# MILITARY COMMUNICATION IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXTS

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*Abstract: Nowadays, tackling the issue of interculturalism has become a primary concern against the background of the increasing globalization tendencies of the contemporary world. From this perspective, we can argue that developing intercultural awareness and communication skills among the citizens of the modern society – military personnel being no exception – is a prerequisite for the success of any type of cooperation, be it individual or at the level of the society, or even between armies.This paper aims at highlighting the particularities of military culture and military communication as manifested in intercultural contexts, by exploring their elements, forms and manners of production and reception. Moreover, the final objective, that of building up on intercultural communication skills, is seen as an educational pursuit in itself and analyzed contrastively form the perspective of the types of courses, targeted skills, and approaches characteristic to training models used by military institutions of higher education in several NATO countries.*

*Keywords: military culture, military communication, intercultural communication, intercultural education, intercultural competence*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For the Romanian Army, addressing interculturalism and mastering the intercultural communication competence, extremely necessary for the success of any type of international cooperation, has become a key issue, especially since 1995, when Romanian forces started to participate actively in various military actions in the Partnership for Peace, engaging in a variety of specific land, air and naval tasks. The first empirical analyses of these participations revealed that intercultural communication represents a significant aspect of the military training, essential to achieving and developing cooperation with military personnel from other partner countries, as well as with the population in the theatres of operations.


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## 2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION – approaches and concepts

Intercultural communication was for the first time explicitly conceptualized by the American ethnologist and semiotician T. H. Hall, in "The Silent Language", published in 1959. In his analysis, the American researcher starts form a semiotic model. According to his interpretation, when communicating, people do not make exclusive use of language, but they also employ a series of non-verbal expressions, such as tone, facial expressions, gestures. Lack of awareness in what regards these elements, due to lack of intercultural education and intercultural communication skills generates what we call "misunderstandings" or "miscommunication".

Most experts agree that the phrase "intercultural communication" is used to anchor the protagonists of a process of communication in different cultures. Bruck (1994) defines intercultural relations as "those relationships in which participants do not relate exclusively to their own codes, conventions, ways and forms of behavior, and where other codes, conventions, views and forms of behavior will also be discovered. In addition, they are experienced and / or defined as foreign".

Although the concept of "intercultural communication" has received different definitions in the specialized literature, two essential elements are highlighted by most scholars. First, intercultural communication is defined as a process of communication that takes place between people who are *aware* of their cultural differences, and, secondly, communication is *interpersonal*, direct, unmediated. "If there is a situation of interpersonal communication between members of different cultural groups, then this interaction can be designated as intercultural communication" (Litters 1995, p.20). Another approach, belonging to Apeltauer (1997, p.17) describes intercultural communication as "communication between [...] two people from two obviously different groups". Some authors emphasize the fact that intercultural communication studies the contact between individuals, and not between the cultures they are affiliated to.

However, defining intercultural communication in the simple terms of a face-to-face interaction is a limitation of its notional scope. The wider significance of this concept encapsulates not only the communicative dimension of interpersonal relationships, but also the all-encompassing concept of interculturality in its various forms (which also include attitudes, behaviors, values etc. in addition to language) which has gained escalating importance in all domains of human activity. Consequently, in the geo-strategic


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context of the 21st century, where globalization affects all aspects of the postmodern society, cultural communication acquires increasingly meaningful values in the military field as well, where the intercultural communication competence becomes a sine-qua-non prerequisite for international cooperation in the current multicultural theaters of operations.

## 3. MILITARY CULTURE – an integrated part of the culture of the society

Sociologically-wise, organizations are defined as cultural systems oriented towards achieving certain goals. The purpose of an organization is considered "the key to understanding its specific structure and culture" (Zulean 2005, p.5). If we assume that the military organization is specialized in using threat and collective violence, i.e. it focuses on inter-social macro-violence, then we can define military culture as being based on a strict bottom-up leadership structure, with a centralized chain of command. The specificity of military culture requires the individual to be instrumentalized and individualized in favor of the group, in a context in which the soldiers are expected to sacrifice their freedom and, inevitably, their life, for a collective goal they might not adhere to. This issue is solved by using a specific type of relations, oriented towards professional ethos, a high sense of discipline and esprit de corps. Burk (1995, p.450) defines professional ethos as a "set of self-accepted norms, defining the identity inherent to the profession, its code of conduct and, especially for officers, their profession". Given that morale and cohesion are vital combat motivating factors and are also crucial to military education and training, discipline means that the members of the organization may be forced to put aside their individual interests in favor of a collective purpose.

