SCIENCE FICTION AND MILITARY ENGLISH:
A CASE STUDY IN ITALY AND ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT. *Science Fiction and Military English: A Case Study in Italy and Romania*. Starting from the premise that science fiction arouses the interest of both young adult readers and members of the armed forces, the current paper aims to evaluate the possibility of using this genre as a means of teaching Military English to first-year cadets. Additionally, this is an attempt to fill a gap left by specialized literature at national and international levels. The paper combines an eclectic theoretical framework, a synthesized lesson plan used to design and deliver experimental seminars involving forty cadets from two countries (Italy and Romania) and a survey accompanied by charts and explanations. The lesson plan is largely based on "Rome, Sweet Rome," a 2011 SF short story by military historian James Erwin, and demonstrates that science fiction – particularly military science fiction—can be an alternative solution to traditional textbooks. The collected data prove that SF sources can help teachers conceive instructive and entertaining language classes, while also providing students with a formal, but comfortable environment, meant to facilitate their acquisition of military terminology and specific knowledge according to the STANAG 6001 requirements. The conclusion emphasises the

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great potential of the proposed method, but also signals that its successful implementation is heavily dependent on the teacher's training, commitment and creativity as well as on the students' receptivity.

Keywords: *Italian and Romanian cadets, lesson plan, Military English, science fiction, survey*

REZUMAT. *Literatura științifico-fantastică și engleza militară: un studiu de caz în Italia și România*. Pornind de la premisa că literatura științifico-fantastică suscită deopotrivă interesul tinerilor cititori și al membrilor forțelor armate, lucrarea de față își propune să evalueze posibilitatea utilizării acestui gen literar ca mijloc de predare a limbii engleze militare cadeților din anul I. Se încearcă astfel umplerea unui gol lăsat de literatura de specialitate la nivel național și internațional. Lucrarea combină un cadru teoretic eclectic, un plan de lecție sintetizat, utilizat pentru a proiecta și susține seminarii experimentale cu implicarea a patruzeci de cadeți din două țări (România și Italia) și un sondaj însoțit de grafice și explicații. Planul de lecție se bazează în mare parte pe „Rome, Sweet Rome" ("Roma, dulce Roma"), o nuvelă SF din 2011 scrisă de istoricul militar James Erwin, și demonstrează că textele SF – în special cele cu tematică militară – pot fi o soluție alternativă la manualele tradiționale. Datele colectate demonstrează că sursele SF îi pot ajuta atât pe profesori, să conceapă seminarii instructive și distractive, cât și pe studenți, să învețe într-un mediu formal, dar confortabil, care să le faciliteze însușirea terminologiei militare și a informațiilor specifice, conform cerințelor STANAG 6001. Acest articol se încheie prin a sublinia marele potențial al metodei propuse, semnalând totodată că succesul implementării acesteia depinde în mod semnificativ de pregătirea, angajamentul și creativitatea profesorului precum și de receptivitatea studenților.

Cuvinte-cheie: *cadeți italieni și români, engleza militară, literatura științifico-fantastică, plan de lecție, sondaj de opinie*

Introduction

The "increasing use of English as a second language" and "the increased requirements for second language learning" are – according to the U.S. Army researcher Michael Drillings and CRESST professor Harold F. O'Neil Jr. – among the trends that "will continue well into the 21st century for both the military and civilian sectors" (Drillings and O'Neil 1994, 1). Therefore, despite the emergence and considerable development of applications such as Google Translate or Voice Translator, a good knowledge of English remains a *sine qua non* condition for

cadets who want to improve their academic results and pursue a successful military career in NATO state members such as Italy or Romania. At the same time, professors, teachers or language trainers working in the military institutions of education bear the major responsibility of elaborating instructional strategies and captivating learning activities that can increase students' motivation and proficiency level. Familiarising, however, first year cadets with English for Military Purposes is by far more challenging than focusing on general English. How can classes become educational and entertaining without being reduced to the memorisation of endless lists of technical terms and dry definitions? Likewise, how can teachers of English approach certain military-specific topics without trespassing into areas reserved for colleagues specialised in subjects such as history, sociology, psychology or engineering?

Inspired by well-established Italian Professor Liliana Landofi, who claims that: "Change, particularly at university level, [...] is a process that needs experimentation and try-out with real experiments in formal acquisitional contexts" (Landofi 2017, 137), This paper proposes and tests a solution that can be used to teach English for military purposes while also enhancing general language skills. It introduces science fiction as a pedagogical tool in the design of instructive and entertaining English language classes, while promoting James Erwin's 2011 narrative "Rome, Sweet Rome" as an example of primary source. The abundance of statistics and articles indicate that this genre is highly successful among both young adult readers and members of the armed forces. Therefore, SF primary sources may represent a refreshing solution to overused and often limitative traditional textbooks, when it comes to working with first year cadets. The assessment of this hypothesis is based on a binational survey that summarizes the viewpoints of Italian and Romanian military students. The reasons underlying the association of Romanian and Italian cadets are complex and can be found in other studies that have already been published: "Attitudes of Romanian and Italian Military Students regarding English Second Language Acquisition" (2023) and "The Role of Gender in English Second Language Acquisition: A Comparative Study of Romanian and Italian Military Students" (2022).

In terms of originality, this article does not pretend to 'reinvent the wheel'. It only tries to roll 'that wheel' in a new direction. Literary texts have been employed in the language teaching – learning process since the Middle Ages and perhaps even longer than that. Nonetheless, scholars did not acknowledge this didactic technique prior to the 1980s. Despite its pulp fiction roots and academic dismissal, science fiction may have been utilised by teachers to entertain their students during classes. However, scientific articles exploring this phenomenon have not sprang until recent years. At international level,

research uncovers only a short list of authors who approach this subject: Anson Yang (2001), Peter Stockwell (2001), Muraveva and Agudo (2017) and Marie Thévenon (2018). Romania and Italy seem to be completely devoid of such studies, or if they do exist, they lack public exposure, making them doomed to oblivion. Therefore, this paper marks a significant milestone for both countries.

Structurally, this paper is divided into three parts. The first one offers a theoretical framework, which connects critical studies, language and pedagogy studies, statistics and studies of collective phenomena and processes. In this case, the applied methodology is a qualitative one, as it involves the collection and analysis of extensive studies. The second part outlines a lesson plan based on "Rome, Sweet Rome", a 2011 military science fiction short story written by American historian James Erwin. The design of this plan takes into account the international standards established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Language and the STANAG 6001 Edition 5, as well as a combination of modern and traditional teaching methods. The lesson plan was implemented in April and May 2022 and involved forty Romanian and Italian military students from Bucharest and Viterbo. The last part of this article consists of a survey meant to certify the effectiveness of science fiction as a pedagogical tool. The same students were given the opportunity to answer twelve multiple-choice questions written in English. Seven of them preceded the lesson, highlighting students' general perception of the given subject. The remaining questions were asked at the end of the class in order to provide feedback. It should be noted that the participants in this survey were between the ages of 18-20 and were equally distributed by nationality and gender. The methodology applied here is a mixt one as it relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The collected data are accompanied by explicit charts and expose the similarities and differences that unite, but also separate the interviewees.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Science fiction and Military Implications

When discussing science fiction, most people tend to associate it with various clichés such as imaginative plots, futuristic societies, highly sophisticated technologies, extreme scientific experiments, extra-terrestrial creatures, superheroes and apocalypses (Catană 2016, 167). This genre, however, must not be reduced to superficial views. Science fiction works are incredibly potent as they encompass the social, political, technological and ideological changes

of the time in which they are produced. Likewise, they anticipate the possible outcome of contemporary issues, simultaneously cautioning and educating the audience. Defining science fiction has proven to be particularly difficult as it is in a continuous process of reinvention and hybridization. Adam Roberts explains the resistance of science fiction to encapsulation by emphasising its nature: "[it] is a wide-ranging, multivalent and endlessly cross-fertilising cultural idiom" (Roberts 2006, 2).

