

## **SOME ASPECTS OF LEVEL TESTING THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL ENGLISH ORAL PROFICIENCY**

*The development of Ukraine in the international arena, its foreign policy, world processes of globalization and Ukraine's participation in international peacekeeping operations require standardization in the field of education for interoperability in cooperation with other countries, including language interoperability. The current state of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) development and the realities of the 21st century require an entirely new approach to foreign language level training and testing of the personnel.*

*The generalization of international experience and transition to standardized procedures in all activities are being held in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Standardization of foreign languages training military personnel is not an exception, but on the contrary, takes quite an important place in the reforming of the AF of Ukraine. The issues of interoperability and standardization are currently a priority for researchers and teachers both in Ukraine and in the world.*

*The purpose of the article is to analyze the processes of foreign languages level training and testing in the AF of Ukraine and to outline a number of issues related to the use of international experience and the lack of a systematic approach.*

**Key words:** *foreign languages level training, level testing, test, summative assessment, multilevel coursebooks, international exams.*

The current state of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) development and the realities of the 21st century require an entirely new approach to foreign language level training and testing of its personnel. The development of Ukraine in the international arena, its foreign policy, world processes of globalization and Ukraine's participation in international peacekeeping operations require standardization in the field of education for interoperability in cooperation with other countries, including language interoperability. The issues of interoperability and standardization are currently a priority for researchers and teachers both in Ukraine and in the world.

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Foreign language proficiency in the AF of Ukraine is assessed according to the scale of standardized language levels (SLL), which correspond to levels of language competence of NATO STANAG 6001 language standard [1], and written in the "Concept of language training of the Armed Forces personnel", ratified by the Minister of Defense of Ukraine on 01.06.2009 №267 [2]. Standardized language levels (SLL) in listening, speaking, reading and writing form standardized language profile (SLP). All modern didactic materials for training and testing foreign languages are based on these documents. As a result, it was determined the number of levels for the organization of foreign language training

and assessment, in other words it was designed well-known system of language levels and system of descriptions of these levels: SLL-1 (survival), SLL-2 (functional), SLL-3 (professional), SLL-4 (expert) and later the transitional levels were added to it [2]. However, there are some issues about single approach to the testing system in the Armed Forces and the theoretical and methodological foundations of standardized language levels 1, 2, 3 that are solved partly or need to be solved and given scientific explanations.

The issues of testing were studied by national and foreign scientists (S. Nikolaeva, A. Kvasova, A. Petrashchuk, V. Kokkota, L. Bachman, A. Palmer, A. Hughes, N. Underhill etc.). The problems of development and specifications of Ukrainian version of NATO "STANAG-6001" test standard for UAF personnel have been researched by Y. Semenov, V. Balabin, A. Lahodynsky).

However, the contents of the test system, test management, evaluation system, statistical analysis and the UAF personnel preparation for the test still have many problems that need to be researched.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the processes of foreign languages level training and testing in the AF of Ukraine and to outline a number of issues related to the use of international experience and the lack of a systematic approach.

### 1. The role and place of testing in foreign languages level training of the UAF personnel

At the beginning we will describe the system of foreign languages level training in the UAF. Using international experience of dividing into independent components language training and testing, in higher military educational establishments of Ukraine the foreign languages departments deal with training and the independent testing centers are created for testing (look Figure 1).

