

## PRAGMATIC EFFECTIVENESS AND COMMUNICATIVE OPTIMIZATION METHODS OF MILITARY COMMAND SENTENCES IN BILINGUAL MILITARY OPERATIONS

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**Abstract.** This article examines the pragmatic effectiveness and communicative optimization methods of military command sentences within bilingual military operations. Military communication requires maximum clarity, brevity, and unambiguous directive force, particularly when soldiers operate across two or more languages. Drawing on speech act theory, relevance theory, and politeness theory, the study investigates how command sentences are structurally and pragmatically adapted to preserve illocutionary force during interlingual transmission. The analysis reveals that bilingual military contexts generate unique communicative tensions between linguistic economy and semantic precision, between hierarchical authority and cooperative compliance. Optimized command structures are identified through corpus-informed analysis of military discourse, demonstrating that effective bilingual commands rely on parallelism, modal reduction, and prosodic standardization. The findings contribute to applied military linguistics and have practical implications for multinational force training, interpreter briefing protocols, and command language policy design.

**Keywords:** military command sentences, bilingual military operations, pragmatic effectiveness, speech act theory, communicative optimization, illocutionary force, military discourse, directive language, interlingual transmission, multinational military communication.

Military communication occupies a uniquely high-stakes domain within applied linguistics. Unlike civilian discourse, military command language is constrained by operational urgency, strict hierarchical relations, and the irreversible consequences of miscommunication. These features intensify in bilingual or multilingual military operations, where directives must retain their full pragmatic force across languages that may differ substantially in syntactic structure, pragmatic convention, and sociocultural norms of authority. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces, and various bilateral military coalitions increasingly conduct operations that require real-time, high-fidelity communication across language boundaries (Chilton, 1985). The study of military command sentences from a pragmatic perspective has gained traction in recent decades. Researchers have examined how commands function as speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), how they encode social hierarchy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and how they are adapted for operational brevity (Liedtke, 2008). However, comparatively little attention has been paid to the optimization strategies employed when military commands must be produced, transmitted, and received in two distinct languages simultaneously or sequentially. This gap is particularly significant given the proliferation of multinational military coalitions since the early 1990s. The present article addresses this gap by examining how military command sentences are pragmatically optimized for bilingual operational contexts. The central thesis is that effective bilingual military communication is not merely a matter

of translation but requires systematic communicative optimization that accounts for illocutionary mapping, syntactic reconfiguration, and cross-linguistic directive alignment. Drawing on a synthesis of speech act theory, relevance theory, and corpus-based military discourse analysis, this article develops a theoretical framework for understanding and improving command sentence pragmatics in bilingual military settings. The article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a review of relevant theoretical frameworks. Section 3 examines the structural and pragmatic properties of military command sentences. Section 4 analyzes communicative optimization strategies in bilingual contexts. Section 5 discusses the implications of these strategies for military language policy and training, and Section 6 concludes with directions for future research. The foundational framework for analyzing military command sentences derives from In bilingual military contexts, the illocutionary mapping problem arises when a directive in one language does not find a structurally equivalent directive in another. For instance, English military commands frequently employ bare imperatives ('Advance!', 'Hold position!'), while other languages may conventionally encode commands with modal constructions or subjunctive forms. When such structural differences are not accounted for in bilingual command design, the illocutionary force of the original directive may be weakened, ambiguated, or entirely lost in cross-linguistic transmission (Searle, 1969). Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory provides a complementary framework for understanding how military commands achieve communicative efficiency. According to relevance theory, human communication is governed by a principle of optimal relevance: an utterance communicates a presumption that it is relevant enough to be worth the addressee's processing effort. In military command language, this principle is operationalized through extreme economy: commands are stripped of pragmatic redundancy, politeness markers, and elaborative content that would increase processing effort without adding operational information. Bilingual military communication complicates this economy because the cognitive effort required to process a command in a non-dominant language is inherently greater. Studies of bilingual processing suggest that second-language comprehension of rapid, formulaic speech—a characteristic feature of military discourse—requires significantly greater cognitive load than first-language processing (Grosjean, 2010). Communicative optimization in bilingual military commands must therefore account not only for semantic fidelity but also for processing efficiency, favoring standardized, high-frequency lexical forms and syntactic constructions that reduce cognitive load for bilingual recipients. Military discourse, however, institutionally suspends many of these mitigation strategies because directness and immediacy of compliance are operationally paramount. The tension between face-threat mitigation and operational directness is resolved in military discourse through institutional role enactment: soldiers implicitly consent to the suspension of normal negative face protections as part of their military role. However, this resolution is culturally and linguistically specific. In bilingual military operations involving personnel from different military cultures, the pragmatic conventions governing face-threat mitigation in commands may differ substantially, creating potential for misinterpretation, delayed compliance, or interpersonal friction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Cross-cultural pragmatic divergence in command reception is thus an additional variable that bilingual military communication strategies must address. Military command sentences are characterized by a cluster of distinctive syntactic features that