We can argue that today's military culture has adapted to the realities of contemporary society and has become:

- ✓ a culture which considers the military profession as a service to the country, in order to ensure the safety of the national and international community;
- ✓ a culture that emphasizes group cohesion and values the professional ethical code;
- ✓ a culture that considers individual leadership to be a duty and a responsibility;


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- ✓ a culture that defines a group which is strongly motivated by its social duty as an activity of excellence;
- ✓ a culture that characterizes a group subjected to political leadership and characterized by strong loyalty to the country's fundamental laws;
- ✓ the culture of a group characterized by duty, honor, selflessness, personal example, community character, hierarchy, discipline and control;
- ✓ the culture of a group that has undergone a careful selection and has benefited from thorough professional education.

Furthermore, military culture is not to be considered constant and identical from a diachronic perspective, but, on the contrary, characterized by change, due to various influences that constantly shape the values, behaviors and beliefs defining it. At the same time, the military organization has the opportunity to develop its own cultural model, based on the following specific elements: *the system of values, symbols, verbal components, rituals and ceremonies, actors and heroes, the physical elements.* They are fundamental elements through which the organization communicates itself and establishes relations with the outside world.

*The system of values* is the cornerstone of military culture, expressing views, beliefs, convictions and rules established for the members of the military organization.

*Conceptions* are the opinions of the military about themselves, the world and the organization, promoted by and reflected in the management and leadership style.

*Values* represent the collective conduct determined by shared preferences and attitudes imposed on all members of the organization. They are the result of the general attitude endorsed by national culture or by the background of the members of the organization, but also entail an emotional dimension. They are usually encouraged by commanders and are accepted as general ideals or standards to be achieved and respected. The specificity of the military organization resides in that the civil society perceives it as an organization that cultivates values such as *courage, honesty, honor, sacrifice, loyalty, sacrifice, prestige* etc.

*Norms* are binding rules of behavior for all members of the military institution, resulting in the recognition of values and beliefs. There are two sets of rules characteristic to the military organization: *formal rules* implemented through formal organizational regulations: instructions, orders etc.; *informal rules*, which, although not listed in any document, have a great influence on the organizational behavior.


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*Symbols* are objects, acts, events, graphic or colored representations that have a particular significance for the organization and serve as a means of conveying messages to the members of the organization (battle flag, military museums, military media, monuments of heroes etc.)

*Verbal components* defining military culture are represented by *language*, composed of typical expressions, persuasive slogans and phrases that briefly express the key values of the organization, *stories and histories*, *legends*, *myths* based on true events, sometimes embellished, romanticized, which transmit certain meanings to the new generations. Usually, the stories convey the core values of the organization and provide examples to be followed. If the events took place in the remote past, stories become legends, and when the significance of the events is profound, due to the substance of the beliefs and values thereof, stories turn into positive or negative *myths*.

*Rituals* and *ceremonies* are closely related to organizational rules, which they also overlap to some extent. They are used to organize certain events, which promote and celebrate the main values and behaviors characteristic to the organizational culture.

*Actors* and *heroes* are characters existing in the organization at a certain moment, which fall into oblivion once they disappear from the scene. *Heroes* are characters that enter into the collective memory of the organization, especially as the main actors of the myths. This role is particularly assumed by the founders of the organization or by individuals who have brought an outstanding contribution in overcoming a critical situation, which led to a profound change in the organization.

*Physical elements* are concrete visible aspects of the organizational culture, directly and immediately observable, such as weapons, combat equipment, buildings, sport facilities, libraries, mess halls, infirmaries, all of which express the concept of the management team, the name and the logo of the organization, which are important symbols for its members.

In what regards the influence the culture of the society exerts on the military culture, we can argue that it is one of the most powerful elements of influence, as the members of the military organization borrow and adapt elements of the society culture to the specific of their military activities, which places the military culture on the border between individual cultural elements and elements that are promoted at national level. For this reason, military cultures are the embodiment and the bearers of the elements of the national culture to which they belong.