Professor Darko Suvin managed to conceive a definition of science fiction in 1979 that has been widely cited ever since. In his view, this genre should be regarded as: "the verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of *estrangement* and *cognition*, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin 1979, 37).

The phrase *verbal construction* refers to the materialisation - usually through words, though it can also be through images, sounds and movement - of an imaginative plot. Endowed with estrangement and cognition, such constructions gradually alienate readers, taking them out of their real world and integrating them into a fictional one, which is accepted as being real. Borrowed from Bertolt Brecht, the term *estrangement* (in German, *Verfremdungseffekt*) is used to underline the magnitude of the cognitive alienation suffered by readers. This process happens gradually, strongly relying on reasoning. It involves - as Adam Roberts claims- "logic implications" and the "constraints of science" (Roberts 2000, 8). Accurate descriptions, achievable scientific events, and pertinent cause-effect relations must be convincingly orchestrated, even if they are not related to reality directly. Despite numerous hybrid texts, traditional science fiction works do not involve the intervention of supernatural or magical elements. A series of key elements fuels the difference between the reality of the SF text and that of the reader. Among these are sophisticated technologies, space or time travel, genetically engineered or extraterrestrial creatures, and environmental disasters. All of these elements are part of the author's proposed fictional mechanism, which the reader accepts without reluctance. Suvin refers to them using the term *novum* (Latin: *new* or *new thing*). According to him, "SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional *novum* … validated by cognitive logic" (Suvin 1979, 63). The concept of hegemony is derived from Karl Marx and emphasizes the importance of maintaining power through persuasion rather than direct force. The author must reassure the reader of the veracity of the *novum* in a subtle rather than conspicuous way.

Military science fiction (MILSF) identifies as a subgenre of science fiction, which is primarily concerned with military organizations or individual members of a chain of command, futuristic weaponry and vehicles (for instance, lasers and space battleships), the mechanics of an armed conflict occurring in outer space, on another planet or in another time dimension and belligerents that may involve extraterrestrials. In addition, MSF texts commonly promote important values such as bravery, sense of duty, discipline, integrity, loyalty, selfless commitment and camaraderie. Given the traditional traits of this genre, it should come as no surprise that a high percentage of MSF authors are active members of the armed forces, veterans or military historians.

Following this line of thought, a good example is the text proposed to the Romanian and Italian military students involved in this project. "Rome, Sweet Rome" is an alternative military history written by Prufrock451, the pen name of American historian James Erwin. It was posted on Reddit, an American social network, on August 21, 2011, triggering a sudden and unexpected frenzy among fans of the genre. This is an account of what might happen if modern-day U.S. Marines encountered the legions led by Augustus Caesar. For unexplained reasons, the 35th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) is relocated from its original base in Kabul, Afghanistan, to the Roman Empire near the Tiber River in 23 BC. The unit consists of 2,200 Marines, 150 Air Force maintenance and repair specialists, 60 Afghan Army soldiers (mostly interpreters and liaisons) as well as 15 U.S. civilian contractors (Prufrock451 2011, 1). Moreover, it is fully equipped with M1 Abrams battle tanks, bulletproof vests, M249 SAW light machine guns, M16A4 rifles, and grenades. Colonel Miles Nelson must weigh his actions carefully because there is no means to replenish fuel or ammunition when they are depleted. Likewise, the Marines are left disadvantaged as they lack the intelligence and combat experience of the Roman legions. Readers are provided with the opportunity to uncover the subtleties of the battle between modern military and ancient legions, by examining the logistical challenges, strategic dilemmas, and the ultimate fate that befall these time-displaced warriors.

1.2. Genre Popularity among Young Adults and Service Members

Throughout its evolution, science fiction has been embraced, but also strongly resented particularly because of its connection with pulp fiction. Detractors frequently asserted that the general interest in science fiction did not reflect its quality, being crude and immature (Landon 2002, 3). The value of any text is subjective and Theodore Sturgeon's 1958 "Law" or "Revelation" is definitive in this regard. The American SF writer and critic highlights that: "The existence of immense quantities of trash in science fiction is admitted and

it is regrettable; but it is no more unnatural than the existence of trash anywhere [therefore] the best science fiction is as good as the best fiction in any field" (qtd in Ibid).

Since 2000, and especially in the last decade, science fiction has dominated both the book and the movie industries. Noah Pflueger-Peters wrote for "The California Aggie" that: "11 of the 20 top domestic grossing movies of the 2010s were science fiction, with a sci-fi movie being the top grossing film for out of the last five years" (Pflueger-Peters 2017). He further stresses that: "in the past two decades, there have been 21 top-grossing sci-fi movies, compared with 24 from every other decade combined" (Ibid). Despite non-traditional publishers being less transparent, Adam Rowe, Forbes columnist, has announced that print and digital book sales in science fiction and fantasy have doubled during this period (Rowe 2018). In reference to the readers' gender, Menadue and Jacups's survey lowers the balance in favour of female respondents, who represent 54.5% of the total readership (Menadue and Jacups 2018, 4). Science fiction has traditionally been viewed as a male-dominated genre. SF books have usually been written by male authors for male readers. According to Darren Beyer, women's interest in science fiction began to increase as their role in society changed significantly (Beyer 2018). The percentage of female readership went from 5-15% in the 1950s, to 25-35% in the 1970s and to around 50% in recent years (Ibid).

Based on the data provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics, Andrea Didato confirmed that survey respondents aged 18 - 24 read the most, as they had "more available time and a greater desire for knowledge" (Didato 2000). According to the same author, "science fiction" was the second preference of 12.6% of the interviewees, being surpassed only by the book category titled "Thrillers and detective stories" which occupied the top position, scoring 27% (Ibid). He also observed that while "Thrillers and detective stories" were popular with all ages and with both genders, "science fiction" belonged to young adults and mostly men (Ibid). In 2020, the Italian National Institute of Statistics, revealed that despite the constantly decreasing number of readers, most of them were 18-19 years old and that women outranked men by 70% (Bologna and Caramis 2022).

The Romanian National Institute of Statistics showed in 2023 that the majority of readers (70.6%) were aged 16-24 and that women were more inclined to read than men (34.4% vs. 24.1%), (Pisică and Rădoi 2023, 43). However, nothing is said regarding their reading preferences. Marius Chivu revealed in his 2013 article "Cît, cum și ce citesc românii" ("How much, how and why do Romanians read?") that according to a survey conducted by www.iVox.ro, 15.5% of the participants favoured fiction books in the detriment of general education books (14%) and specialty books (11%) (Chivu 2013).

