
LANGUAGE TRAINING IN THE ESTONIAN DEFENCE FORCE, JUNE 2009 – JUNE 2010.

INTRODUCTION

The foreign language proficiency of personnel in the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF) is part of their professional qualification and is taken into consideration in career planning. Over the past years, every effort has been made to establish the professional qualifications system for military personnel and as a result, professional standards for NCOs and officers have been approved by the Estonian Qualification Authority. These standards involve also established language proficiency levels.

To achieve the above objectives, the language programs within the Estonian Defence Forces are designed to meet different needs. The areas which need more consideration are: specialized language courses, specifically tailored courses for certain target groups with fixed course outcomes, and appropriate assessment tools.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

By the April of 2010, the Language Centre of the Estonian Defence Forces has operated as a centralized language centre of the Estonian Defence Forces for more than 1 year. The Language Centre of the Estonian Defence Forces was formed based on the Language Centre of the Estonian National Defence College (ENDC) and involves three sections: Translation and Proofreading Section, Language Testing Section and Foreign Language Teachers' Section. The latter involves the teachers of English working in the ENDC, and five teachers of English working outside the ENDC: three teachers in the Naval Base in Tallinn, one teacher in the North-Eastern Defence Command in Tapa, and one teacher in the Non-commissioned Officers' School in Võru.

The objective of the ENDC Language Centre is to provide language training for the Basic Officers' Training Course (BOTC, applied higher education) and Advanced Officers' Training Course students (AOTC, master students) through their curricula, and to offer intensive and non-intensive courses for the members of the EDF in accordance with the request of the General Staff within the Defence Forces Development Plan 2009-2018. During the period from June 2009 to June 2010, the Language Centre has provided language training in the English and Estonian languages. Estonian oral and written self-expression for BOTC and AOTC students is taught for both native speakers and as a second language for non-Estonians living in Estonia (with the minimum entrance level B2 in Estonian according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). As an integral part of curriculum development activities, achievement tests have been constructed.

In the spring of 2009, the process of establishing the outcomes-based curricula started throughout the Estonian higher education system. As part of this, both the curricula of officer training in the Estonian National Defence College and the different intensive and non-intensive English courses for the members of the EDF taught by the ENDC Language Centre are also being transformed accordingly.

From May 2009 to June 2010, there are the following major achievements in terms of language training:

- The learning outcomes for all language courses taught by the EDF Language Centre were synchronized according to language levels, and the minimum language levels were fixed (to get the minimum positive grade 1);
- Main graded tasks and final examinations according to different language levels were harmonized;
- In May 2010, the assessment criteria are to be developed and fixed (from 2 to 5) for all language levels organised by the EDF Language Centre.

International cooperation and assistance plays a very important role in language training. System of the English language training for military personnel is supported also by the partner institutions from abroad (e.g. cooperation between the ministries of defence of the USA and Estonia etc.).

Table 1. Language Courses in the Estonia Defence Forces, June 2009 – June 2010

No	Type/Level of Course	No of Groups	No of Students
1.	English Elementary Course (CRL ¹ A2, STANAG level 1)	6	58
2.	English Pre-intermediate Course (CRL B1, STANAG level 2)	2	24
3.	English Intermediate Course (CRL B1+, STANAG level 2+)	7	71
4.	English Upper-intermediate Course (CRL B2, STANAG level 3)	3	25
5.	English Courses for Basic Officers' Training Course (BOTC, compulsory and elective)	7	66
6.	English Courses for Advanced Officers' Training Course (AOTC, compulsory and elective)	4	29
7.	Estonian written and oral self-expression for BOTC and AOTC	3	57
Total number of students			330

TESTING

Since January 2009, the Language Testing Unit of the Estonian Defence Forces (LTU hereafter) is part of the EDF Language Centre. As before, the LTU is responsible for developing, administering and assessing tests based on the STANAG 6001 level descriptors. In addition, we also administer and mark ALCPT tests, the results of which are used for placing trainees in language courses as well as for screening test-takers for STANAG tests. The LTU usually administers ALCPT once a month, but when there is demand, twice a month. In addition, ALCPT is also administered by the EDF

¹ Common Reference Level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

English-language teachers in the teaching centres, but the LTU retains the overall responsibility for ensuring the security of the test forms and for keeping track of the results.