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On the other hand, every organization and, implicitly, the military organization, has its own identity, given that its personality is firstly shaped by the people working within it, having their own values, beliefs and attitudes.

In essence, we can conclude that, from a general perspective, military culture is a subculture of the society culture of origin, with which it shares common values, behaviors, norms, and attitudes specific to the organizational context. Moreover, the military culture is perceived as a process, not just as heritage, being an aggregate of systems, therefore a dynamic culture. As a national institution, the military organization is representative of the society it serves. The specific national environment and its historical evolution have marked it and shaped its values and norms, and as a consequence, the military reflects both the social structure and the cultural values of the society from which it originates and in which it operates.

Fortunately, one of the benefits of globalization and of the establishment of international security bodies is materialized in the fact that militaries from partner countries have the opportunity to benefit from identical training. As a result, they are subordinated to a common culture – the military culture - seen as a subculture of the global culture, essentially comprising a system of almost identical values.

## 4. MILITARY COMMUNICATION – definition, elements, forms, characteristic features

Communication, as a means of spreading cultural values, is key to effective military organizations. It influences and is influenced by all organizational processes and phenomena: organizational culture, decision-making style, leadership style, conflict mediation, conflict mitigation, organizational changes and evolution of the organization. Throughout its history, the military organization has aimed at permanently improving communication in order to achieve competitive superiority at all levels. In the context of the asymmetrical warfare defining the types of conflicts in the 21st century, the concept of military communication has gained paramount importance, emerging as a sine-qua-non instrument for transmitting not only orders, commands (at the level of the micro-organization), strategies and doctrines (at macro level), but also ideologies (in society), encompassed in the very fabric of the discourse.

In this context, military communication must submit its own cultural model, based on the specific elements mentioned above: *the system of values, symbols, verbal components, rituals and ceremonies, actors and heroes, the physical elements*. The


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exploration of the intercultural dimension of military communication aims at analyzing the verbal elements defining both the military culture and the communication patterns specific to it. A content analysis of the discourse as the main component of military communication will specifically target the language, generator and bearer of values, norms, beliefs and ideology inherent to the military culture.

The noteworthy features of military communication are particularly salient from the specific language used by the members of the organization (military and civilians alike). This distinct form of language is shaped by the role of the actors in the communication process, by the use of certain forms of communication, and by some specific means of transmitting the message. Military language is recognized as specialized language, the so-called military language, characterized by words and phrases specific to the organization as a whole and to separate military branches and specialties. In short, we can declare that military language is materialized through linguistic formulas (specific terminology, abbreviations, acronyms, set phrases, slangs, expressions) and by particular means of communication such as orders, reports, commands etc. When analyzing the military environment, we cannot ignore the hierarchical, pyramid-type organization of the institution, the subordination relations, the existence of rules of conduct, the specific ways of addressing, reporting etc.

In what regards the forms of communication used in the military organization, Afrim and Cosma (2015) mention: formal communication, vertical communication, oral communication, written communication. The four forms are not separately identifiable, but operate simultaneously, in parallel and in perfect osmosis, providing military communication increased efficiency and effectiveness in its dimension as linguistic communication. Therefore, for example, formal communication, which has two sub-types, namely vertical communication (ascendant and descendant) and horizontal communication (between members of the organization situated on the same hierarchical level) can be achieved either in writing or orally, and has several functions: information, motivation, socializing, regulating actions etc.

Form a linguistic perspective, the act of communication in the military can also be scrutinized from an intercultural angle. Language is a finely articulated vehicle for the promotion of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies, all of which are conjoined in what linguists call *discourse*, defined as "a social practice, a particular way of making meaning of experience" (Fairclough, 1992, p.7). If we take the rationale even further, we


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can anchor the discourse in the socio-cultural context it operates, thus enabling it to promote those particular ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes inherent to the ideology of the community it belongs to. Lemke (1995) argues that the social nature of discourse and meaning making situate this practice in particular communities that operate in particular socio-cultural and political contexts. Therefore, we can speak of a *military discourse*, specific to this community of practice, with its own particular features and composition structures and patterns, genre, style, language, method of production, circulation, distribution, reception and consumption, which is contextually, ideologically, organizationally and globally shaped and controlled.