distinguish them from everyday directive speech. The most salient of these is the prevalence of the bare imperative, a syntactic construction in which the verb appears in its base form without an overt subject. This construction is pragmatically unmarked for politeness and syntactically compact, allowing for rapid processing and unambiguous directive interpretation (Chilton, 1985). Military command manuals across multiple national traditions privilege this form precisely because of its processing efficiency and its resistance to pragmatic ambiguity. Beyond the bare imperative, military commands frequently employ nominal command style, in which noun phrases or abbreviations substitute for full clausal structures ('All units, advance!'; 'Fire at will!'). This nominalization reflects the influence of military discourse conventions that prioritize brevity and standardization over grammatical completeness. Additionally, military commands in operational contexts frequently employ vocative-first ordering, in which the addressee's rank, unit designation, or call sign precedes the directive content. This structure serves both a pragmatic and an organizational function: it identifies the intended recipient of the command before the command itself is delivered, reducing the risk of misaddressed directives in multi-party communication environments (Liedtke, 2008). A central pragmatic property of military command sentences is illocutionary transparency: the directive force of the utterance must be immediately recoverable by the hearer without requiring pragmatic inference. In standard communicative contexts, the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts allows speakers to accomplish social goals while maintaining ambiguity or deniability. Military discourse largely eliminates this ambiguity by conventionalizing a small set of directive forms whose illocutionary value is institutionally fixed. The phrase 'Move out!' in military English, for example, carries the force of an immediate order regardless of its surface form, and its illocutionary value is not negotiable through pragmatic reinterpretation (Austin, 1962). The requirement for illocutionary transparency creates specific challenges in bilingual command contexts. When commands are transmitted through interpretation, the interpreter must preserve not only the semantic content but also the pragmatic weight of the original directive. Research on military interpretation has documented instances in which interpreters, drawing on civilian communication norms, soften or hedge commands in translation, thereby reducing their illocutionary force and potentially compromising operational compliance (Dragovic-Drouet, 2007). Optimized bilingual command protocols must therefore include explicit guidance on illocutionary mapping, ensuring that interpreters are trained to prioritize directive force over pragmatic mitigation. Military commands are not purely linguistic phenomena; they are also prosodically and paralinguistically encoded. The distinctive prosodic profile of military commands—including elevated pitch, increased loudness, sharp onset, and terminal falling intonation—contributes significantly to their pragmatic impact. These prosodic features function as force amplifiers, reinforcing the illocutionary weight of the command and signaling its urgency. In bilingual military communication, prosodic conventions may vary across languages and military cultures, potentially creating mismatches between the intended and received pragmatic force of a command (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Standardization of prosodic command features across bilingual military units is therefore an important component of communicative optimization. NATO's Standardization Agreements (STANAGs) have addressed some aspects of cross-linguistic command standardization, particularly in the context of air traffic control and naval operations, where the consequences of miscommunication are most