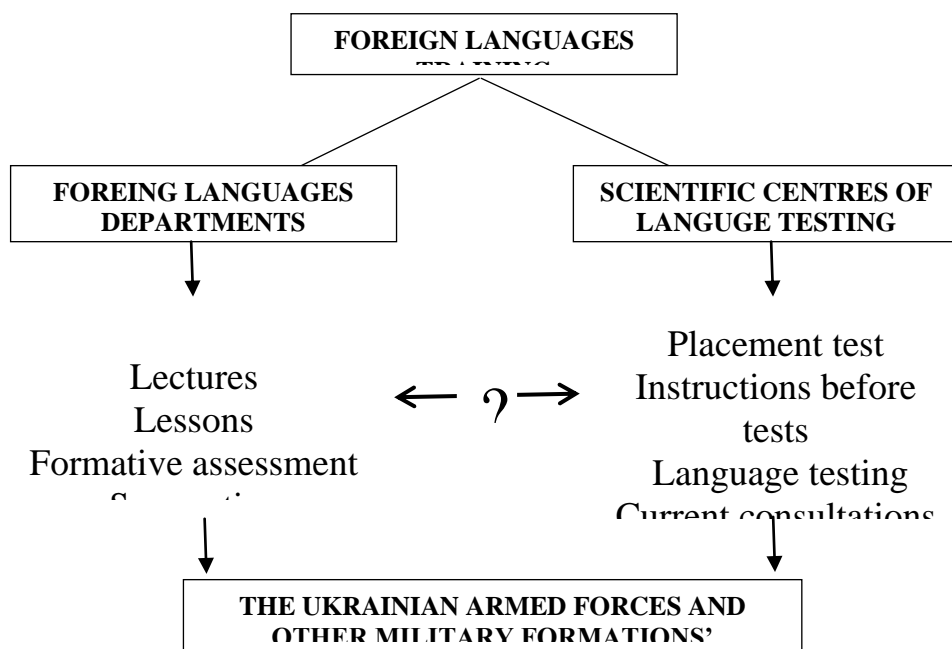


Figure 1.

Let us refer again to the above mentioned documents the NATO STANAG 6001 and "Concept of language training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel." On their basis, the foreign languages departments teach foreign languages according to levels system consisting of 5 levels, from which the 1st and 2nd levels in full and the 3rd partly are important for Ukraine. These levels correspond to the levels system adopted in Europe, in the framework of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1996, in which three threshold levels were described: A – basic user, B – independent user, C – mastery user, which were subsequently broken at the sublevels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). (look Comparison Chart).

*Comparison Chart  
Campaign – STANAG 6001 – Levels – International exams*

Campaign	Scales				Tests		
	<b>STANAG 6001</b> Standardized agreement 6001 (1976) <b>NATO: &amp; BILC:</b>	<b>CEF</b> Common European Framework <b>COE: Council of Europe</b>	<b>ALTE Scale</b> <b>ALTE: Association of Language Testers in Europe</b>		<b>Cambridge ESOL</b> <b>Cambridge ESOL Examinations.</b> (formerly <b>UCLES</b> )	<b>ELTS</b> <b>The British Council, IDP &amp; Cambridge ESOL</b>	
	<b>5555</b> Native/bilingual				(DIPLOMA)	9	
	<b>4444</b> Fully Professional	<b>C2 Mastery</b>	Proficient User	<b>5</b> Good User	Upper Advanced	CPE	8 7
		<b>C1 Effective Operational Proficiency</b>		<b>4</b> Competent User	Lower Advanced	CAE	6
<b>Campaign 3</b>	<b>3333</b> Minimum Professional	<b>B2+ Vantage+</b>	Independent User	<b>3</b> Independent User	Upper Intermediate	FCE	5
<b>Campaign 2</b>		<b>B2 Vantage</b>					
	<b>2222</b> Limited Working	<b>B1+ Threshold</b>	Independent User	<b>2</b> Threshold User	Lower Intermediate	PET	4
		<b>B1 Threshold</b>					
<b>Campaign 1</b>	<b>1111</b> Elementary	<b>A2+ Waystage+</b>	Basic User	<b>1</b> Waystage User	Elementary	KET	3
		<b>A2 Waystage</b>					2
	<b>0</b> Unscaled	<b>A1 Breakthrough</b>	Basic User	<b>0</b> Breakthrough	Beginner		1
							0

Level approach adopted in the world linguodidactics was designed to provide favorable conditions for continuous long-life learning of foreign languages and it involves standardization of learning objectives, pragmatic and practical training, unified format of training materials and criterial testing. Accordingly, the most world recognized educational coursebooks such as «Headway», "International Express", "Cutting edge", and English for the military "Campaign", "American language course" – are designed to meet the multilevel approach requirements, that provides gradual learning of a foreign language. These coursebooks are used by departments of foreign languages and provide level approach to foreign language training. The results of the training must be assessed reliably and transparently on the basis of standardized requirements and evaluation criteria of the same level language testing.

