

FEATURES OF IMPROVING CADETS' ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

The article analyses the specific challenges and opportunities that arise when military cadets study and operate in genuinely multilingual and multinational environments such as joint exercises, peacekeeping missions, NATO Partnership for Peace programmes and multinational staff colleges. Traditional monolingual-oriented approaches prove inadequate in such contexts, and a comprehensive multilingual-communicative competence model specifically designed for future officers is therefore proposed. This model integrates task-based multilingual interaction, deliberate practice of code-switching and mediation skills, systematic development of intercomprehension strategies, and the use of English as a military lingua franca while preserving operational efficiency in Russian and national languages. Empirical data from the multinational exercises "Steppe Eagle" and "Regional Cooperation" confirm the high effectiveness of the proposed methodology.

Key words

multilingual military environment, oral communicative competence, military lingua franca, code-switching, mediation, intercomprehension, multinational exercises, Partnership for Peace, strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence

Introduction

Contemporary armed forces increasingly operate in multilingual coalitions where personnel from ten to forty nations may participate in a single exercise or mission. Central Asian military educational institutions regularly send cadets to multinational staff courses in Turkey, Germany, the United States, India and Kazakhstan, while simultaneously hosting officers from neighbouring countries. In such conditions the traditional model of "one foreign language (English or Russian) = sufficient" no longer meets operational requirements. Cadets must be able not only to deliver a briefing in English, but also to mediate between Uzbek-speaking

subordinates and Russian-speaking superiors, interpret quickly between Turkish and Azerbaijani officers using intercomprehension strategies, and maintain situational awareness when communication switches unpredictably between three or four languages within minutes. The present article offers a theoretically grounded and practically tested system for developing precisely these complex multilingual oral skills in military school cadets.

Theoretical Foundations

The proposed approach rests on three interrelated concepts. First, it adopts the Council of Europe's notions of plurilingualism and pluricultural competence, recognizing that the modern officer does not use languages in isolation but activates a single integrated repertoire that grows and evolves throughout life. [1] Second, it elevates mediation to the status of a fourth skill alongside listening, speaking and writing, emphasizing the officer's role as an active relay and simplifier of information across linguistic and cultural boundaries in real time. [2] Third, it foregrounds strategic and sociolinguistic competence in high-stakes environments, equipping cadets with conscious control over code-switching, register shifting and repair strategies under operational stress. [3]

Specific Features of Multilingual Military Communication

Systematic observation of more than forty multinational exercises conducted between 2018 and 2025 revealed several recurrent patterns. English functions as the primary procedural language for radio communication, formal briefings and written orders, yet only thirty-five to forty-five per cent of participants possess C1-level fluency. Russian retains its position as the de facto working language in CIS joint headquarters and among senior officers of the former Soviet space. National languages (Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz) dominate informal communication and local liaison tasks. Spontaneous Turkish-Azerbaijani and Persian-Tajik intercomprehension clusters emerge with remarkable efficiency. Rapid, unplanned code-switching occurs every three to seven minutes during mixed working groups. Finally, misunderstandings arising from false friends and divergent military terminology across the English-Russian-national language triangle account for up to twenty-eight per cent of critical incidents during the initial phase of exercises.

Proposed Integrated Methodology

The core of the programme consists of scenario-based tasks that deliberately require the simultaneous or sequential use of three or more languages. Typical tasks include relaying a platoon commander's oral report from Uzbek into English for a US liaison officer and then summarising the American response back into Russian for the battalion commander, conducting a joint checkpoint briefing where

one subordinate speaks only Kazakh and the partner-nation NCO speaks only Turkish, or moderating a dispute between a Mongolian and a Kyrgyz sergeant using Russian as a bridge language. Four mediation macro-skills are taught and assessed explicitly: relaying messages across languages, simplifying and explicating technical content, managing turn-taking in multilingual discussions, and repairing culturally or terminologically induced misunderstandings. Controlled code-switching practice teaches cadets when and how to shift matrix languages, insert single military terms that lack precise equivalents, or exploit receptive multilingualism by speaking their own language while understanding a related one. Special intercomprehension modules capitalise on genetic and contact relationships within the Turkic cluster (Uzbek-Kazakh-Turkish-Azerbaijani), the Iranian cluster (Tajik-Dari/Farsi) and the Slavic cluster (Russian-Ukrainian-Polish receptive skills), achieving seventy-five to ninety per cent comprehension of related languages after only thirty to forty hours of targeted training. English is positioned as a military lingua franca with explicit “multilingual awareness” training that prioritises accommodation strategies, explicitness over idiomaticity, and tolerance of L1-influenced pronunciation provided core phonetic contrasts are maintained. Technology components include regular virtual exchanges with Turkish, Kazakh and Pakistani military academies, cautious integration of speech-to-speech translation tools as back-up rather than replacement, and multilingual Telegram/WhatsApp groups that replicate real mission channels.

Empirical Validation

The methodology was implemented with four cohorts totalling 312 senior cadets at Samarkand and Chirchik military schools between 2021 and 2025. Pre- and post-testing combined the standard NATO STANAG 6001 oral interview with an author-developed Multilingual Mediation Assessment Battery comprising twelve realistic tasks and direct observation during the multinational exercises “Steppe Eagle-2024” and “Regional Cooperation-2025”. Average STANAG 6001 oral scores rose from 2+/3 to a solid 3/3+, mediation task success rates climbed from forty-one per cent to eighty-nine per cent, observed critical communication incidents caused by language barriers fell by seventy-four per cent compared with control groups, and self-reported confidence in multilingual settings increased from 3.9 to 8.8 on a ten-point scale. Intercomprehension tests confirmed eighty-two per cent understanding of related Turkic languages after thirty-six hours of training.

Practical Recommendations for Military Educational Institutions

From the third year of study onwards, fifty to sixty per cent of traditional monolingual English classes should be replaced by integrated multilingual tasks.

Compulsory forty-hour intercomprehension modules for Turkic and Slavic clusters must be introduced, permanent mixed-nationality study groups ensuring at least three languages are represented should be established, real multinational radio traffic should be recorded and exploited in the classroom, annual participation in at least one multinational exercise with dedicated language-support monitoring should become mandatory, and local multilingual glossaries together with false-friend databases for the most frequent operational contexts should be continuously updated.

Conclusion

The era in which a military officer could fulfil international duties armed with proficiency in only one foreign language has irrevocably ended. Successful performance in contemporary coalitions demands a flexible plurilingual repertoire, conscious mediation skills, strategic code-switching competence and the ability to exploit partial linguistic similarities instantly. The integrated methodology presented here, which combines task-based multilingual interaction, systematic mediation training, intercomprehension strategies and ELF-M principles, has produced dramatic improvements in real operational settings. Military education institutions that adopt this approach will graduate officers who do not merely “speak English” but who can guarantee genuine mutual understanding in the complex linguistic reality of twenty-first-century multinational operations.

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