed forces formations, possess knowledge of strategy and tactics of extensive discussions in foreign language, conduct public presentations and participate in negotiations using communicative methods as well as techniques of professional multicultural communication.

We shall emphasize that international military cooperation and participation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in joint operations is a significant factor of building up the authority and prestige of Ukraine and strengthening of its position on the world scene and in different international organizations like the UN, OSCE, NATO and others. Besides, Ukrainian military officers participate in military exercises together with representatives of other countries (such as Sea Breeze, Rapid Trident, Flaming Sword, Cambrian Patrol, Platinum Eagle, Saber Guardian, etc.) and peacekeeping operations that requires not only professional, political, psychological, physical readiness but they should undergo special professional communicative training. Such training is available to future military officers at the higher military educational establishments while studying English language course and specific subjects in foreign language.

NATO recognizes Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner and there is a need for the Ukrainian Armed Forces to close to NATO standards and to enhance the efficiency of functioning of the system of military education, including foreign language training. Taking this into consideration, we realize that international experience of formation of foreign language competence is very important for implementation of rapid military education reforms, modernization of future military officers' professional training and improvement of foreign language teaching within Ukrainian higher military educational establishments.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the research is to analyze the theoretical and practical approaches to formation of foreign language competence among future military officers in the EU countries and to streamline the various recommendations implemented at military institutions of some NATO member states for improvement of foreign language training of future military officers in Ukraine.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

The process of formation of foreign language competence among future military officers was studied by a number of native and foreign scholars. Theoretical approaches to the problem was described by O. Boe, A. Bulatbayeva, Z. Bushellová, R. Helt, T. Holth, M. Kozyar, U. Marchibayeva, L. Naniwska, B. Tazhigulova, N. Ryndenko, O. Romanyshyna, C. Paulston, O. Voitiuk and others. At the same time P. Tkachuk explained and proved at the scientific level the necessity to form foreign language competence among future military officers if Ukraine has adopted the EU standards.



M. Likaj, J. Kazimianec and D. Jatautaitė recognize the need to enhance effective foreign language communication for those countries who belong to the EU and NATO organizations. Importantly, we encounter many works devoted to peculiarities of the process of formation of foreign language competence among future military officers. For example, B.-O. Niculescu, G. Obilișteanu, and I. A. Dragomir described English language training at the Land Forces Academy (Romania). N. Ryndenko studied the peculiarities of foreign language training of border guard officers for Straż Graniczna (Poland). T. Holth and O. Boe outlined the enhancing of communication skills of Norwegian military officers. J. Kazimianec and D. Jatautaitė studied second/foreign language teaching at the military academy of Lithuania on the basis of audiovisual method. M. Likaj outlined the main problems encountered during teaching English language course at the Albanian military institutions and presented the recommendations to overcome them. R. Dobrzinskiene and S. Rimkute explained the structure of linguistic competence of future police officers in details and described the process of professional training. in Lithuania and Slovakia.

RESULTS

Future experts' professional competence is formed and established during their professional training and further practical activities when a person has chosen professional orientation clearly and determined own professional aspirations (Voitiuk, 2012). The content of professional competence depends on the specificity of organizational goals, professional functions and their designation to certain social sphere. O. Torichnyi (2012) considers that professional competence of future officers includes two broad aspects – scientific and theoretical (involves the thorough analysis of different scientific approaches regarding theory of formation of skills and abilities that are necessary for future profession) and specialized (makes up the nature of professional competence regarding speciality of the person who is trained).

This idea is supported by M. Jaros (2018) who thinks that foreign language teaching at the higher military educational establishments is always professionally oriented, integrated to the special subjects, and built taking into consideration cadets' needs that are specifically determined by their future professional activities. Defining the notion of professional competence some findings (Dobrzinskiene & Rimkute, 2020) show that this category should be understood as the ability of the individual to act in particular environment taking into consideration to his/her appropriate knowledge, cognition, skills, approaches, value attitudes and personal qualities.

Professional competence is a mandatory characteristic for every professional. Effective communicative skills are, no doubt, significant in any daily leadership. For a military officer, it is crucial. Communicative competence can be the decisive factor for the life of the officer, the military unit personnel, and their ability to succeed in operations of great importance (Holth & Boe, 2017). Thus, professional competence of military officers includes communicative competence necessarily. Communicative competence is described as the ability to engage into communication with the individual as well as within a group while choosing various tools of communication and ensuring transferring and understanding of the information (Kozyar, et al., 2020). Some scholars (Paulston, 1992) suggest that communicative competence is acquired only in presence of the comprehension of language rules, use of words, correct pronunciation, etc., and in a possession of a particular linguistic competence. O. Voitiuk describes communicative competence as a special type of professional competence when an expert is ready and able to acquire special and scientific knowledge during professional communication. Therefore, foreign language



professional competence is the process that helps to realize all abilities and skills to exchange information, to search and extend professional knowledge in foreign language.