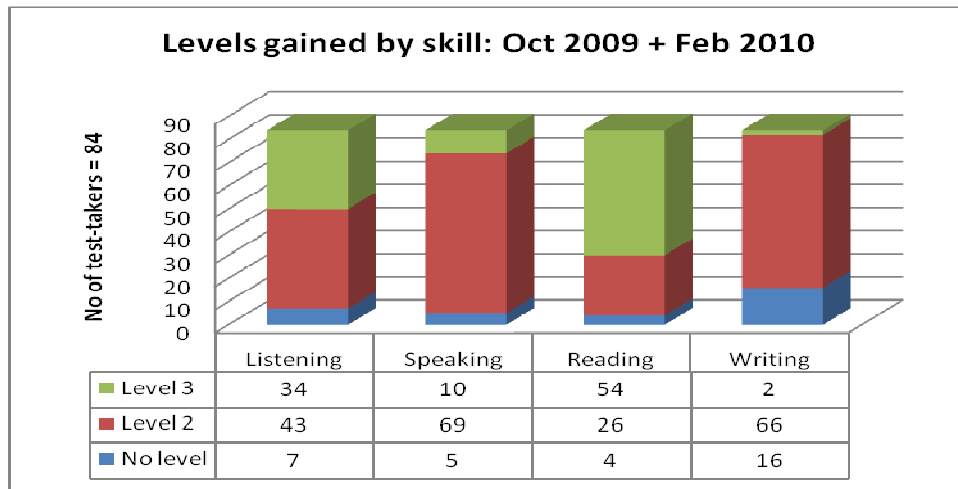
Since June 2009, there have been changes in the personnel of the LTU. The Chief of the LTU, Lt Piret Paju was transferred to J1 of the EDF HQ and, as two of the testers are on maternity leave, the work usually done by four people has had to be done by only two.

Since 2007, the LTU has been offering bi-level tests for levels 2 and 3. The listening and reading tests are developed in cooperating with the Latvian NATO STANAG 6001 Testing Group. So far, three versions of the tests have been developed and we are currently working on Version 4. This bi-lateral cooperation allows us to pool our resources and, hopefully, develop better-quality tests.

In Estonia, three STANAG 6001 testing sessions are usually held every year: two in spring (January/ February and April/ May) and one in autumn (September/ October). Therefore, since June 2009 we have had two testing sessions and are in the middle of the third. All in all, 139 people have taken the test since June 2009, but we have the results for 84 test-takers so far. Certificates for those who are taking the test now will be issued by June 1.

Out of 84 test-takers whose results we have, 4 could not be issued with a certificate as their proficiency was below L2 in more than two skills. Only 2 test-takers had SLP 3333 and 8 SLP 3332. The most common SLPs in Estonia seem to be 3232 (gained by 21 test-takers this time) and 2232 (20 test-takers). 12 test-takers gained SLP 2222.

The chart below shows the levels gained in each of the four skills. Estonian test-takers are best at reading and worst at writing.



In addition to the routine work of test development, administration and assessment, work continues on international standardisation. In 2008, a MILSIG project on standardising the assessment of writing was started. MILSIG is the SIG of Language Testing in the Military of EALTA (European Association of Language Testing and Assessment). The aim of the project is to identify scripts illustrating weak, typical and strong performances at levels 1-4. The scripts could be used for standardising the rating of writing as well as to demonstrate to test-takers typical performances at each level.

The first stage of the project was completed by June 2009 and Ülle Türk, Head of the Language Testing Unit, made two presentations on its results: “Standardising the assessment of writing in English across nations in the military“ at the Sixth EALTA (European Association for Language Testing and Assessment) Annual Conference in Turku, Finland (June 4-6, 2009) and “EALTA

MILSIG – Standardising the assessment of writing across nations“ at the STANAG 6001 Testing Conference in Zagreb, Croatia (July 7-9, 2009). The conclusion drawn was that the project needs to be continued as out of 27 scripts the six participating nations/ institutions could agree on the level of 15. Unfortunately, because of the heavy working load mentioned above, the project has been on hold for almost a year. However, on May 10-14 a Pan-Baltic testing meeting will take place in Riga, Latvia and one of the issues on the agenda will be the standardisation of the assessment of writing.

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