The reasons why science fiction is so popular among young people of both genders are quite numerous. To begin with, there is - what John Huntington calls - "the genuine intellectual pleasure to be driven from imagination in the fullest detail possible of a previously unknown or unthought-of machine, society, race or environment" (Huntington 1975, 345). Secondly, as shown in Menadue and Susan Jacups's survey, SF works play an "important influence on the perception and acceptance of science by the public" (Menadue and Jacups 2018, 1). Many of the technologies and scientific experiments that were imagined by SF authors have come to fruition. Flying by plane, crossing the oceans on board of a submarine, or travelling to the Moon and other planets were all actions dismissed as pure fiction, when Jules Verne first described them in his novels. Nowadays, they are only common facts that many of us take for granted. However, for this to occur, Verne and other science fiction authors have consistently prepared their audience. Thirdly, science fiction has the potential to "engage a particular set of problems to which science itself gives rise and which belong, not to the future, but to the present" (Huntington 1975, 345). Young readers of science fiction become more sensitive to issues related to rights and freedoms, ecology, scientific experiments, terrorist attacks, religious fanaticism, war, pandemic, etc.

The interest of the military in science fiction has not been statistically measured so far. Nonetheless, there are numerous service members or veterans, who claim an increased preoccupation for this genre. In this context, Australian Brigadier Mick Ryan claims that Science fiction "should be part of the reading program, and the professional library of military officers" (Ryan 2016). His statement is supported by several reasons, including the fact that this genre reminds [service members] of the enduring nature of [their] profession" (Ibid). Likewise, numerous military professionals offer advice to military science fiction writers on how to improve their stories and make them more accurate in a similar manner. For example, William S. Frisbee Jr., a former US Marine, gives important information on this topic in his guide book, *Writing Military Science Fiction: Infantry* (2018).

To summarise, science fiction dominates both book and movie ranks in the English-speaking countries around the world, but also in Italy and Romania. Despite traditional perceptions, this genre is equally enjoyed by both men and women. However, it does not often cross age boundaries, remaining mostly the preferred choice of teenagers and young adults. Due to its topics (technology, war, chain of command, etc.), the military represents a professional category that is prone to consume, promote, and even produce science fiction.

Based on the data presented above, this section launches the hypothesis that both male and female cadets, aged 18-20, from Romania and Italy, may present an increased interest in science fiction. This fact may enhance their learning of Military English and practice of language skills.

1.3. Science Fiction and Military English

The pedagogical potential of science fiction is undeniable. Apart from the fact that it is in essence "an intellectually stimulating and provocative form of popular literature" (Sawyer and Wright 2011, 5), science fiction can become a tool for teaching and learning new subjects. For instance, back in 1990, Professor Hilary M. Lips published an article on "Using Science Fiction to Teach the Psychology of Sex and Gender". Aiming to help her students "appreciate the impact of gender on social relationships and social structure", she introduced them to "science fiction about worlds in which gender is constructed very differently" (Lips 1990, 197). Several years later, in 2011 and 2015, American authors Stephanie N. Putt and respectively Carisa Ketchen published their works on the use of science fiction to teach science. Putt claims that the "information learned through narratives [such as science fiction texts] can be retained for a longer period of time than information learned through textbooks" (Putt 2011, 1). Carisa Ketchen provides evidence on how science fiction stimulates students' engagement with scientific facts, increases their science literacy skills, and even determines their interest in science related careers (Ketchen 2014, vi). The approach of both authors is strengthened by the fact that many science fiction writers have a scientific background. Think of Isaac Asimov who was a biochemistry professor, Arthur C. Clarke, who had a degree in mathematics and physics or Robert Anson Heinlein, who was an aeronautical engineer and naval officer, and the list may continue.

The association of science fiction and second language acquisition or language for specific purposes has not gained popularity until recent years. The controversial nature of this genre made its use during classes an unconventional choice. In short, it was not something every teacher would dare to use in a formal learning environment. However, there have also been exceptions. Canadian author, Margaret Atwood, admitted that in her youth, she employed science fiction texts in order to teach English to foreign engineers working in her country. As part of this process, she invited her students "to write imitations of Kafka, which [...] might help them in their chosen profession" (qtd. in Rogers 1999, 419).

Teachers have traditionally used literary texts to teach various languages, including English, to pupils and students. This practice has captured the interest of many researchers around the world, particularly since the 1980s. Sandra McKay, for instance, explored the advantages and disadvantages of using literature in her 1982 article titled "Literature in the ESL Classroom". She argued that "if literary texts are to be used successfully in the classroom, they must be carefully selected and approached in a manner which promotes an

aesthetic interaction between the reader and the text" (Mckay 1982, 529). William T. Littlewood's 1986 study titled "Literature in the Second Foreign Language Course" defined "five levels or perspectives for literary works and their place in language instruction" and provided some "criteria for the selection of appropriate texts" (Littlewood 1986, 180). In her 1988 thesis "The effectiveness of fiction versus nonfiction in teaching reading to ESL students", Becky Kay Appley stated that unlike non-fiction, "fiction is more enjoyable" and "seems to be better for teaching direct statements" (Appley 1988, 5). At the beginning of the 1990s, Gillian Lazar published a guide for teachers and trainers, meant to help them "develop a thoughtful and principled approach to using literature in the language classroom" (Lazar 1990, xii). Many more recent studies such as M Enamul's "The Use of Literature in Teaching English as a Foreign Language" (2007), Parlindungan Pardede Christian's "Using Short Stories to Teach Language Skills" (2011) and Supaporn Yimwilail's "An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in an EFL Classroom" (2015) demonstrate that literature is crucial in teaching English language, and that there is an increasing variety of approaches.

Researchers only started promoting the inclusion of science fiction in English second language classes after 2000, possibly due to its rising popularity. Anson Yang wrote in his 2001 article "A Journey into the Future: Using Sci-Fi Stories with EFL Learners" about the use of both film and text versions of science fiction stories in helping students participate confidently in reading classes as well as other "successful methods in eliciting EFL students' discussion" (Yang 2001, 63). Similarly, Peter Stockwell proposed in his 2001 article "Teaching the Future: On the Use of Science Fiction in English Language Learning", some "science fiction texts that explicitly address language issues" and some "practical techniques of using science fiction in the language classroom" (Stockwell 2001, 3). In 2007, authors Muravevaa and Agudo presented their attempt to teach English to Technical degree students while using science fiction materials, especially dystopian narratives. They argued that this way students could improve their "understanding of lexical and grammatical formulas, syntactic relations, discursive particulars and extralinguistic concepts" (Muravevaa and Agudo 2007, 303). One year later, Marie Thévenon stated that certain passages from science fiction novels and films suitable for teaching English to students majoring in biotechnology or astrophysics (Thévenon 2018, 6). These methods can help them improve language skills, while indulging in ethical debates based on scientific facts.

The research conducted so far has not been able to identify any connection between science fiction and English for Military Purposes. Therefore, the present article makes a first step by launching the idea that this genre can be successfully employed in this particular teaching and learning process.

In *Military English: From Theory to Practice* (2015), Valentina Georgieva provides a self-contained definition:

> "Military language as one of languages for special purposes comprises all linguistic means – terms, military slang and military symbols as semiotic signs – for designating military organisations, personnel, military ranks and hierarchy, armament and military equipment, military systems, types of military activities, tasks and operations, which are defined in doctrines, strategies, manuals, guides, orders and similar specialised military/defence national and international documents and collections of informal military slang" (Georgieva 2015, 8).

