

SKYBA Oksana,

Senior Lecturer of the Department of
Philology and Military Translation, Kyiv
Institute of the National Guard of Ukraine
(Kyiv, Ukraine)

ENGLISH AS A FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN MULTINATIONAL PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

Multinational peacekeeping operations constitute one of the most linguistically and culturally heterogeneous environments in contemporary international relations. Personnel from diverse national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds must coordinate complex military, humanitarian, and diplomatic activities under conditions of considerable operational stress. The United Nations, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) routinely deploy forces comprising dozens of nationalities, each bringing distinct linguistic repertoires and communicative norms [10]. Within this context, English has emerged as the predominant working language, functioning as a critical instrument for operational coordination and intercultural understanding. The main role of English in peacekeeping contexts reflects broader patterns of linguistic globalization, wherein English serves as the primary medium of international communication across military, diplomatic, and commercial domains [4]. However, the adoption of English as a lingua franca in peacekeeping operations raises significant questions concerning communicative equity, operational effectiveness, and the preservation of cultural diversity within military institutions.

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated positive correlations between English language proficiency and operational effectiveness in multinational military contexts. NATO's Standardization Agreement (STANAG) 6001 establishes language proficiency standards for alliance personnel, recognizing that linguistic competence constitutes a critical operational capability [9]. Studies conducted within NATO frameworks have shown that inadequate language proficiency contributes to coordination failures, misunderstandings of operational orders, and reduced situational awareness among multinational forces [8]. Robert Scaife's examination of language training in multinational military operations identifies several mechanisms through which English proficiency enhances operational performance [11]. These include improved information sharing across national contingents, more effective coordination during crisis response, and enhanced capacity for joint planning and decision-making. Conversely, linguistic barriers have been identified as contributing factors in several notable operational failures, including coordination breakdowns during the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Rwanda [5]. The relationship between language proficiency and operational effectiveness extends beyond technical coordination to encompass cultural dimensions of military operations. Peacekeeping missions increasingly emphasize civilian protection, humanitarian assistance, and engagement with local populations, activities

that require culturally sensitive communication and trust-building [3]. English serves as an internal coordination language among peacekeepers, but its utility in local engagement depends upon the linguistic environment of the host nation and the availability of interpretation services.

Effective intercultural communication in peacekeeping contexts requires more than linguistic competence in English; it demands cultural awareness, adaptive communication strategies, and sensitivity to diverse communicative norms [2]. Military organizations increasingly recognize that language training must be integrated with cultural education to develop comprehensive intercultural communication competence among peacekeeping personnel. Research by Abbe, Gulick, and Herman on cross-cultural competence in military operations identifies several key dimensions of intercultural communication ability, including knowledge of cultural systems, cognitive flexibility, interpersonal skills, and motivation to engage across cultural boundaries. English language proficiency enables communication, but it does not automatically confer understanding of diverse cultural values, social hierarchies, or contextual communication patterns that vary significantly across national military traditions [1].

The development of intercultural communication competence is complicated by the fact that English itself carries cultural associations and communicative norms derived from anglophone contexts. Non-native English speakers must navigate not only linguistic challenges but also cultural expectations embedded in anglophone communication styles, including preferences for directness, informality in certain contexts, and particular approaches to politeness and hierarchy [13]. These cultural dimensions of English usage may conflict with communicative norms in other military traditions, potentially generating misunderstanding even among individuals with adequate linguistic proficiency.

International peacekeeping organizations have developed various policy responses to linguistic diversity and the dominance of English. The United Nations maintains six official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) and provides interpretation services in official contexts, while recognizing English and French as working languages for peacekeeping operations. However, resource constraints and operational demands often result in English functioning as the primary operational language, particularly in field environments where interpretation services are limited.

NATO has implemented comprehensive language training programs designed to ensure minimum English proficiency levels among alliance personnel. The alliance's Defence Language Working Group coordinates language training initiatives and promotes the adoption of STANAG 6001 proficiency standards across member nations [7]. These initiatives reflect recognition that linguistic interoperability constitutes a critical capability for multinational military operations and that systematic investment in language training yields operational dividends.

The reliance upon English as a lingua franca in peacekeeping operations presents several persistent challenges. First, the emphasis on English proficiency may divert resources from other critical capabilities, particularly for nations with limited defense budgets. Language training represents a significant investment of time and resources that

must compete with technical military training, equipment procurement, and other priorities [14].

Second, the privileging of English may contribute to the marginalization of local languages in peacekeeping contexts, potentially undermining engagement with civilian populations and limiting access to locally-derived intelligence. While English facilitates communication among peacekeepers, mission success often depends upon effective engagement with host communities in local languages, requiring investment in interpretation services and local language training for key personnel [12].

