

Integrated Verbal And Nonverbal Communication In Military Speech

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Abstract: This article examines the role of verbal and nonverbal communication in military interaction, where strict hierarchical and legal frameworks require clarity, precision, and discipline. Verbal communication through commands, instructions, and reports ensures accurate information exchange and supports effective command execution. Nonverbal cues such as gestures, posture, facial expressions, and uniforms also play a critical role, especially in combat or communication-restricted environments. The study highlights key principles of appropriate military communication, including adapting formality to hierarchy, controlling the use of jargon and slang, and avoiding profanity. The findings show that the integration of verbal and nonverbal strategies strengthens coordination, minimizes misunderstandings, and enhances operational effectiveness. Communicative competence is therefore essential for maintaining professionalism and ensuring efficient communication across all levels of military command.

Keywords: Military communication, verbal communication, nonverbal means, military discourse, body language, military uniform, linguistic pragmatics.

Introduction: Communication within the military sphere both among service members and in their interactions with civilians operates under clearly defined legal and regulatory norms and relies on formal, purpose-driven communicative strategies. The overall efficiency of this interaction is determined by the harmonious application of two essential components: verbal (spoken) and nonverbal (unspoken) signals. Contemporary studies in military linguistics and professional communication indicate that the deliberate and integrated use of these components substantially enhances the precision, speed, and pragmatic impact of information transmission. As a result, organizational hierarchy is maintained more effectively, discipline is reinforced, and communication procedures become more streamlined. Under emergency circumstances, in combat environments, or in situations with restricted radio communication, nonverbal cues acquire particular significance and function as a primary tool for conveying urgent information. The subsequent sections examine the functional characteristics of both

verbal and nonverbal communicative means within military contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Verbal communication is generally defined as the use of systematically structured linguistic units to convey meaning within a speech community that shares a common language. Language, in this sense, is conceptualized as "a system of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meanings, governed by rules and employed for communication" (Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth, & Harter, 2003, p. 74). Through verbal communication, language is actualized and expressed. As a social construct, language is shaped by cultural conventions and operates according to structural principles mutually recognized by members of the same linguistic community.

Importantly, verbal communication extends beyond spoken interaction and includes both oral and written modes of expression. It may occur through a wide range of channels, including face-to-face conversations, group discussions, counseling interactions, interviews, telephone calls,

teleconferencing, mass-media broadcasts, memos, letters, reports, notes, and email exchanges (The Business communication, 2005). Verbal communication is fundamental to human activity in general and plays a particularly crucial role in the communicative system of the armed forces. Speech serves not only to transmit information but also to regulate social relations, coordinate joint activity, support the exchange of professional experience, and articulate emotional states. Because language becomes operational through speech, verbal communication constitutes the principal mechanism for conveying meaning, establishing formal norms, and distributing communicative functions among military personnel.

Verbal discourse encompasses a broad spectrum of forms, such as conversation, dialogue, formal addresses, question-and-answer sequences, reprimands, congratulations, advice, discussions, and announcements. Each format fulfills a specific communicative purpose issuing commands, clarifying actions, providing information, expressing emotions, or organizing collective activity. These functions are particularly critical in military contexts, where accuracy, discipline, and clarity are imperative.

All communication unfolds within a particular situational framework and involves individuals who either generate or interpret messages. In verbal interaction, speaking and writing appropriately require selecting linguistic resources that correspond to the expectations and norms of the communicative situation. Verderber and Verderber (2005, p. 62) define appropriate speech as the deliberate choice of linguistic forms and symbols that align with the listener's needs, interests, knowledge level, and attitudes, while avoiding expressions that may alienate or confuse them. Consequently, effective verbal communication demands an understanding of both the receiver's characteristics and the contextual conditions that shape the communicative act.

METHODS AND RESULTS

In military contexts, the principle of situationally appropriate verbal behaviour becomes exceptionally significant, as every spoken or written act of communication directly influences discipline, coordination, command execution, and overall operational effectiveness. Clear, context-sensitive verbal interaction is therefore not merely a matter of etiquette, but a fundamental component of military professionalism and the command hierarchy. Verderber and Verderber's (2005, p. 62) framework for effective verbal communication can be applied to military discourse in the following ways:

1. Match the level of formality to the communicative context

The degree of formality must correspond to the military hierarchy and the specific operational situation. Military discourse typically requires a high level of formality—especially when addressing superiors, issuing commands, preparing reports, or participating in official procedures. Formality influences vocabulary choice, tone, and message structure. Even in communication among peers or in non-operational settings, service members are expected to uphold norms of respect, discipline, and clarity, avoiding overly casual expressions that may compromise authority or precision.