Just like any other language for specific purposes, Military English "tends to be generally more abstract and less dependent on the immediate setting for its coherence than everyday language use" (Hyland and Jiang 2021, 13). The setting that Hyland and Jiang are talking about, does not necessarily have to be a realistic one reconstructed based on students' books, newspaper articles or military documents. It can very well be a fictional one, as depicted by military science fiction (MSF) texts. Military science fiction does not only include the specific terminology, but also contextualizes it in a dynamic manner, which arouses the interest of both service members and the general public.

Considering the documented attempts to incorporate science fiction into the teaching process of subjects such as psychology, science as well as foreign languages, it becomes no surprise that this genre can also be employed to familiarise cadets with Military English.

2. Lesson Plan: Science Fiction and Military English

This section outlines a lesson plan that illustrates how science fiction can aid cadets in practicing military English in an instructive and entertaining manner. It should be mentioned that this plan has been significantly synthesised for length reasons and works only for orientation purposes. The original plan was implemented with first-year military students enrolled in Bucharest and Viterbo academies, in April and May 2022. As previously stated, the forty participants in this experimental class were between the ages of 18 and 20, and were equally devided by their nationality and gender. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Skills (CEFR), the participants' scores in English were B2 (upper intermediate) and B1 (intermediate). This means that most of them could "understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar" (CEFR 2024). The rest of them can at least "understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in

work, school, leisure, etc" (Ibid). In addition, the cadets had already gained knowledge of basic military vocabulary and related topics. The lesson plan consists of ten main activities, which are preceded by a warm-up questionnaire and followed by feedback.

The estimated time for completing all tasks is 1 hour and 50 minutes. The learning objectives of this experimental lesson are divided into two categories in accordance to their specificity. 1. General objectives: a. to consolidate newly and previously acquired vocabulary related to military branches, ranks, uniforms, equipment, weaponry, vehicles, logistics, combat tactics and strategies; b. to compare modern and ancient military means, and c. to raise cadets' awareness regarding the multidimensional impact of military forces into a foreign territory. 2. Specific objectives: a. to identify essential information related to aspects of the military profession, based on images, written texts and video recordings; b. to use the identified information in conversations and written texts. Performing this lesson in good conditions requires the use of a variety of modern materials, such as Linguaphone system, smart board, projector, headphones, video, photos, copies of military dictionaries, text.pdf, handouts. The types of classroom interaction include: learner-instructor interaction, learner-content interaction, and learner-learner interaction, whereas the applied teaching techniques involve: eliciting, conversation, communication, explanation, exercises, brainstorming and cooperative learning. One of the expected language issues is that the cadets may not be familiar with all the military terminology used in the lesson. In the event that this happens, the teacher can either provide the necessary explanations or request the cadets to identify the necessary information by themselves using military dictionaries or the Internet. A brief presentation of the activities included in the lesson plan is provided below.

Warm-up Activity: Seven introductory questions are asked by the teacher to assess cadets' knowledge of science fiction and the possibility of using it as a tool for Military English practice. The analysis of questions and their answers is completed in the final part of this article.

Activity 1: The teacher displays five photos and invites cadets to describe them. As with all speaking tasks, their responses should be well developed and coherent. They should demonstrate effective use of grammar and military vocabulary (U.S. service branches, ranks, insignia, uniforms, equipment, weaponry etc). Example: The student asked to describe *Image 1.* is expected to indicate what military branch those men belong to, their rank, name their uniform type and distinctive camouflage, talk about their headwear and eyepro (eye protection) as well as boots. Nonetheless, the student should also be able to identify the type of rifle and the additional equipment used by the two men, and describe their posture and the actions.

Activity 2: Listening comprehension. The teacher invites students to watch a video excerpt selected from "Rome, Sweet Rome" (Kelly 2012). After listening to it, students are asked to complete ten sentences that have been extracted from the video by filling in the gaps with the correct military terminology. Example: Nelson's men will soon (1) report that all communication, including GPS and (2) satellite radio, has been completely lost. Nelson is now convinced that something more dreadful has happened - (3) a nuclear war or (4) an EMP. (qtd Kelley 2012)

Activity 3: Based on the previous activity, the teacher asks students five questions and expects them to provide the answers. Example: 1. What would happen if cutting-edge military powers clashed with ancient battle strategies?

Activity 4: The teacher instructs students to take turns and read Parts Two and Three of "Rome, Sweet Rome". They are tasked with identifying 10 military terms and defining them. 1. Humvees - (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) a range of high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles that are lightweight, four-wheel drive, military trucks and utility vehicles.

Activity 5: The teacher asks five questions based on the previous text and the students are required to respond to them. 1. Why were all fixed-wing aircraft and fight helicopters rendered inoperable?

Activity 6: The teacher shows a picture of a Boeing Vertol CH-46 Sea Knight, a helicopter mentioned in "Rome, Sweet Rome", and students are encouraged to participate in this activity. Ten components need to be identified and defined.

Example: 10. Rotor blades - the four long, flat, thin pieces of metal on top of a helicopter, which go round and lift it off the ground. CH-46 features fiberglass rotor blades.

Activity 7: Students are invited by the teacher to explore sections Four and Five of "Rome, Sweet Rome". There have been seven paragraphs removed from the extract. Students are required to choose from paragraphs A-H the one that best matches each gap. There is an extra paragraph that they do not need to use.

Activity 8: Multiple choice exercise. For sentences 1-10, students have to read sections Six and Seven of "Rome, Sweet Rome" and select which answer (A, B, C, or D) is the most appropriate for each gap. Example: 1. "The Marine negotiating team heads east in an (1.) D. armed convoy: three Humvees with two helicopters riding shotgun" (Prufrock451 2011). A. naval convoy; B. convoy control; C. humanitarian convoy; D. armed convoy

Activity 9: Students are required to write a short essay (250-300 words) that summarizes and evaluates the main ideas from section Eight of "Rome, Sweet Rome". The teacher displays their essays on the smart board, encourages students to read them and engage in discussion.

Activity 10: Teamwork. Students are invited to form groups of five members each, and do brainstorming in order to identify a possible ending to James Erwin's "Rome, Sweet Rome". Their ideas should be presented in a brief essay (350-500 words). The text should be read by a team leader. The teacher projects the essays on the smart board. Arguments for and against the presented endings should be provided by each group.

Feedback: Five final questions are asked by the teacher, and students are encouraged to provide their answers. The survey below includes the questions and their answers.

3.The Results of the Student Survey

3.1. Before the lesson:

Question 1: Do you like science fiction?

Most students (70%) are enthusiastic about science fiction, whether it is in the form of movies or books. Despite the constant decrease in the number of readers, young adults still read and prefer science fiction, as evidenced by their responses. In this particular case, Italian male students like this genre the most, although they would rather watch movies more than read books. It is also evident that, contrary to their female colleagues, male students have a higher preference for science fiction. During the warm up activity, one of the Italian girls confessed that: "Personally, I do not like science fiction very much because, even if I believe in science and its progress, I think it is a genre too far away from concrete reality and, therefore, it shows us a view that can hardly come true in our present". Nonetheless, she claimed that science fiction could be used to teach English.