Nowadays testing is the most popular and modern assessment technique of knowledge and skills by far. The development and application of language tests belong to the expertise field of linguodidactic testing [3]. Linguodidactic test we understand as prepared in accordance with certain requirements a set of tasks that have been pre-tested to determine its quality and allows assessing testees' degree of language (linguistic) and / or communicative competence and those results are evaluated by pre-established criteria [4]. Using multilevel testing as a new for Ukraine form of foreign language assessment needs the preparation of specialists in this field. The developing of multi-level testing (diagnostic testing) is a challenge from methodological, technical and organizational point of view. Abroad, "Testology" as science has been developing for quite a long time, even the departments of Testology have been created and "tester" as a profession is also recognized unlike Ukraine. In our country, training and assessment up to 2004 had been done by the foreign languages departments that means by teachers and assessment, especially in exams, had been trusted to experienced teachers who had substantial teaching experience. Today, the departments continue to train, but the assessment is being done by the independent language testing centers. From the first point of view, it seems right: compliance with international standards, reduction of corruption and prejudiced evaluation, etc. However, overseas language testing centers have different structure and sometimes functions and overseas testers have **standardized training with clear requirements to their competence** [5]. For example, to participate in the test Key English Test a tester must undergo initial training in a local department of University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and obtain permission, and then regularly attends seminars concerning **coordination issues** not to lose his/her competence.

Ukraine is lacking experienced testers, because there is neither such bodies, as the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate in the UK or the Russian State Testing System in Russia, nor the requirements to the competence of testers. In order this system works, we need not only experienced testers, but experts in the field of testing, that means the creation of Testology departments in universities of Ukraine that prepare foreign language teachers. And now the positions of testers are occupied by civilian and military who are called as "researchers" and sometimes even do not have any experience of teaching foreign

languages for the military personnel. It causes difficulties and sometimes even makes impossible process of coordinating level training and testing.

In the opinion of the author the relationship between the following components are disturbed: level coursebooks and progress achievement tests carried out by the departments do not always correlate with proficiency test carried out by the scientific center of language testing (look Figure 2).

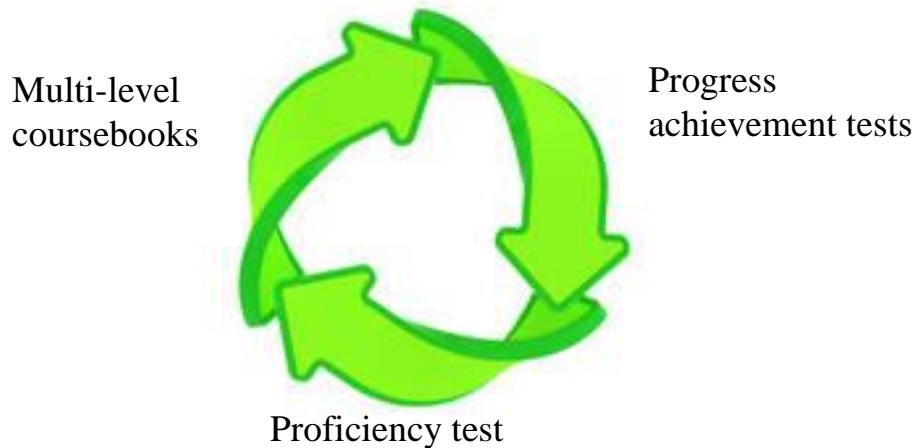
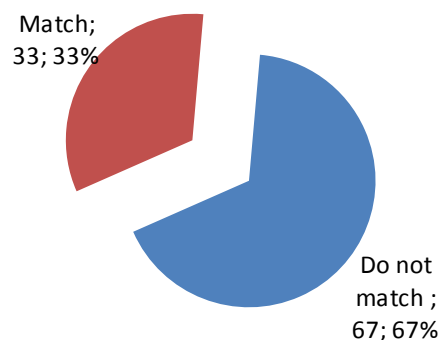