## 5. TRAINING INTERCULTURAL MILITARY COMMUNICATION – a contrastive approach

Globalization unites and divides at the same time, and what separates the world also brings it together. Culture is no longer a self-sufficient term, being replaced with the more complex concepts of multiculturality, cross-culturality, interculturality. Consequently, the world becomes even more diverse, while states and nations that used to have geographical limitations are now open in the face of culture and interact, preserving, renewing or developing their own cultural identity. The military organization is also open. We now speak of multinational task forces, collaboration among countries, cooperation between armies, interoperability, standardization etc. We have PfP, NATO, UN missions, carried out by a global army of universal soldiers, whose universality does not reside only in their abilities as polyvalent warriors, but in the very nature of their intercultural knowledge, competence and skills. Carrying out multinational missions, in which cooperation is mainly underlined by diversity, presupposes the creation of joint forces composed of military structures whose individuals belong to different nations, thus having different language and culture and, more importantly, different perceptions, attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the military organization and the military profession.

A special place in the context of military communication is occupied by intercultural communication, arising from the inherent cultural differences between soldiers from different armies, participating in international missions. Cultural and intercultural education and training in the armies of various countries differ in many respects, but also include some common aspects. We will briefly present the manner in which the armies of several NATO countries, namely the US, UK, Germany, France and


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Romania design and conduct intercultural education, especially in terms of training the intercultural communication competence.

The US military institutions responsible for intercultural training are: the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), the Information Center of the US Army (United States Army Intelligence Center - USAIC) and training centers belonging to the armed forces categories.

CALL, the most important of them, collects and analyzes data from a variety of current and historical sources, including military operations and training exercises in order to provide lessons learned for the military personnel. One of its main tasks consists in developing intercultural training and education targeting several cultures in the world. These programs are intended primarily for intelligence officers, specialized personnel and individually-deployed soldiers.

Another training center is the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC), which was created in December 2007, and is tasked with educating and training Air Force personnel in terms of languages and cultures specific to the areas of deployment for different missions. The center aims to develop intercultural skills by infusing knowledge (focusing on concepts, theories and methods), skills (communication, negotiation, interpersonal relationships), and attitudes, through diverse intercultural learning approaches.

Aware of the fact that the focus should be on educating and training the military personnel from an intercultural perspective, the United States Military Academy at West Point included the formation of intercultural competence of cadets in its academic program. This required revising the academic curriculum from an intercultural perspective and the establishment of the Center for Languages, Cultures and Regional Studies (CLCRS), whose mission is to provide theoretical and applicative research in language learning, while fostering intercultural competence and training regional expertise. Several disciplines in the field of humanities offer students a variety of multicultural experiences. Curriculum directly supports the learning model based on relevant applications from an intercultural perspective. Education and training of cadets includes formal and cultural contacts, promotes understanding of the diversity and wealth of human culture. This experience supports the development of future graduates as professional soldiers and citizens of a global environment. Another efficient method is the immersion of the cadets in other cultures, which directly facilitates the acquisition of the language and the


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acceptance of the target culture. The academic program proposes two to four semesters of language learning in one of the eight languages in the educational offer: Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

Since March 2007, the British military forces have adapted the specific doctrine for small confrontations and counterinsurgency operations by fundamentally remodeling the training of military personnel participating in missions in various areas of operations. In 2007, the British forces set up an agency, as part of the Directorate of Targeting and Information Operations (DTIO), charged with collecting and using information related to the culture and cultural habits in the mission area. One of the working groups within this agency is the Social and Cultural Profile Group, whose main duties include designing the profile of the population in the area of the mission, cultural and intercultural guidelines necessary to the military and analyzing the cultural networks in the designated region. The main structure responsible with cultural training and education in the British Army is the Defense Cultural Support Unit (DCSU). Its continuous mission is to train cultural specialists to be deployed in theatres of operations and to assist the military by providing cultural education at different levels.

The German army offers a variety of courses, seminars and trainings, aimed at educating and developing the intercultural competence. The core concept is represented by the German leadership philosophy, Innere Führung, with emphasis on the model of the citizen in uniform. In *The White Paper* (2006), Innere Führung is defined as a principle based on the development of leadership, of civic education. This concept is at the top of the core values in the German constitution.