Table 1
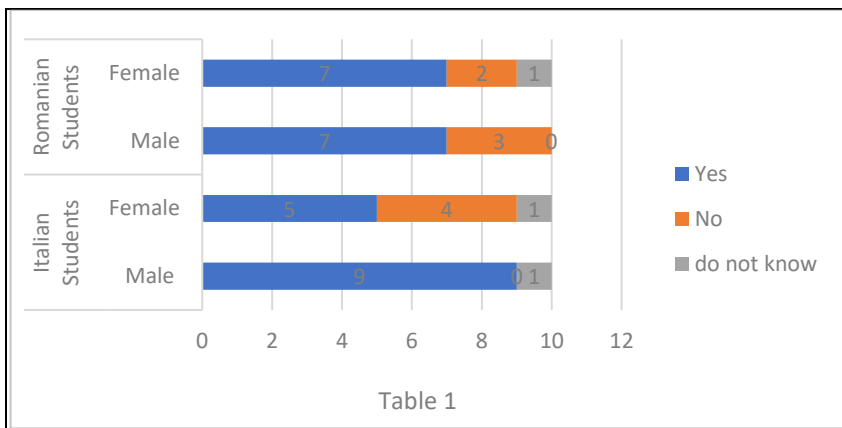
Question 2: In your opinion, which statement defines best science fiction?

Almost all students comprehend the thematic complexity of science fiction. They are able to identify the best description from the several options provided to them, demonstrating their knowledge in the field.

a form of fiction that deals principally with aliens and spaceships

a form of fiction that deals with actual or new scientific discoveries, technologies and different social systems.

a form of fiction that deals with annoying situations

a form of fiction about magical things

a form of fiction about things do not exist or will never happen

Table 2
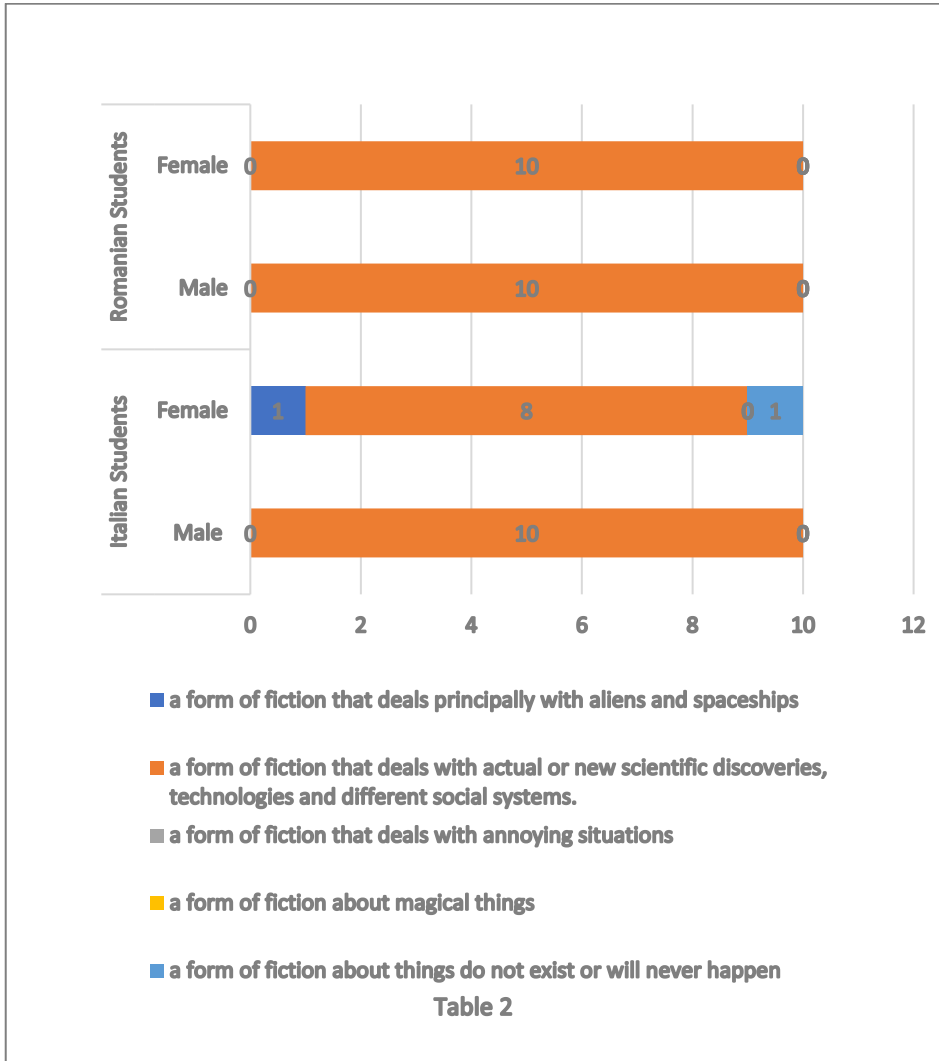
Question 3: Can science fiction include military vocabulary and topics?

All students agree that science fiction may include military terminology while depicting military activities, such as armed conflicts, weaponry, heroic officers or non-coms, and various other aspects of military life.

Table 3
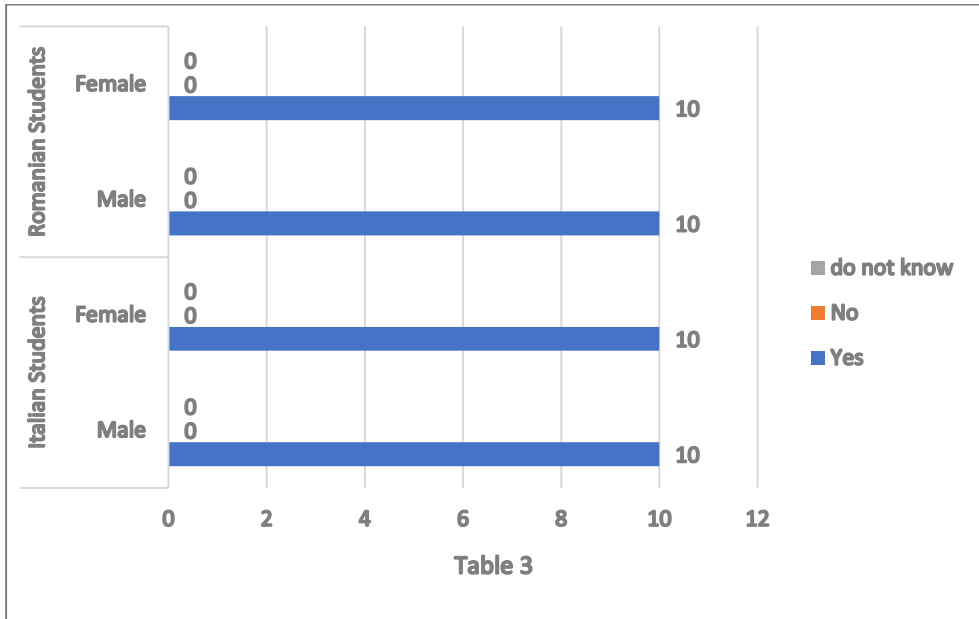
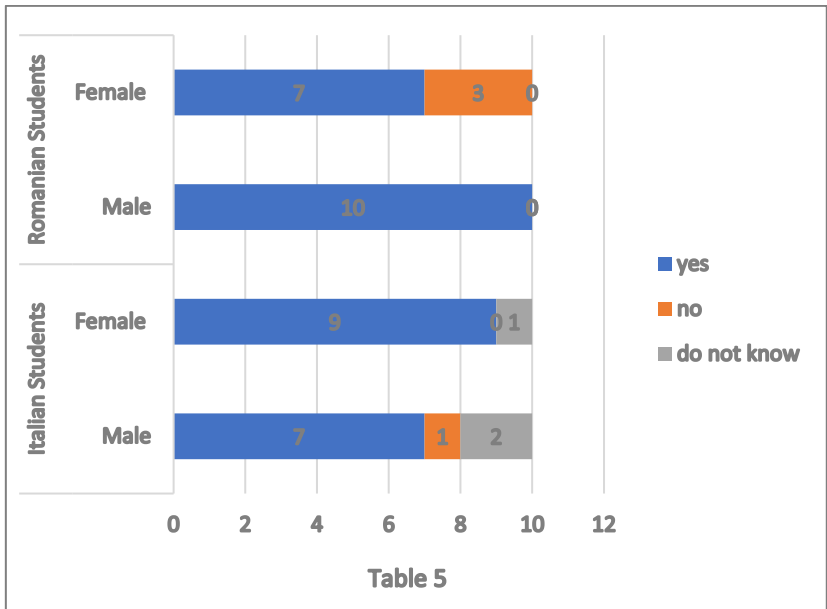Question 4: Do you watch SF movies or read SF books?