Figure 2.

As an example, let us analyze the process of training and testing one of the study groups in 2012. When comparing estimates in speaking of the formative assessments and summative assessment (both relate to progress achievement tests) and proficiency language test in a group of 9 people 3 (33%) estimates match, 6 (67%) estimates – do not match (*they are in italics*).

Estimates in speaking

Formative assessment	Summative assessment	Proficiency test
5	5	Level 2
<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Level 1+</b>
5	5	Level 2
<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Level 1+</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Level 2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Level 2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Level 2</b>
5	5	Level 1+
4	4	Level 1+



It seems not very difficult to solve this question: it is necessary to add elements of proficiency testing to the syllabus, with the same content (lexical, grammatical, topics essential requirements), the format, the criteria and scoring system.

In the world practice if you want to take any international exam you will be

offered a preparatory course [6] that will not teach you the language or check the material from the previous lesson, but it immediately will be preparing you for the exam using the similar tests and learning materials, giving you some advice and evaluating your performance. But this simple step raises a number of other problems related to the common understanding, scientifically based theoretical and methodological foundations, the format, and some other things of the levels interpretation (SLL 1,2,3) we will focus on below.

Therefore, the task of level training and testing of foreign languages harmonizing in the framework of the course preparation is considered as our priority. We cannot leave such a big difference in level training and testing assessment without attention. Teaching and assessment are **integral** to each other and **interdependent** components [7].

## 2. Peculiarities of STANAG 6001 Testing

An essential reference today for all who teach a foreign language the military is basic methodological guidance document NATO STANAG 6001, developed jointly by experts in the foreign languages training and testing by the International Bureau for Coordination of language training (BILC). The description of levels is based on determining foreign language competencies what “can do” language learner at each practical action level.

The level of foreign language competence is determined by the qualified proficiency test. The language test is developed in accordance with the proposed descriptors describing the quality of speaking product and its compliance with certain level of communicative competence. These descriptors are represented in all components of communicative competence and are the parameters of assessment.

The components of communicative competence we consider **linguistic competence** - knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar and skills to use them in a productive speaking and understand in the speech of others; **sociolinguistic competence** - the ability to take into account the sociolinguistic context of the communicative act, the specific situation of communication; **pragmatic competence** - a set of knowledge and rules for constructing statements, their combination into a text (discourse), the ability to use utterances for a variety of communicative functions; **socio-cultural competence** - awareness of ethno-cultural features [8]. Some difficulties in the practical implementation of language test lead to inaccurate determination of SLL. As an example, we will give the descriptor for SLL-2 in speaking.

### Level 2 (Functional)

Able to communicate in **everyday social and routine workplace situations**. In these situations the speaker can describe people, places, and things; narrate current, past, and future activities in complete, but simple paragraphs; state facts; compare and contrast; give straightforward instructions and directions; ask and **answer predictable questions**. Can **confidently** handle most normal, casual conversations **on concrete topics** such as job procedures, family, personal

background and interests, travel, current events. Can often elaborate in common daily communicative situations, such as personal and accommodation-related interactions; for example, can give complicated, detailed, and extensive directions and make non-routine changes in travel and other arrangements. Can interact with native speakers not used to speaking with non-natives, although natives may have to adjust to **some limitations**. Can combine and link sentences into **paragraph-length discourse**. **Simple structures and basic grammatical relations** are typically controlled, while **more complex structures** are used inaccurately or avoided. Vocabulary use **is appropriate** for high-frequency utterances but unusual or imprecise at other times. Errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar **may sometimes distort meaning**. However, the individual generally speaks in a way that is appropriate to the situation, although command of the spoken language is not always firm.

