

# INTEROPERABILITY AND THE STUDY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE ROMANIAN MILITARY

**Lect.univ. Speranza TOMESCU**

*Lucrarea de față caută să identifice și să analizeze relația dintre interoperabilitatea în armată și interoperabilitatea lingvistică. Se statuează legătura dintre cele două concepte, precum și motivația acestei legături în lumea contemporană în care estul (geopolitic) și vestul s-au remodelat și interacționează de o manieră complet diferită de cea din trecut, de dinainte de Războiul Rece. Premisa acestui studiu este aceea că interoperabilitatea – atât în termeni militari, cât și în termeni lingvistici – este un imperativ pentru armata României în contextul participării sale la operațiile desfășurate în teatrele în care este prezentă ca membru NATO.*

The contemporary world (at least its northern hemisphere) is characterized by several aspects which act as a consequence of the response that society, as a whole, has – beyond the geographical, political, religious or any other type of boundaries – to the challenges that have appeared worldwide after the end of the Cold War. The east and the west of the contemporary world do no longer oppose to each other, at least not in the same manner in which they used to oppose to each other between the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall (event that acknowledged, at a symbolic level, the collapse of the communist regime in central and eastern Europe and – as a natural consequence – the closure of the Cold War. The east and the west seem to have been re-shaped within the past less than two decades, they ceased being two separate ideological entities, as they have partially merged and they have constantly influenced each other, in an attempt to erase their feuding past of one towards each other. The two newly shaped and emerging entities are now cooperating in an effort to create new grounds and prerequisites for development in virtually every field possible: education, defense, commerce, tourism, etc. This merging can be observed at several levels of life in the contemporary society:

- more and more citizens from the east- and central-European countries travel abroad both as tourists and in order to study in countries with balanced democracies and steady, free, real and mature market economy;
- numerous western companies have been developing their business in the former communist world, thus creating valuable behavioral patterns on the work market in these countries, also bringing considerable infusions of capital in this part of the world;
- the foreign policy of the eastern, but equally of the western countries, has become more flexible, more relaxed, more overtly generous and – last, but not least – more natural.

Under such circumstances, we would expect the tensions between east and west to have disappeared, and the international arena to have become a perfectly balanced one, in perfect harmony. Nevertheless, this horizon of expectation still remains unsatisfied because of another contemporary phenomenon: the re-shaping of the world map that opposes the east to the west not only geographically, but also ideologically. In other words, between the east and the west, there still are antagonisms springing from the systemic entirety of “moral, religious, philosophical etc. ideas and concepts that reflect, in a theoretical shape, the interests and aspirations of some categories in a certain historical period / epoch”<sup>1</sup>. The “categories” referred to in the text of the definition given to the term ideology can be understood, in the context of our debate here, as being the east and the west, but re-delimited on the map of the northern hemisphere, that is to say: the east of the islamic terrorism and the west of the civilized world that wishes to have peace. Although judging the east and the west in such absolute terms is neither accurately true to fact, nor equitable, one must admit that the “epoch” in the definition is the current stage, one equally marked by terror attacks and by the antiterrorist fight of a considerable part of the international community. The “theoretical” shape that is mentioned in the definition can no longer be considered valid since the ideological identity of a certain part of the islamic world behaves – as it has actually behaved already repeatedly – violently and irrationally, killing thousands of innocent people, kin and alien alike, people whose faces are most of the times unknown to the representatives of this ideology, people that do not always embody the “enemy”.

We do not want to dwell more upon the ideological aspects, as they do not represent the object of this paper. What draws our attention related to the aspects mentioned above is about the answer that *the west* (in its

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<sup>1</sup> This is a translated excerpt from the lexicographical definition given to the word “ideology” in the DEX (the explanatory dictionary of Romanian language). We used this excerpt here to illustrate the perception of the eastern culture (represented by the Romanian one) related to the re-shaping of and the delimitation between the east and the west specific to the period that we are passing through.

contemporary version) gives to *that east* that refuses to live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to cherish peace and share the ideological values of the civilized world. The aspects to which we will pay attention in the following lines are related to the concerted answer given to terrorism by the member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, amongst which our country.