Science fiction is consumed by 60% of students, whether they read books, graphic novels, comics, or watch movies. Obviously, movies are their first option. In the discussion that followed this interview many male students provided examples of sci-fi war movies they already watched on Netflix such as *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2017), *War of the Worlds* (2005), *Battleship* (2012) or *World Invasion* (2011).

Table 4

|		Yes	No	do not know
Romanian Students	Female	6	3	1
Romanian Students	Male	6	3	1
Italian Students	Female	5	3	2
Italian Students	Male	7	2	1
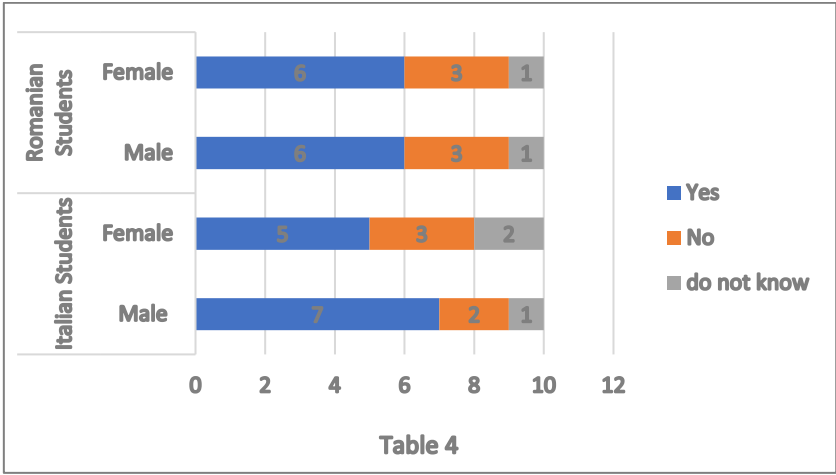
Question 5: Could your level of English improve based on SF books or movies?

Most students are open to the idea of improving their level of English based on reading SF books or watching movies. The only downside in this process is related to reading. Reading books, especially as homework, is a real challenge.

Table 5

		yes	no	do not know
Romanian Students	Female	7	3	0
Romanian Students	Male	10	0	
Italian Students	Female	9	0	1
Italian Students	Male	7	1	2

Question 6: Do you think science fiction texts / videos could make English seminars more entertaining?

According to 52.5% of the total number of students, science fiction texts and videos can improve their English skills in a more pleasant way. Although the students who support this attempt come from both genders, men seem to be more confident. Likewise, Italians are more interested in such a project than Romanians. During the discussions that followed this question, two girls qualified the use of science fiction as "interesting" and "entertaining" and manifested their desire to fulfil various language tasks based on SF materials. The same Italian girl who provided a negative answer to question 1, added in this case: "I believe that analysing science fiction should improve our language skills by learning more technical and specific words and this should be useful to expand our vocabulary".

Table 6
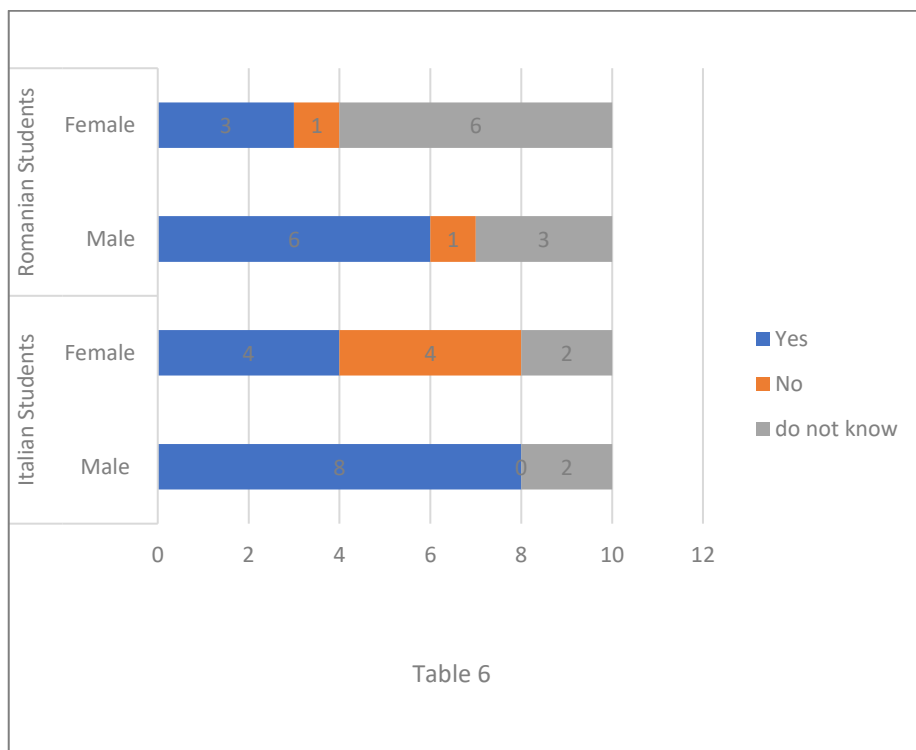
Question 7: What sort of English activities could be developed using science fiction sources?

Students are able to identify various language activities based on SF sources. This proves the fact that science fiction can have great pedagogical potential in helping students improve their English skills. The majority of interviewees believe that science fiction may involve activities that require *reading* or *listening comprehension*. 37.5% imagine more complex activities such as *role play* and *group debates*, which could help them improve their conversation skills and vocabulary. A small share of students (7.5%) venture to choose *writing* as a creative activity, which would help them improve their essays.