severe. However, prosodic standardization of ground-force commands in bilingual contexts remains an underexplored area of military language policy. One of the most widely implemented communicative optimization strategies in bilingual military operations is the development of standardized command vocabularies. These vocabularies consist of a finite set of high-frequency, cross-linguistically stable command terms that are taught to all personnel regardless of their first language. The use of English as a lingua franca in NATO operations represents the most prominent example of this strategy, but bilingual military forces—including the Canadian Armed Forces, the Swiss Federal Forces, and various UN peacekeeping contingents—have developed their own standardized multilingual command lexicons (NATO, 2016). Effective command vocabulary standardization requires careful attention to cross-linguistic phonological compatibility: command terms must be easily pronounceable and discriminable across the phonological systems of both languages involved. Terms that are phonologically confusable in one language may be safe in another, creating asymmetric risk profiles in bilingual command environments. Optimization of command vocabulary therefore requires phonological auditing in addition to semantic and pragmatic analysis, a procedure that is rarely formalized in existing military language policy frameworks. A second major optimization strategy is the use of syntactic parallelism: structuring commands in both languages according to identical or closely parallel syntactic templates. When commands in Language A and Language B share the same argument structure, modifier placement, and clause ordering, the cognitive effort required to process bilingual commands is substantially reduced, and the risk of syntactic misinterpretation is minimized (Grosjean, 2010). Military command templates—pre-formatted command structures into which operational variables are inserted—represent a practical implementation of this principle. Template-based command design also facilitates automatic, pre-attentive processing of command structures, an important advantage in high-stress operational environments where cognitive resources are taxed by competing demands. Research on stress and language processing indicates that under acute stress, speakers and hearers tend to rely more heavily on formulaic, automated linguistic processing and less on flexible inferential processing (Liedtke, 2008). Bilingual military command templates exploit this tendency by reducing the inferential load associated with novel or variable command structures, thereby improving compliance speed and accuracy. Research on military interpreting identifies several recurring pragmatic failures in interpreter-mediated command communication, including illocutionary softening, face-saving hedging, and culturally motivated paraphrase (Dragovic-Drouet, 2007). In practice, bilingual military units often develop spontaneous code-switching conventions, integrating lexical or syntactic elements from both languages within a single command utterance. While such hybrid forms may appear to violate the principles of linguistic standardization, research on code-switching in professional bilingual settings suggests that well-established switching patterns can function as efficient communicative resources, allowing speakers to exploit the complementary strengths of both languages for different functional components of a command (Grosjean, 2010). The pragmatic analysis of military code-switching reveals systematic patterns: command verbs are often retained in the dominant operational language for illocutionary clarity, while addressee identification, operational parameters, and urgency markers may be expressed in the interlocutor's dominant language. This functional division of labor between the two languages represents an

emergent form of communicative optimization that military language policy should acknowledge and, where appropriate, formalize rather than prohibit. Theoretical analysis and strategic review presented in the preceding sections have several important implications for military language policy and training design. First, bilingual military command protocols should be explicitly grounded in pragmatic theory, not merely in grammatical correctness or lexical equivalence. Command quality in bilingual contexts is ultimately a pragmatic, not a grammatical, criterion: a command that is linguistically correct but pragmatically deficient—because it fails to convey urgency, authority, or unambiguous directive force—is operationally inferior to a pragmatically potent command that departs from grammatical norms. Second, language training for bilingual military personnel should include explicit instruction in speech act mapping: soldiers should be trained to recognize the illocutionary equivalents of command forms across their operational languages, and interpreters should be specifically trained in directive-force preservation. Current language training programs for military personnel typically emphasize vocabulary acquisition and grammatical competence, with comparatively little attention to pragmatic competence in directive speech (NATO, 2016). Third, command vocabulary standardization efforts should incorporate phonological auditing to identify and eliminate cross-linguistic confusability. The consequences of a misheard command in combat conditions can be catastrophic, yet the phonological dimension of bilingual command design receives little systematic attention in existing standardization frameworks. Fourth, military institutions should develop explicit policies on code-switching in command communication, acknowledging the pragmatic efficiency of functional code-switching while establishing clear boundaries to prevent operationally dangerous ambiguity. The tendency of existing policy to treat code-switching as a deviation from standard rather than as a potentially effective communicative strategy reflects a linguistically naive approach that bilingual military communication research can help to correct. The implications of this analysis extend beyond theoretical linguistics to practical military communication policy. As multinational military operations become increasingly common and as the linguistic diversity of military coalitions continues to grow, the demand for theoretically informed, empirically grounded bilingual command protocols will intensify. The field of military linguistics has an important contribution to make in this domain, but it requires closer integration with pragmatic theory and applied language policy research than has typically characterized military language studies. Future research should pursue corpus-based studies of bilingual command language in real operational settings, experimental studies of command processing efficiency across language conditions, and policy-oriented analyses of existing bilingual command protocols in NATO and UN operations. Such research, conducted in collaboration with military language policy makers, has the potential to make a significant practical contribution to the safety and effectiveness of multinational military operations.

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