2. Control the use of jargon and slang

Military jargon encompasses specialized terminology (e.g., AO, SITREP, ROE), whereas slang includes informal expressions used within subgroups. These forms can enhance efficiency among trained personnel but may impede understanding when interacting with civilians, recruits, or allied forces unfamiliar with specific terms. In formal settings briefings, reports, inter-agency communication jargon should be used accurately and clarified when necessary. Slang should be excluded from formal military discourse, as it diminishes clarity, professionalism, and inter-unit interoperability.

3. Avoid profanity and vulgar speech

Although profanity is increasingly common in daily communication, its use in military interactions can undermine discipline, professionalism, and emotional self-control qualities essential to military service. Expressions such as damn, crazy, or more explicit profanity may appear informally, yet they erode respect, morale, and the disciplined image expected of military personnel. Avoiding such language is therefore critical to maintaining authority, upholding military ethics, and fostering mutual respect.

The core of military verbal discourse consists of commands, instructions, oral reports, official statements, and other structured speech units grounded in military terminology. Such utterances are characteristically concise, precise, unemotional, and require immediate compliance. For instance, the command "Group, stop!" constitutes a direct speech act with a fixed intonational pattern. Military interaction always reflects hierarchical norms; hence oral reports follow established structures with regulated forms of address, predetermined information order, and clear identification of the responsible party.

Nonverbal communication constitutes an independent

and highly efficient system of transmitting information without spoken language. Contemporary linguistic scholarship recognizes it as a distinct field with its own theoretical foundations. Gestures, facial expressions, bodily movements, posture, gaze, proxemics, gait, and even silence collectively form a complex semiotic system. Researchers note that the human body is capable of producing more than seven hundred thousand distinct mimetic and kinetic signals. This extensive “body-language alphabet” is indispensable in military practice, meeting the operational requirements of speed, brevity, clarity, and secrecy.

In combat situations, or when verbal communication is unsafe or impossible, orders are conveyed through gestures and bodily cues. For instance, a simple directional gesture signaling “you move left, I move right” illustrates the operational effectiveness and immediacy of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal competence is equally important in routine military duties. Accurate interpretation and use of nonverbal cues help avoid miscommunication, enable coordinated action, and support rapid decision-making. When combined with verbal commands, nonverbal signals amplify illocutionary force; a stern facial expression or a pointed glance may sufficiently replace a spoken instruction.

A crucial dimension of nonverbal military communication is appearance uniforms, insignia, and other visual markers. First impressions of military personnel are strongly influenced by their outward appearance. Uniforms function as linguo-semiotic indicators that encode information about an individual's profession, specialization, rank, and social status. Colors, badges, stripes, patches, and emblems serve as visual signs of hierarchical position and unit affiliation. Terms such as furajka in Uzbek and cap in English reflect culturally specific forms of military headgear and embody historical traditions. The distinctive attire of particular units in the Indian Armed Forces, such as Nihang or Sikh regiments, further demonstrates how military clothing simultaneously fulfills practical, communicative, and symbolic functions.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Taken together, verbal and nonverbal communication constitute an integrated and mutually reinforcing system within military environments. When effectively combined, these modes of communication improve the speed and accuracy of information exchange, reinforce institutional discipline, and contribute to the formation of a coherent and efficient communicative culture across the armed forces. Ultimately, competent communication in military settings requires a context-

sensitive and precise coordination of verbal and nonverbal strategies. Because military interaction functions within a rigid hierarchical structure and under demanding operational conditions, the appropriateness of linguistic choices whether in spoken or written form has a direct impact on discipline, coordination, and the execution of commands.

Adjusting the level of formality to the communicative situation, controlling the use of jargon and slang, and refraining from profanity are not simply matters of etiquette, but essential conditions for ensuring clarity, professionalism, and mutual respect among service members. At the same time, nonverbal elements including gestures, posture, facial expressions, and the symbolic meanings embedded in uniforms and insignia play an indispensable role in reinforcing or substituting verbal messages, especially in high-risk, time-sensitive, or communication-restricted contexts. Proficiency in both verbal and nonverbal modalities enhances interpersonal understanding, reduces the likelihood of miscommunication, and increases operational effectiveness. For this reason, the development of communicative competence grounded in linguistic accuracy, situational awareness, and adherence to military norms is fundamental to shaping effective military discourse and ensuring reliable, efficient communication at all levels of command.

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