Table 7
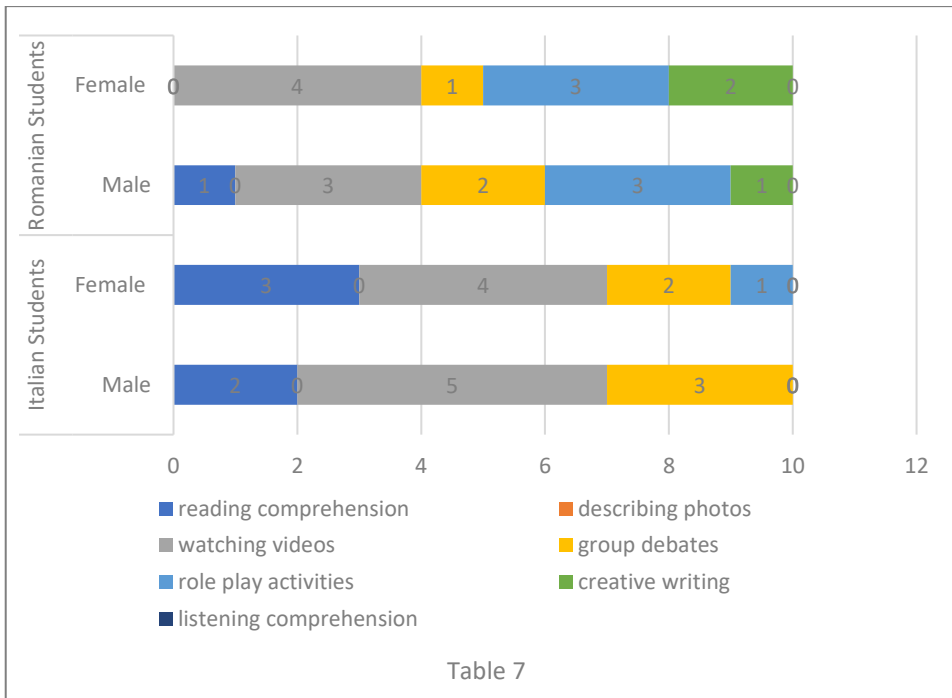
3.2. After the lesson

Question 8: Do you qualify this English class as being instructive and entertaining?

This English class is considered both instructive and entertaining by all students, regardless of their nationality or gender. Using a genre that appealed to their interests and age category, they improved military vocabulary and practiced language skills within a formal but comfortable context.

Table 8
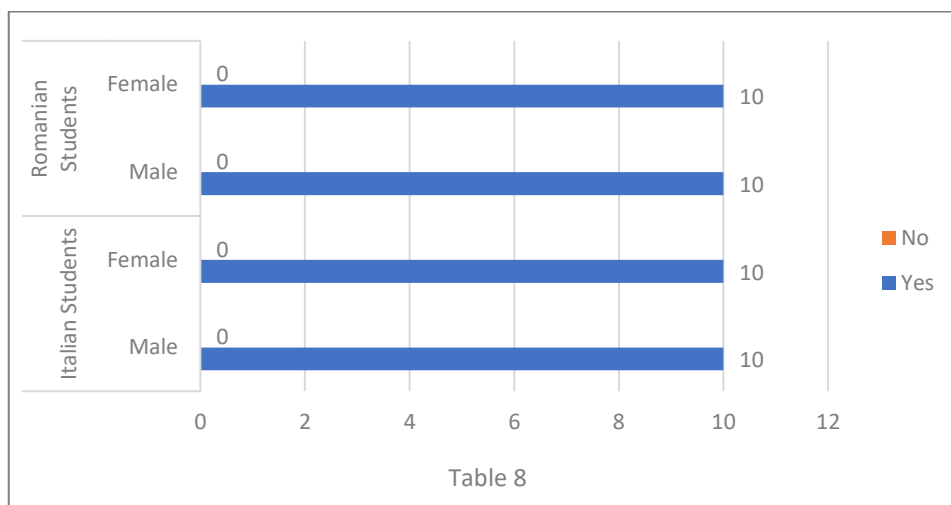
Question 9: What was the easiest class activity that you attended to?

Italian students found *listening* to be the easiest activity, while their Romanian peers chose *reading*. Female students in both countries tend to favour speaking more than their male colleagues; a fact that confirms their holistic approach on learning a language.


Table 9
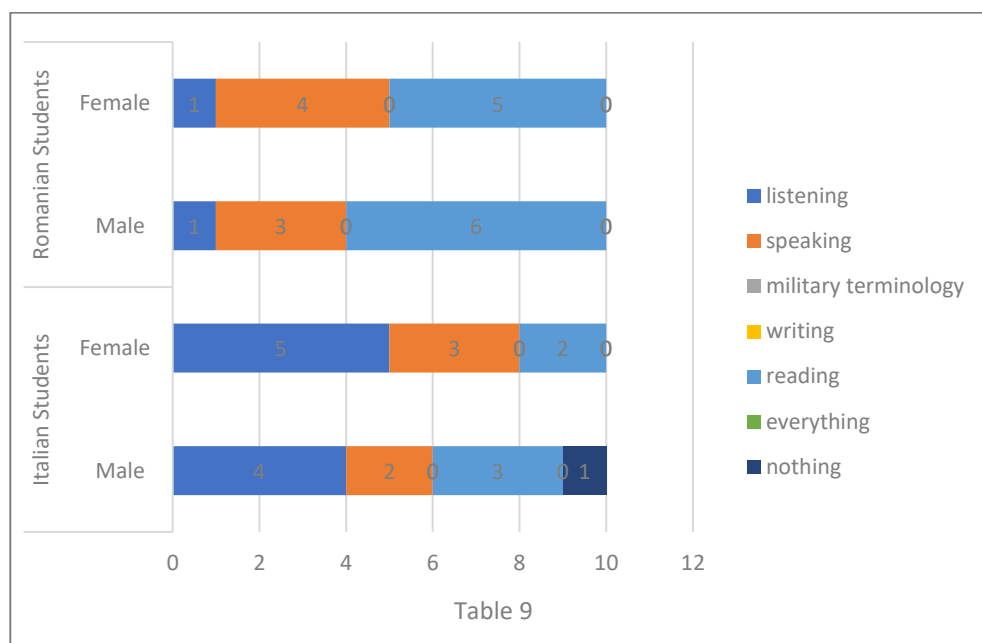
Question 10: What was the most difficult class activity?

Most students (60%) regard *military vocabulary* as being the most difficult feature of the class. Acquiring military vocabulary requires additional preparation and research. However, this is the main task that cadets have to fulfil in order to pass the STANAG 6001 exams that are waiting for them at the end of their Bachelor studies. *Writing* an essay on a military topic is not an easy task either. Not only that students have to employ the specific terminology, but they also have to apply certain writing strategies. A few students also claimed that *all activities* had presented a significant degree of difficulty.


Table 10
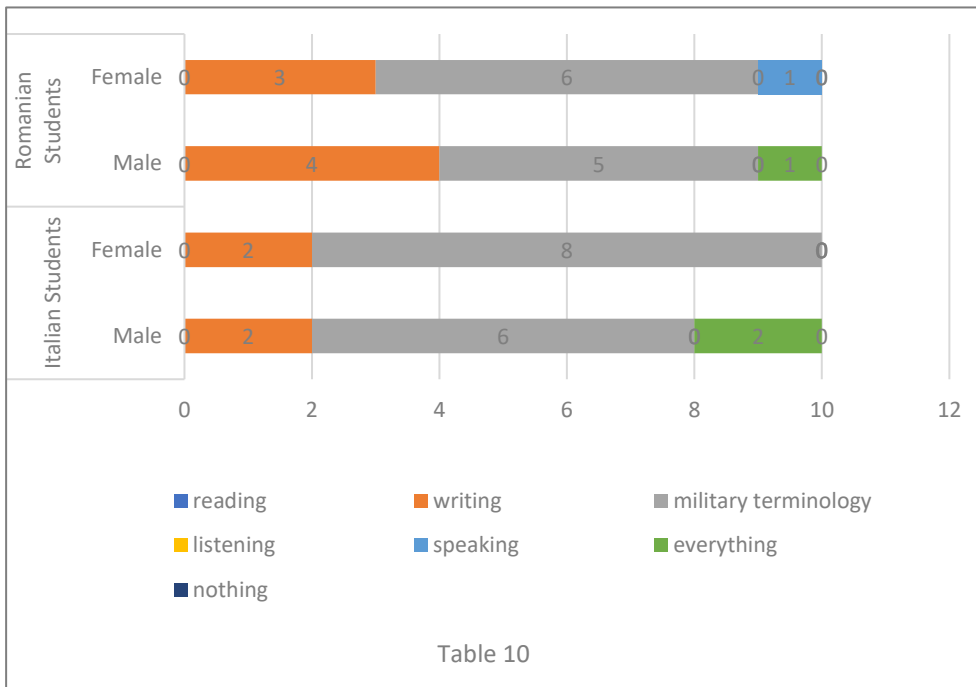
Question 11: Identify the activity that is most beneficial for learning Military English.