The author thinks the descriptors using without further reflection and clarification unlikely. *In italics there are* only some of the requirements and criteria requiring to be detailed, but also they need a single methodological understanding among teachers, testers and students. In fact, each of these descriptors is more complex and multifaceted phenomenon than that is presented above. The analysis of testing military personnel' English oral proficiency indicates the absence of scientifically based theoretical and methodological foundations.

All the examples above confirm the fact that the descriptors need further scientific understanding, methodological and linguistic interpretations.

From the methodological community in Ukraine, in this case, it is required a methodological holistic vision and methodical interpretation of the assessment system, taking into account the characteristics and realities of foreign languages training in the AF of Ukraine, training peculiarities of the Ukrainian servicemen and possibilities of our training-material basis.

### **3. Comparison of testing English oral proficiency: speaking test designed by the scientific center of language testing (SCLT) on the basis STANAG 6001 standards and world-recognized test "Preliminary English Test" (PET)**

This question is one of the most pressing and controversial among methodological community of professionals in teaching and testing in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Do we need to compare, and why, etc? Well, we recall that the testing oral proficiency (speaking test) is aimed to assess the communicative competence of the learner as precise as possible. Indeed, the level of English competence is a kind of permission (selection) among the servicemen to perform professional tasks related to training abroad, participation in international peacekeeping operations and military exercises, assigning to some positions, cash bonuses. As testing is quite a "young" procedure - comparison with international standards, with further scientifically theoretical and methodological analysis is clearly needed. So, let us to compare these tests.

Test of Speaking PET (correlated with SLL-2 consists of 4 parts (tasks).

**1st part** - is a classic interview where an examiner asks questions (5-6 questions) and a testee answers (duration 2-3 min.).

**2nd part** – is simulated situation - imitated and played reproduction of interpersonal contacts, organized around a problematic situation (check the ability to make and respond to suggestions, discuss alternatives, make recommendations, negotiate agreement) (duration 2-3 min.).

**3rd part** – is a detailed monologue based on description photo (picture), where the ability to connect sentences in discourse and use the necessary lexical items is examined. (duration 1 min.).

**4th part** – is dialogic speech, that's mean the ability to interact with each other, to express opinions, preferences is examined. (duration 3 min.) [9].

The test has precise lists of topics, vocabulary and grammar minimum requirements which are examined in the test.

The author as a teacher has the experience using this test as progress achievement during the training process. The format of this test really allows examining foreign language communicative competence as defined above. Students pass the test with varying success, but normally, formative assessment and PET test assessment give the same picture.

Now, we will consider the speaking test designed by SCLT on the STANAG 6001 standards. Speaking test consists of 1 part – it is a classic interview where an examiner asks questions (3 questions) and a testee answers (duration up to 10 min.) [10].

Without any doubt, one can see that this test format - does not examine foreign language communicative competence in its entire meaning, *the ability to make and respond to suggestions, discuss alternatives, make recommendations, negotiate, engage, ask questions, express opinions, preferences, etc.* remains unexamined. But while training according to the world-recognized multi-level coursebooks we teach students just those things, mentioned above most of the time. World-recognized exams are also aimed to examine foreign language communicative competence in full. The performing of professional tasks requires the same components of foreign language communicative competence as listed above. The Scientific Centre of language testing has experimental lexical and grammatical essential requirements lists as well as military terminology vocabulary minimum lists for standardized language levels SLL 1,2,3. But their matching with the content of the test can hardly be noticed. For example, if one compares the grammar minimum list and the speaking test no relationship will be seen between them. Thus, the existing format, content, organization and technics of speaking test need to be improved.

