



**BUREAU FOR INTERNATIONAL  
LANGUAGE CO-ORDINATION**

**NATO STANAG 6001**

**LEVEL 4 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

*– A Conceptual Model and Implications for Testing –*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**





## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Framework document is to provide a comprehensive interpretation and a conceptual model of language competence associated with Level 4 IAW the NATO STANAG 6001, Ed. 4 proficiency scale. In addition, the paper discusses requirements for testing language competence at Level 4. This includes the testing construct, suitable techniques, methods and approaches for each language skill area (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the type of testing organization and quality control system required to support Level 4 testing. The paper is intended to enhance the common understanding of the Level 4 descriptors of STANAG 6001. In addition, it can be used as a reference to assist language testers in developing valid, reliable, and practical language tests at Level 4.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The paper was developed by a BILC working group formed to respond to a concern expressed by some nations that occasionally were expected to conduct Level 4 language tests. These nations often felt under-resourced and ill-equipped to meet this requirement. Even though the paper is primarily intended for testing specialists and test developers, it is also expected to serve as a tool for analysing job positions in NATO that require high level foreign language skills and for attaching appropriate Standardized Language Profile (SLP) designations to them.

## 3. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LEVEL 4 PROFICIENCY

Level 4 language is linguistically complex.<sup>1</sup> The STANAG 6001, Ed. 4 label for Level 4 is “Expert”, indicating that this level of language proficiency is typically, although not necessarily and not exclusively, achieved by individuals who use the foreign language extensively on a daily basis as part of their profession or specialisation, usually in an environment where the target language is the primary means of communication.

Level 4 proficiency is usually more characteristic of individual ability than of job requirements. A Level 3 speaker may be able to represent an official position or participate in the negotiation of an agreement. However, a Level 4 speaker will bring to that process a greater understanding and more effective linguistic expression of cultural norms and expectations. The Level 4 user will feel sufficiently at ease when using the language to find socio-culturally appropriate ways to tailor/adjust language to the situation and the person to whom one is speaking (for example,

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that higher level language is also required to perform Level 3 tasks. Level 3 language users need to understand and use abstract linguistic concepts and formulations; their discourse needs to include hypothesis, analysis, and arguments supporting or opposing issues and positions.

to persuade them to reconsider their official point of view). He/she can employ those skills in international professional situations related to his/her specialization as well as in social settings and more informal encounters. Language users at this level are also comfortable with the entire range of styles and registers in the target language, from very formal settings (such as lectures and speeches) to very informal (such as discussions about complex or sensitive topics with close friends). A similar range of abilities is observable in Level 4 users when performing in the other skill areas – listening, reading, and writing.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR TESTING

The paper also reviews the implications of testing at Level 4 across the four skill areas. It addresses some of the complexities associated with test development at this level. These include selection of appropriate texts for testing the receptive skills; techniques for testing at higher levels; and the selection, training, and quality control of appropriate personnel for conducting and rating tests of the productive skills. In addition, the paper emphasizes the importance of establishing a closely-monitored and standardized testing system, which consistently produces ratings that can withstand external challenges and legal scrutiny.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important to point out that the BILC Working Group believes that Level 3 is the highest level of language needed for most requirements of most jobs. Even the language needed for a very high level job task, such as negotiating a treaty, may combine discourse from Level 2 (concrete, factual language) and Level 3 (abstract linguistic formulations) with Level 4 language (nuanced and very precise language, drawn from the individual's area of specialization). One implication of this situation is that a person commanding all of the Level 4 job tasks may not necessarily pass a Level 4 test, because general proficiency is not always congruent with job performance.