The activity that most students consider the best for studying Military English is *conversation*. However, they seem to consider *all activities* extremely important. While female colleagues recognize the importance of all activities in learning Military English, most male students prefer to use military vocabulary when talking.

Table 11
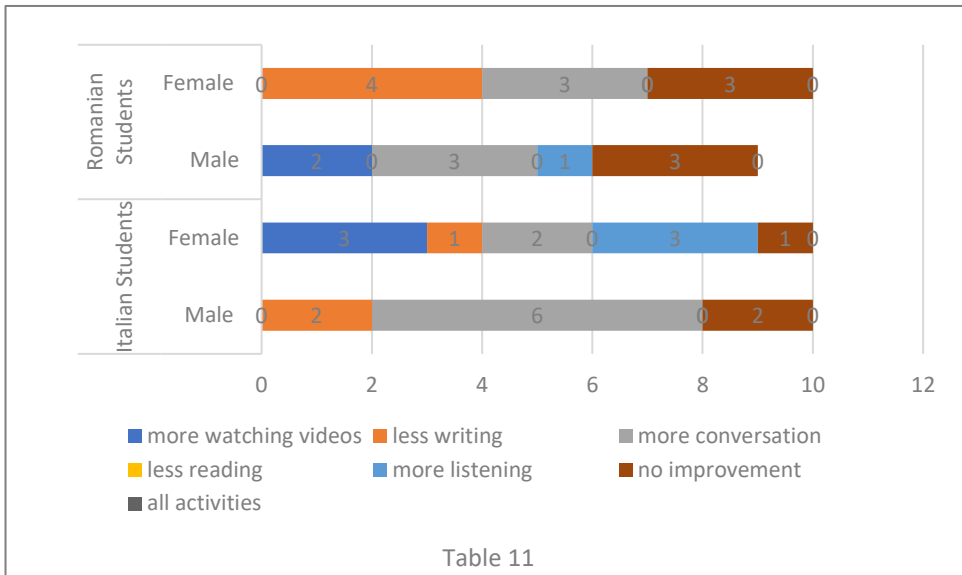
Question 12: What enhancements would you make to the class activities?

The class they attended seems to have satisfied most students. The majority stated that there were no improvements needed for its activities. To enhance something, they would prefer *more conversation* and *less writing*. However, it is impossible to avoid writing activities because STANAG 6001 evaluates both oral and written performance of candidates.

Table 12
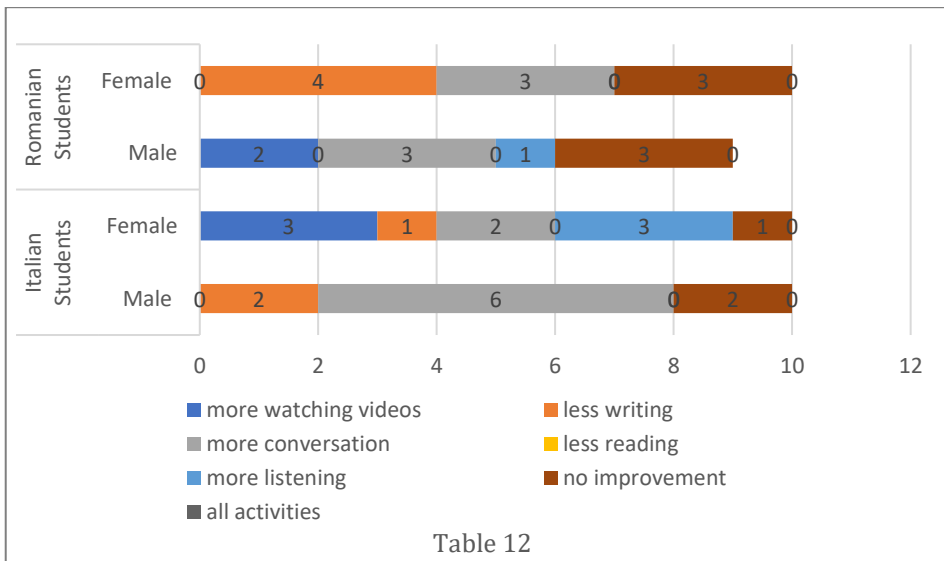
Conclusion

By combining an eclectic theoretical framework, a synthesised lesson plan and a survey, this article has introduced and assessed the prospect of utilizing science fiction as an approach to teaching Military English.

The theoretical section has highlighted the fact that science fiction is a complex genre, whose definition goes beyond traditional clichés. Likewise, it has revealed that this genre offers a rich background for exploring military topics and vocabulary implicitly. In terms of popularity, science fiction dominates international reading surveys being preferred especially by young adult readers and presumably by both males and females. Due to their military themes, science fiction works also appeal to members of the armed forces. Active service members and veterans' interest in science fiction has been revealed on numerous websites.

Research has brought to the fore the use of science fiction in the teaching of subjects such as psychology, science, and foreign languages. However, it identified a gap regarding the use of this genre in the teaching of Military English and established its fulfilment as a goal of this article.

The lesson plan that was implemented with forty Italian and Romanian cadets demonstrates that science fiction can provide the opportunity to design a significant number of activities. All of them can facilitate the acquisition of Military English in a formal, but comfortable environment.

The survey has indicated that all participants comprehend the thematic complexity of science fiction and recognize that SF texts can contain military terminology and topics. This genre is enjoyed by more than half of the cadets, who are enthusiastic consumers of both SF books and movies. It seems that Italian male students have a fondness for this genre, even though they prefer watching movies over reading books. Contrary to Menadue and Jacups' 2018 study which states that female respondents (54.5%) enjoy science fiction more than their counterparts (Menadue and Jacups 2018, 4), this survey shows that science fiction is still a male favourite genre.

The idea that science fiction could improve their military knowledge and English skills is widely accepted by students. In this respect, they are able to identify various language activities based on science fiction sources, their main options being *reading* and *listening comprehension,* but also *role play* and *group debates*. The experimental English class was deemed beneficial for acquiring military vocabulary and practicing language skills by all participants. The easiest activities for Italian and Romanian male students are *listening* and *reading*, while their female colleagues opt for *speaking*, which reveals their holistic approach to language learning. *Learning military vocabulary* is the most challenging activity students were asked to complete. This is followed by *writing*, a task that

students are conditioned to cope with, because of the STANAG 6001 exams. The study of Military English is – according to the cadets – best enhanced by *conversation*. The majority of students, 70%, have concluded that there are no improvements needed for the class activities.

To conclude, science fiction has the potential to be an effective teaching and learning tool for Military English. Nonetheless, its implementation is heavily reliant on the teacher's training, commitment, and creativity, as well as the students' receptiveness.

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