Thus, we reviewed and analyzed the following issues: 1 )The role and place of testing in foreign languages level training of the UAF personnel and concluded that it should be an integral part of the total educational process as a whole and have the same meaning and purpose; 2) Peculiarities of STANAG 6001 Testing, here we analyzed the level descriptors of foreign language and their different interpretation, and thus determined the need for methodological details of them



among teachers, students and testers; 3) Comparison of testing English oral proficiency: here we found that the Ukrainian version of the speaking test does not examine foreign language competence in full and has a very big difference with the methodological foundations of world multilevel training coursebooks and thus we need to improve the actual test of speaking. These issues are undoubtedly important for training highly qualified military professionals and language interoperability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine military forces with international organizations.

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### ДО ПИТАННЯ ТЕСТОВОГО ДІАГНОСТУВАННЯ АНГЛОМОВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ В ГОВОРІННІ ОСОБОВОГО СКЛАДУ ЗБРОЙНИХ СИЛ УКРАЇНИ

*Розвиток України на міжнародній арені, її зовнішня політика, світові процеси глобалізації та участь України в міжнародних миротворчих операціях вимагають стандартизації в освітній сфері задля взаємосумісності при співпраці з іншими державами, зокрема й мовної. Сучасний стан розвитку Збройних Сил України (ЗСУ) та реалії 21 сторіччя вимагають якісно нових підходів до рівневої іншомовної підготовки та тестування військовослужбовців.*

*У ЗС України проводиться узагальнення світового досвіду й відповідно перехід до стандартизованих процедур у всіх видах діяльності. Стандартизація іншомовної підготовки особового складу ЗСУ не є винятком, а скоріше навпаки, посідає досить таки важливе місце в реформуванні. Проблеми взаємосумісності та стандартизації наразі є першочерговим завданням для науковців і педагогів-практиків як в Україні, так і в усьому світі. Мета статті – проаналізувати процеси рівневого навчання та тестування в ЗСУ та окреслити низку проблемних питань, які пов'язані з використанням світового досвіду та відсутністю системного підходу.*

**Ключові слова:** *рівнева іншомовна підготовка, рівневе тестування, тест, рубіжний контроль, багаторівневі навчальні комплекси, міжнародні іспити.*

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## **К ВОПРОСУ ТЕСТОВОЙ ДИАГНОСТИКИ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ В ГОВОРЕНИИ ЛИЧНОГО СОСТАВА ВООРУЖЕННЫХ СИЛ УКРАИНЫ**

*Развитие Украины на международной арене, ее внешняя политика, мировые процессы глобализации и участие Украины в международных миротворческих операциях требуют стандартизации в образовательной сфере для взаимосовместимости при сотрудничестве с другими государствами, в частности и языковой взаимосовместимости. Современное состояние развития Вооруженных Сил Украины (ВСУ) и реалии 21 века требуют качественно новых подходов к уровневой подготовке и тестированию по иностранным языкам военнослужащих.*

*В ВС Украины осуществляется обобщение мирового опыта и соответственно переход к стандартизированным процедурам во всех видах деятельности. Стандартизация подготовки по иностранным языкам личного состава ВС Украины не является исключением, а скорее наоборот, занимает достаточно важное место в реформировании. Проблемы взаимосовместимости и стандартизации сейчас являются первостепенной задачей для учёных и педагогов-практиков как в Украине, так и во всем мире. Цель статьи – проанализировать процессы уровневого обучения и тестирования в ВС Украины и очертить проблемные вопросы, связанные с использованием мирового опыта и отсутствием системного подхода.*

**Ключевые слова:** *уровневая подготовка по иностранным языкам, уровневое тестирование, тест, итоговый контроль, многоуровневые учебные комплексы, международные экзамены.*