

## Realization of Commands in Military Discourse: Linguistic and Pragmatic Perspectives

**Firuz Abdusalomov**

Senior lecturer of the Center for foreign languages, associate professor,  
Academy of the MIA of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

E-mail: [desperion90@gmail.com](mailto:desperion90@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *This study provides a comprehensive discourse-pragmatic analysis of military command language, focusing on how commands are realized and interpreted in military contexts. The research explores the syntactic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic features of military commands, emphasizing their role in authority, coordination, and operational efficiency. Using authentic military communication materials, the study examines direct and indirect forms of commands, the influence of rank and hierarchical relationships, and the cultural dynamics in multinational military operations. The findings highlight the standardization of command lexicon, the importance of pragmatic competence, and the role of cross-cultural communication in effective command delivery. This research contributes to the field of military linguistics and provides insights for improving communication strategies within military institutions.*

**Keywords:** *military discourse, command language, speech acts, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, authority, coordination, multinational operations, cross-cultural communication, standardized lexicon, directives, military communication, linguistic analysis.*

### Introduction

In modern linguistics, discourse analysis has evolved into a powerful tool for understanding the relationship between language and its social functions. Among the many specialized domains of discourse, military discourse occupies a unique position due to its hierarchical structure, rigid communicative norms, and highly strategic use of language. Military communication is primarily goal-oriented, often requiring immediate action, clarity, and strict adherence to protocol. At the heart of this discourse lies the linguistic phenomenon of the command — a speech act that not only reflects authority but also serves as a mechanism for operational execution and institutional control.

The realization of commands within military discourse represents a critical intersection between linguistic form and pragmatic function. Commands in this context are not simply imperative sentences; they encompass a range of syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic strategies that align with military norms, hierarchy, and situational urgency. Understanding how commands are constructed, delivered, and interpreted in military settings can offer deeper insights into the mechanisms of institutional communication, authority negotiation, and discourse management.

Despite the strategic significance of military commands, their linguistic and pragmatic realization remains relatively underexplored compared to other institutional discourses such as legal or medical communication. Previous studies in speech act theory [1; 65] have laid the groundwork for understanding how directives function in everyday language, yet these models require adaptation when applied to institutional and hierarchical contexts like the military. The unique sociolinguistic environment of the armed forces — characterized by command chains, operational codes, and urgency — calls for a tailored analysis of directive speech acts.

The present study aims to analyze the realization of commands in military discourse by examining their structural, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic features. This article adopts a discourse-analytical and

pragmalinguistic approach to explore how authority is encoded in language, how command forms vary across contexts, and how military-specific communicative strategies ensure compliance and coordination. Through this analysis, we seek to contribute to a broader understanding of how language operates within institutional power structures and mission-critical environments.

### **Literature review**

The study of military discourse has increasingly attracted the attention of linguists seeking to understand how institutional power is exercised and maintained through language. Although military language has long been recognized for its precision, formality, and directness, its systematic study within the framework of discourse analysis is a relatively recent development. Scholars such as Chilton [3; 13], Fairclough [6; 172], and van Dijk [14; 60] have emphasized the importance of discourse in constructing institutional realities, including those within military settings. In this context, military discourse is seen not only as a vehicle for information transmission but also as a performative act that reflects and reinforces institutional hierarchies and power dynamics.

The core linguistic feature of military discourse — the command — has its theoretical roots in *speech act theory*. Austin introduced the concept of *performative utterances*, where saying something is doing something, laying the foundation for understanding how commands function beyond mere propositions [1; 72]. John Searle later expanded this framework with his taxonomy of illocutionary acts, identifying *directives* as a category of speech acts intended to get the hearer to do something [12; 29]. Commands, as a subtype of directives, are thus understood as linguistic realizations of authority and obligation.

However, the application of speech act theory to military contexts reveals limitations. In military discourse, commands are not always issued in direct imperative forms. As shown in works by Coulthard and Johnson [5; 93] and Trosborg [13; 76], indirect strategies, modalized expressions, and contextual cues often play significant roles in the realization and interpretation of commands. The pragmatics of command realization becomes even more complex when considering cross-linguistic and cross-cultural military communications, where politeness strategies, institutional conventions, and operational urgency intersect.

Sociolinguistic studies further deepen this understanding by examining how roles, ranks, and situational dynamics influence command forms. Holmes and Stubbe [9; 216] observe that institutional talk is shaped by both power relations and communicative goals, suggesting that in military discourse, the expression of commands is inherently tied to the speaker's institutional role. Research by Saville-Troike [11; 49] supports the view that command structures are not just linguistic choices but are also culturally and socially conditioned.