According to U. Marchibayeva et al. (2015), communicative competence of future officers means the combination of three main components including a number of key sub-units. They are the following:

- 1) solidly communicative skills (speech, comprehension, pronunciation, grammar knowledge);
- 2) representative (knowledge, abilities, skills of creative activity used to present information and build effective messages);
- 3) reflexive (personal competence that refers to the regulator of personal achievements, the activator of self-knowledge and professional growth).

At the same time, the term “language professionals” is widely used within military terminology and it refers to the personnel who possess a verified foreign language capability and can use this capability to perform their primary functions efficiently by means of foreign language instruments (Department of Defense, 2011, Pateşan & Zechia, 2018).

The English language is an operational linguistic instrument all NATO member countries and their partners. As soon as NATO, political-military alliance, extends, the armed forces of member states participate in various military operations (joint, peacemaking or peacekeeping, humanitarian or search and rescue missions). Given its importance, the Regional and Cultural Expertise: Building a DoD Framework to Meet National Defense Challenges states that language skills are now as critical as operational capabilities for military officers. They “...just as important as weapons on the battlefield and across the entire array of Departmental missions” (Department of Defense, 2007, p. 6). According to the English Language Wing of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defense, foreign language training to the Armed Forces personnel enhances military capability for operations and contributes to the International Defense Engagement Strategy (English Language Wing, n/a).

First of all, having identified communicative competence components, its functionality and social role, the foreign language instructor should develop effective syllabus and curriculum. Designing such documents is quite challenging due to the content of professional activities – related goals to be met during the course. For example, at the Foreign Language Centre of the Academy of the Armed Forces (Albania) military English language curricula are designed, but not specifically communicative ones. These curricula should be objectively approximated to cadets’ and/or officers’ needs, such as those who are training to be deployed in peacekeeping missions abroad, those who are assigned for the NATO organization, to others are prepared to be part of an international team who perform their duty as mentors or advisers and often have to carry out lectures and practical classes. Therefore, we should design a communicative curriculum with speaking tasks that meet learners’ needs (Likaj, 2013).

Some higher military educational establishments provide different course for cadets and military officers to enhance the efficiency of foreign language professional training within the Armed Forces. For, example, the Defense Language Institute of the Military Academy and Training Command in Vyškov (Czech Republic) provides four types of foreign language courses (Bushellová, 2010). They include intensive, combined, enhancement and terminology courses. The Intensive course is taught for a 6-month period and has 500 hours. The cadets and officers undergoing the intensive course have between 4 and 7 classes a day. The Combined Course is designed for military officers who cannot be released from their work place for the Intensive Course and they attend one week training



per month. This course lasts 10 months. The Enhancement Course is designed for cadets and/or officers of previous courses who did not achieved their primary goal and, therefore, require more time for material revision prior to retesting or deploying on a special task where foreign language is applied. The Terminology Course focuses on military terminology used by the NATO countries and it is designed for military professionals who are due to operational deployment abroad or instructional positions.

The assessment of English language proficiency of the military officers is carried out in accordance with the NATO Standardization Agreement 6001 (STANAG 6001) published in 2014 (NATO, 2014). This agreement provides Language proficiency levels to enhance language interoperability. The proficiency skills are divided into six levels coded 0 through 5. In general terms, skills may be explained as following:

- Level 0 – No practical proficiency;
- Level 1 – Survival;
- Level 2 – Functional (Limited working);
- Level 3 – Professional (Minimum professional);
- Level 4 – Expert (Full professional);
- Level 5 – Highly articulate native (Native/bilingual).

These levels of proficiency have been adopted by all higher military education institutions in NATO member states. Currently, Ukraine is using the same table to approximate the process of professional military training to NATO standards. In order to meet the linguistic requirements, military officers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces should possess Level 2 or 3. Also, the STANAG 6001 divides language proficiency skills into four didactic activities: receptive (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing). The importance of acquiring these skills is outlined in two important documents regarding the linguistic achievements of cadets are supposed to accomplish: STANAG 6001 (NATO, 2014) and Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001).