Additional to the pre-deployment training, which focuses on the future military operations, the Bundeswehr (Federal Defense Force) provides a one-day seminar called the Cultural Dimension. Language training is conducted at the Federal School of Foreign Languages, particularly designated for international military missions or for personnel serving as military attaché. In the future, the Bundeswehr University in Munich is envisaging the implementation of a master's program, entitled Intercultural Communication and Conflict Analysis.

Individual and collective training of the French military personnel is completed at the Military School for Training of the Forces for Operations Outside the National Territory (École militaire de specialisation de l'outre-mer et de l'étranger – EMSOME). The school benefits from the experience of more than 120 years of Marine expeditionary


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campaigns, signifying a real asset for cultural and intercultural education and training. Its objective is to train soldiers from a cultural standpoint and prepare them for international missions, regardless of the destination, if French contribution is required for short term (four to six months) or long term (one to three years) deployments. The aim is to assist military personnel to integrate into the new environment and learn how to behave.

The training offered by EMSOME covers over 90 percent of the military personnel nominated for dislocation and is facilitated by instructors who have conducted missions in the country whose language they teach. This training is enriched by the participation of professors and experts from various international organizations, NGOs etc. The teaching is multidisciplinary and focuses on integrating theoretical issues related to history, geography, anthropology, sociology, language etc. Compared to the other training models mentioned above, EMSOME does not offer language courses, language skills being formed through courses offered in foreign languages universities. Because competence in a foreign language requires years of in-depth study, combined with immersion in the country where that language is spoken, the effort focuses on training officers and noncommissioned officers in terms of using interpreters.

During the pre-deployment preparation, military instructors teach soldiers how to interact with the locals, which salute formulas to use, what codes of conduct to apply when in a meeting, how to quickly identify dominant individuals or families in the local community, how to understand the social value of negotiation with sellers in the market, how to discuss and how to obey the rules of hospitality. At this stage, the leaders of small structures benefit from a 2-hour language course, where they are familiarized with approximately 50 key phrases, needed to “break the ice”.

Another distinctive aspect that typifies the French model is that ENSOME does not apply a specific training pattern, but adapts subjects to the particular mission. Training is provided through courses (adaptation, specific training, using military advisers), through dissemination of publications and files, through targeted training for all three army categories at different levels (squad, platoon etc.).

Currently, the issue of cultural and intercultural training in the Romanian Armed Forces is particularly novel. Intercultural training is not applicative, as it is approached only form a theoretical angle, and is intended only for military staff and structures nominated to participate in multinational operations. The main structures tasked with the cultural and intercultural training of the soldiers participating in multinational missions are


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the Military Intelligence Directorate (DIM) of the General Directorate of Defense Intelligence (DGIA). It should be noted that the cultural training provided by the two institutions is limited to delivering specific presentations and to simulating interactions between the cultures involved, during Simulation Field Tactical Exercise (SIMFTX) dedicated only to maneuver battalions.

In what concerns the Romanian military organization, the implementation of a program aimed at providing intercultural training and education to the Romanian soldiers is a niche approach and an innovative concept. Unfortunately, there are no entities entrusted with the cultural and intercultural training of the Romanian forces. Although such training is attempted in Military Academies and in Language Centers, the cultural dimension is included under the umbrella of the language courses, targets the diffusion of general knowledge and does not specifically focus on forming the affective and actional skills needed in the make-up of what we can call intercultural competence.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

As seen from the brief analysis of the intercultural training programs in the mentioned NATO countries, we can conclude that training and developing cultural competence is the cornerstone of military communication as manifested in intercultural contexts. The fundamental dimensions of military communication should distinctively target the enhancement of intercultural sensitivity (the ability to experience and discriminate between cultural differences that are relevant to the process), of intercultural efficiency (the ability to successfully work and live in another culture/country), and, not least, of intercultural intelligence (the ability to interpret and translate unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in a given context).

If we start from the premise that nowadays the real challenges are cultural, and refer to the ability to understand and adapt to cultural differences, we can conclude that, obviously, the military organization cannot subtract from this reality. It is deeply impregnated with specific elements of cultural diversity, and the internationalization of the military life in the modern warfare contexts reaches its culmination in temporary or permanent multinational military coalitions. As a consequence, training the intercultural communication competence, as a foundation of the current military communication, is absolutely necessary in the political, social and geostrategic environment of the 21st century.


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