In recent years, discourse analysts such as Cornelissen and Clarke [4; 160] have explored military language from a critical discourse perspective, highlighting the ideological underpinnings of command language and the rhetorical strategies used to legitimize authority. Yet, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the systematic analysis of command realization in authentic military contexts — especially across different languages and operational settings.

This literature review demonstrates that while foundational theories provide essential tools for analyzing military command language, a specialized framework is required to capture the complexity of its realization in institutional discourse. The present study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by offering an integrated discourse-pragmatic analysis of commands within military communication.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative, discourse-analytical methodology with a focus on pragmalinguistic features of command realization in military discourse. The approach is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, aiming to uncover the underlying communicative strategies, speech acts, and sociolinguistic norms that govern command structures in institutionalized military contexts.

### **Data collection**

The primary data for the analysis consist of:

- **Authentic military communication materials**, including excerpts from military manuals, field operation guidelines, command protocols, and training documents from English-speaking Armed Forces.
- **Transcribed verbal interactions**, such as military briefings, orders issued during simulated operations, and command exchanges during joint tactical exercises (where available in open-source military training repositories).
- **Comparative military texts**, including English translations of military command language from multilingual NATO exercises and joint operations.

All materials were selected for their relevance to command issuance and response, ensuring they reflect real-world military communication dynamics across various ranks and operational contexts.

### **Analytical framework**

The study employs a **triangulated framework** incorporating the following analytical lenses:

- **Discourse analysis**: Drawing on the works of Gee [7; 112] and Fairclough [6; 249], the discourse-analytical approach investigates how commands are embedded within broader institutional practices, how authority is discursively constructed, and how language functions as a tool for coordination and compliance.
- **Speech act theory**: The classification of command types follows Searle's [12; 91] taxonomy of illocutionary acts, particularly focusing on *directives*. Austin's [1; 64] distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts informs the interpretation of how commands are intended and received in context.
- **Pragmalinguistics and politeness theory**: The study incorporates elements from Brown and Levinson's [2; 308] politeness theory to explore how indirectness, mitigation, and formality interact with authority structures in command expressions, particularly in multinational or multicultural settings.

### **Scope and limitations**

This research is focused on the English language usage in military discourse, particularly within NATO and U.S. military contexts. While examples from other languages are noted in translation, the primary analysis centers on English constructions. Limitations include restricted access to classified communications and reliance on publicly available data, which may not capture the full range of operational language use.

### **Results and discussions**

The realization of commands in military discourse is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by linguistic form, institutional hierarchy, and situational context. In this section, we analyze authentic command expressions drawn from military manuals, operation briefings, and simulation dialogues. The analysis is structured across three key dimensions: syntactic realization, pragmatic function, and sociolinguistic context.

*Syntactic realization of commands.* In military discourse, commands are most often realized through imperative constructions, such as: "*Secure the perimeter*"; "*Move to checkpoint*". These examples exhibit directness, immediacy, and operational clarity — features essential to time-sensitive and hierarchical environments. Imperatives in such contexts are typically unambiguous and devoid of hedging or politeness markers, emphasizing efficiency over interpersonal negotiation.

However, syntactic variation exists. Commands may also appear in modalized forms or embedded structures, such as: "*You will proceed to objective Alpha at 04:00 hours*"; "*All units are to remain on standby*". These forms maintain authoritative force but reflect a more formal or procedural tone, particularly in written directives or high-level operational plans. The use of modal verbs (*will*, *must*, *are to*) indicates obligation and planned action while preserving the command's institutional legitimacy.

*Pragmatic function and illocutionary force.* The illocutionary force of a command in military discourse goes beyond its surface form. According to Searle's [12; 190] typology, military commands align with directive speech acts, whose aim is to cause action in the hearer. However, their realization may be explicit or contextually inferred, depending on rank relations, urgency, and standard operating procedures. *For instance:* "I want everyone ready by 05:00" → *Though formally a statement of desire, the context (superior speaking to subordinates) transforms it into a performative command.* "Let's maintain radio silence." → *A collective suggestion that functions as a softened directive, especially common in multinational forces where diplomacy is valued.*

The pragmatics of military commands also include non-verbal reinforcement, such as gestures, tone of voice, and eye contact, which are often critical in field operations. Additionally, the perlocutionary effect (action taken in response) is vital in military contexts, as delayed or misunderstood commands may compromise mission success.

*Sociolinguistic dynamics of command language.* The form and force of military commands are deeply influenced by the speaker's **rank**, the **situational context**, and **cultural-linguistic norms**. For example, while direct imperatives are acceptable between officers and enlisted personnel, **peer-to-peer communication** may involve mitigated language to preserve camaraderie or avoid face-threatening acts.

Moreover, **multinational operations** present challenges where command clarity must be balanced with intercultural sensitivity. A commanding officer from the UK may say: "*Could you cover that sector?*". While still directive, this modalized request reflects British indirectness norms — in contrast to American counterparts who might say: "*Cover that sector now*". This variation demonstrates the necessity for **cross-cultural command competence**, particularly in joint missions.