Indeed, the end of the Cold War made the cooperation possible for countries like the USA, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and others, on the one hand, and Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and so on, on the other hand, at several levels, the military one included. Gradually, after the fall of the Warsaw Pact, some of the eastern- and central-European countries have been accepted, first as partner-countries within the *Partnership for Peace Cooperation*, and later on as full membership countries in NATO. This opening of the west to the east, and vice versa, in the realm of the military has two aspects which, at first sight, do not seem to have much in common: reaching a reasonable degree of interoperability between the militaries of the traditional NATO member countries and the militaries of the newly allied countries, and the adequate use of a linguistic vehicle meant to enable effectual and real-time communication between the two sides mentioned above. We have stated that the two concepts are only apparently different. They are almost organically correlated in the context of countries like Romania, among others, adhering to NATO structures. That which we have called *interoperability* might be called *strictly military interoperability*, whereas the second notion mentioned above can be conceived as *linguistic interoperability*.

The two types of interoperability have to be corroborated in an effort to fully and effectively accommodate the Romanian military reality and philosophy to the military reality and philosophy of the other countries of the Alliance. Many of the aspects of this process of accommodation – related to military technique, to tactics and strategy, to the economical or the informational side, as well as probably others – cannot be grasped by us, as they are not the main object of our present endeavour. What underlies this paper is the connection between the two types of interoperability that the Romanian military is currently striving to accomplish: the one on a strictly military plan and the one on a linguistic plan.

The Romanian military is faced nowadays with its double status: of national military, on the one hand, and of NATO member military, on the other hand, although it is probably wrong to consider the two perspectives separately. The Romanian military is a non-divided entity whose attributes are not solely at national level (defending the national territory, the national sovereignty and Romania's territorial integrity), but at the same time at international level, towards its coalition partners (the fight against terrorism, as well as against any common enemy). Consequently, our country does no longer identify to the ideological east, but to the west. This identification has,

naturally, military, economical, cultural, but also linguistic components. As a matter of fact, the linguistic components are the ones that facilitate communication at all other levels within the Alliance. Hence, the military educational system has the responsibility to build in the new generations of military men and women skills able to facilitate a good cooperation with the other NATO-member militaries, skills meant to ensure the interoperability of the Romanian military at a human level as well.

The military educational system is currently focusing in a particular manner on enhancing the insight of its members in the need to harmonize with the doctrine, military technique, and organization of the older NATO-member militaries. It equally focuses on developing the communication skills with the representatives of these ways of thinking. Participating in real missions in operation theatres in Afghanistan and Irak, as well as in other areas where Romanian troops are dislocated, presupposes good equipment endowment, an excellent physical, psychological and tactical training of troops, but it equally presupposes the knowledge of foreign languages that troops must use in various operation theatres: French, Arabic, English, etc.

In the National University of Defense, as well as in all the other military education institutions in our country, joint efforts are made by both military and civilian teaching staff<sup>2</sup>, so that the students of this institutions should acquire and improve the English language knowledge (both general and military / specialized English), and the Anglo-Saxon culture and civilization knowledge, as the most frequently used linguistic “vehicle” within the Alliance is English nowadays.

The English teachers and faculty members in the Romanian military system of education have different targets, according to the level of knowledge in this field that each study group has. Consequently, virtually all learning levels are to be found within our military educational system. However, more and more English language study groups are made up of advanced level students, which highlights a certain aspect of our teaching effort: facilitation of meeting military interoperability. These courses improve the knowledge of language, culture and civilization of the officers, NCOs and even civilians working in the military system and who already speak English well or satisfactorily. This categories of students need practice, refreshing the knowledge acquired beforehand, enlarging the gammut of active English vocabulary, and they also need various opportunities to use some or all four basic linguistic skills (writing, reading, speaking, and listening). All these are required of the students in order to reach level 3 or 4 STANAG-6001 during a linguistic evaluation session.

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<sup>2</sup> Part of these joint efforts of the military and the civilian teaching staff is the delivery of some military lectures in English on vital, present-day topics. These lectures are delivered by military instructors during intensive language courses held in the Department of Foreign Languages, within the University of National Defense.

The graduates of such courses, on condition that they prove – at the end of the course – that they have English language abilities according to level 3 or 4 STANAG descriptors, have the potential to be appointed to important positions in the connection between the Romanian military and the NATO structures. In such positions, the employees of the Ministry of National Defense can contribute to the accomplishment of military interoperability between the Romanian military and the militaries of the other NATO-member countries by means of their remarkable linguistic abilities, of their knowledge regarding social interaction in various occasions in the international environment, regarding the cultural (military and civilian) values specific to the Anglo-Saxon space, and – last, but of course not least – by means of a remarkable professional ability.

We thus consider obvious that, in the light of the above-mentioned, there is a close connection – at least in the current stage – between interoperability and the study of the English language. It is, hence, evident that the military interoperability of the Romanian military with the other NATO militaries has an important linguistic component, in the delimitation of which the study of English as a foreign language plays a paramount role.