Obviously, teacher's professionalism, his/her ability to create an environment in the classroom that is favorable to communication in a foreign language play the significant role in the learning process (Kazimianec & Jatautaitė, 2018). But every foreign language instructor at the higher military educational establishment should apply the methodology oriented towards improvement of four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing). Consequently, the analysis of scientific literature (Bushellová, 2010, Likaj, 2013, Niculescu, Obilișteanu & Dragomir, 2019, Pateșan & Zechia, 2018,) provides the guidelines to improve foreign language training designed according to the STANAG 6001 and to reach level 2.

Table 1 shows the recommendations to be implemented within the English language classroom to enhance necessary language skills.

Additionally, to reach positive results in foreign language education of future military officers some findings (Kozyar, et al., 2020, p. 162) insist on carrying out productive professional activities in different situations of cross-cultural and professional communication based on a set of language skills, including: foreign language lexical expressions; correct usage of grammar rules; adaptation of speakers' behaviour to numerous linguistic, social, cultural and professional norms in the context of interactive communication of professional environment.



Table 1

Recommendations to be implemented within at the English language classroom at the higher military educational establishment

Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to organize listening comprehension exercises every class; – make cadets listen for the main idea/specific details; – make future officers acquire the military terminology like military words and word combinations, acronyms, jargonisms and slang words); – organize exercising on the basis of acquired vocabulary; – encourage listening or watching original audio- and video materials (films, public statements, speeches, news, etc.); – increase cadets’ note-taking skill; – point out the strategies to be used for this listening activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ask cadets to skim the texts for specific details); – organize reading between the lines in order to teach cadets to find inferential information from the context; – initiate finding the missing details in the source text; – work with original documents presented as special passages for reading; – make cadets aware of the importance of the methods and strategies used to improve the reading comprehension; – tailor the materials to the cadets’ needs and language knowledge; – use word-translation method if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – initiate cadets’ practicing daily on the subject of social and routine workplace environment; – encourage cadets to deal with real-life situations and to speak about certain topics, professional events in particular; – avoid frequent translation of words and phrases in order not to complicate formation foreign language communicative competence with additional elements. When they graduate, they must be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) describe people, places, and events; 2) give accurate instructions and directions; 3) speak using present, past and future tenses; 4) compare and contrast; 5) ask and answer predictable questions; – to make the speaking curricula flexible to the foreign language, allowing them to arrange it in accordance with the specific language knowledge of their cadets; – get into the same topic discussion as in the previous lesson for revision; – use connecting words, semantic maps, synonyms, antonyms, highlighting, or professional terms in context; – approximate speaking curriculum with any kind of speaking tasks they find useful and effective; – explain the importance of non-verbal communication while speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – provide writing exercises connected with professional activities; – make the writing memos according to real-life scenarios; – write the document using the certain information like date, place, purpose, etc.; – practise issuing orders or directives; – interpret and reflect upon professional texts; – organize gathering information, composing and presenting of written texts on topics of professional importance; – provide clear feedback on writing tasks



CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that foreign language competence has an important place within the structure of professional competence of a modern military officer in Ukraine due to the change of social role of military formations and the approximation to the NATO standards in particular. Today communicative competence can be the decisive factor for the life of the officer, the unit personnel, and their ability to succeed in operations of great importance. In the article communicative competence is described as the ability to engage into communication with the individual as well as within a group while choosing various tools of communication and ensuring transferring and understanding of the information. Also, it is combined of three main components: solidly communicative skills; representative skills; reflexive skills. Foreign language communicative competence is defined as military officers' capability to perform their primary functions efficiently by means of foreign language instruments.

On the basis of scientific literature and legislative documents the process of formation of foreign language communicative competence among future military officers was described. Thus, the requirements to designing of foreign language syllabus and curriculum were outlined. They should be approximated to professional activities and correspond with cadets' and/or officers' needs. Taking this into consideration, the classification of foreign language courses taught in foreign higher military educational establishments were presented. They include intensive, combined, enhancement and terminology courses. The special attention was paid towards the assessment of English language proficiency of the military officers. NATO member states use the NATO Standardization Agreement 6001 to assess language proficiency skills that are divided into six levels. Also, the article provides the recommendations for foreign language instructors to be implemented within the English language classroom at the higher military educational establishments to enhance necessary language skills.

Further, we are planning to research the innovative technologies applied during foreign language professional training at the foreign higher military educational establishments and design the model of their implementation in the process of professional training of cadets in Ukrainian higher military educational establishments.

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