*Recurring patterns and operational terminology.* Lexical choices in military command language are also highly standardized. Phrases such as "hold your position", "advance under cover fire", or "abort the mission" are **institutional idioms** that carry specific tactical meanings. These expressions are often encoded in standard operating documents and training manuals to ensure uniform interpretation across units.

Another notable feature is the **compression of language** — commands are often minimalistic, using elliptical forms for speed and clarity: "*On me*" (*Follow me*); "*Weapons free*" (*You are authorized to fire*).

These elliptical and encoded forms reflect operational necessity and shared understanding within the military community, reinforcing group identity and efficiency.

This study has revealed several critical insights into the realization of commands within military discourse, highlighting how language functions as a tool of authority, coordination, and operational precision in institutional contexts.

1) Structural consistency and variation. Commands in military discourse exhibit both high structural regularity and context-sensitive variability. While direct imperatives are dominant in urgent and tactical scenarios, modalized and embedded structures are more prevalent in formal documentation or when addressing higher-ranking officers. This reflects a balance between efficiency and hierarchy.

2) Pragmatic nuance of directive speech acts. Commands are not restricted to imperative syntax. The illocutionary force of directives is frequently conveyed through declaratives and interrogatives, particularly when considering interpersonal dynamics or intercultural cooperation. The contextual interpretation of authority is essential for correctly decoding these forms.

3) Command language as social practice. The use of command forms is deeply embedded in institutional roles, social hierarchy, and cultural norms. The choice of command strategy depends not only on rank but also on familiarity between participants and mission type. In multinational settings, indirectness and mitigated directives are more common to maintain diplomatic rapport.

4) Standardized lexicon and operational clarity. Military discourse relies heavily on a standardized command lexicon designed for rapid comprehension and unambiguous execution. Phrases



such as “*weapons free*”, “*hold position*”, or “*fallback*” are contextually loaded, demonstrating a semantic economy rooted in shared operational knowledge.

- 5) Ellipsis and compression for tactical efficiency. The elliptical nature of many command forms (e.g., “*On me*”, “*Go hot*”) underscores a preference for brevity and precision. These forms are effective within trained units but presuppose a shared understanding, which may challenge communication in joint or mixed-experience teams.
- 6) Cross-cultural pragmatic competence. In multinational operations, successful command realization depends on pragmatic adaptability. Differences in politeness norms and directive strategies between cultures necessitate cross-cultural training to avoid misinterpretation and ensure cohesive coordination.

## Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive discourse-pragmatic analysis of command realization in military discourse, revealing the complex interplay between linguistic structure, pragmatic function, and sociolinguistic dynamics. The key findings highlight how commands serve as pivotal instruments of authority and coordination in the military, reflecting both institutional hierarchy and operational exigency.

1. *Sociolinguistic and pragmatic significance of commands.* The study confirms that military commands are not merely imperatives; they function as **directive speech acts** that shape behavior and operational outcomes. The variation in command forms — from direct imperatives to modalized and indirect constructions — reflects a strategic deployment of language to manage authority, compliance, and social relationships within military settings.

2. *Institutional and cross-cultural variability.* A critical insight is the **institutional nature of command language**, where forms of command are tailored to rank, context, and operational goals. In multinational and multicultural military operations, the study underscores the importance of **pragmatic competence** and the need for cross-cultural communication strategies to avoid misunderstandings and ensure effective coordination.

3. *Pragmatic adaptability in multinational settings.* This research also emphasizes the challenges posed by cultural differences in command realization. While English serves as a lingua franca in many multinational military operations, **pragmatic strategies** such as politeness and mitigation vary across cultural contexts, suggesting that effective command communication requires not only linguistic competence but also intercultural sensitivity.

4. *Standardization and lexical economy.* The study demonstrates the crucial role of **standardized military lexicon** in ensuring clarity and operational efficiency. The compression of language, through elliptical forms and established terminology, allows for quick decision-making and unambiguous execution of tasks. However, these forms also rely on a shared knowledge base, which might be a limitation in diverse or multinational teams.

5. *Implications for future research.* While this study has shed light on several key aspects of military command language, it also paves the way for further research. Future studies could explore **comparative analyses** of military command language across different armed forces or delve deeper into the **psycholinguistic aspects** of command interpretation. Additionally, further investigation into **technological communication in military operations**, such as the role of artificial intelligence in command delivery and reception, would contribute to the evolving discourse on military language.

In conclusion, this research highlights the significance of military command discourse as a site where language, power, and social order intersect. The findings offer valuable insights for military linguists, communication strategists, and intercultural trainers, emphasizing the role of language in shaping and executing military objectives.

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