Third, standardization around English may produce linguistic homogenization that reduces cognitive diversity and limits the range of perspectives brought to bear on complex peacekeeping challenges. Research on organizational diversity suggests that linguistic and cultural heterogeneity can enhance problem-solving and decision-making when appropriately managed, but these potential benefits may be lost if diversity is suppressed through excessive linguistic standardization [6].

Addressing the complexities of English usage in multinational peacekeeping requires multifaceted policy responses. Peacekeeping organizations should maintain investment in comprehensive language training programs that develop both linguistic proficiency and intercultural communication competence. Such programs should extend beyond grammar and vocabulary instruction to encompass cultural education, communication strategies, and practical exercises in multinational environments.

International peacekeeping frameworks should also strengthen support for multilingual operations, including enhanced interpretation services, translation of critical documents, and recognition of linguistic diversity as an operational asset rather than merely a challenge to be overcome. Technology offers promising tools for facilitating multilingual communication, including real-time translation applications and multilingual command and control systems, though human interpretation remains essential for nuanced communication in complex situations. Research communities should as well expand empirical investigation of linguistic dynamics in peacekeeping contexts, including longitudinal studies of language training effectiveness, ethnographic research on communication practices in multinational units, and comparative analysis of linguistic policies across different peacekeeping organizations. Such research can inform evidence-based policy development and contribute to more effective management of linguistic diversity in military operations.

English functions as an indispensable instrument for intercultural communication in multinational peacekeeping missions, enabling coordination among diverse national contingents and facilitating operational effectiveness in complex environments. However, the dominance of English also generates significant challenges, including communicative inequalities, cultural tensions, and potential marginalization of non-anglophone perspectives. These tensions reflect broader dynamics of linguistic globalization and raise fundamental questions about equity, effectiveness, and cultural sensitivity in international peacekeeping.

Effective management of linguistic diversity in peacekeeping contexts requires recognition that language policy constitutes a strategic concern with implications for

operational effectiveness, organizational culture, and the legitimacy of international peace operations. Future peacekeeping frameworks must balance the pragmatic advantages of linguistic standardization against the values of inclusivity, cultural respect, and cognitive diversity that undergird the multilateral peacekeeping enterprise. Through sustained investment in language training, intercultural education, and multilingual support systems, international peacekeeping organizations can enhance both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of their operations in an increasingly interconnected yet persistently diverse global environment.

References

1. Abbe A., Gulick L.M.V., Herman J.L. Cross-cultural competence in Army leaders: A conceptual and empirical foundation : study report 2008-01. United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 2007. 66 p.
2. Abbe A., Halpin, S.M. The cultural imperative for professional military education and leader development. *Parameters*. 2009. Vol. 39, No. 4. P. 20–31.
3. Autesserre S. Peaceland: Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. 2014. 329 p.
4. Crystal D. English as a global language (2nd ed.). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. 2003. 229 p.
5. Dallaire R. Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity in Rwanda. Canada : Random House. 2003. 592 p.
6. Ely R.J., Thomas D.A. Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 2001. Vol. 46, No. 2. P. 229–273.
7. Higate P., Henry, M. Insecure spaces: Peacekeeping, power and performance in Haiti, Kosovo and Liberia. London : Zed Books. 2017. 189 p.
8. Ispas L., Tudorache P. Intercultural communication in military multinational operations. *International conference Knowledge-Based Organization*. 2018. Vol. 24, Iss. 1. P. 98–103.
9. NATO. *STANAG 6001: Language proficiency levels* (5th ed.). URL: <https://natobilc.org/stanag-6001> (access date: 08.11.2025).
10. Rubinstein, R. A. Peacekeeping under fire: Culture and intervention. New York : Routledge. 2008. 224 p.
11. Scaife R.B., Mills P.J. A Paradigm of Dialogue and Trust Army Mission Command Training URL: https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20150228_art010.pdf (access date: 08.11.2025).
12. Slim H. Is humanitarianism being politicised? A reply to David Rieff. *The Dutch Red Cross Symposium on Ethics in Aid*. (The Hague, October 8th 2003). The Hague, 2003. P. 1–8.
13. Spencer-Oatey H. Culturally speaking: Culture, communication and politeness theory (2nd ed.). London and New York : Continuum International Publishing Group. 2008. P. 113–116.
14. Tatham S. Strategic communication: A primer. URL: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/94411/2008_Dec.pdf (access date: 08.11.2025).