

Military Terminology in Contrast: A Triangulated Study of English, Russian, And Uzbek Terminological Systems

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Abstract: This article presents a comprehensive contrastive analysis of military terminology across three linguistically and culturally distinct languages—English, Russian, and Uzbek. The research identifies keyword-formation patterns, semantic phenomena (polysemy, synonymy, metaphorization), and challenges of terminological equivalence. Special attention is given to abbreviations and acronyms as integral components of military language. The findings reveal significant asymmetries among the three terminological systems, particularly in organizational structure designations, abbreviation conventions, and the interplay between official terminology and professional slang.

Keywords: Military terminology, contrastive linguistics, terminological equivalence, word-formation, abbreviations, Russian-English-Uzbek, lexicography, semantic fields.

Introduction: Military terminology constitutes a specialized lexical subsystem that has evolved under the pragmatic imperative of unambiguous communication in contexts where precision can determine operational success or failure. As Dolomanova (2025) aptly observes, military terms represent "the language of action, not of emotions or interpretations"—their meanings are strictly defined and resist ambiguity. This functional specificity has made military terminology a persistent object of linguistic inquiry, yet contrastive studies encompassing languages from different genetic and typological families remain relatively scarce.

The present study addresses this gap by undertaking a triangulated analysis of military terminology in English (Germanic), Russian (Slavic), and Uzbek (Turkic). These three languages represent not only distinct linguistic structures but also different military traditions: English as the lingua franca of NATO operations, Russian as the historical language of Soviet and post-Soviet military education and documentation, and Uzbek as a national language undergoing active terminological modernization since 1991. The intersection of these

systems provides a unique vantage point for examining how military concepts are encoded, standardized, and adapted across linguistic boundaries.

The theoretical framework integrates classical terminology theory (Wüster, 1979; Reformatsky, 1961) with contemporary cognitive-semantic approaches (Temmerman, 2000; Faber, 2019) and corpus-based methodologies. This eclecticism is necessary because military terminology functions simultaneously as a system of concepts (ontological dimension), a set of lexical units (linguistic dimension), and a tool for professional communication (pragmatic dimension).

The concept of the term occupies a central position in specialized lexicology. Following ISO 704 (2022) and ISO 1087 (2019), a term is defined as a "verbal designation of a general concept in a specific subject field." This definition emphasizes three crucial features: the term is a linguistic unit, it denotes a concept (not merely a referent), and it operates within a bounded domain of knowledge.

Korovushkin (2005) provides a more elaborate characterization specifically for military terminology,

describing the military term as "a standard nominative unit with neutral connotation, denoting a general military or military-specialized scientific-technical concept and functionally anchored in the professional-corporate sphere of military affairs." This definition highlights the stylistic neutrality expected of terms—a feature that distinguishes them from emotionally charged everyday vocabulary.

However, contemporary terminology studies have moved beyond the prescriptive ideal of monosemy and univocity (L'Homme, 2020). Real-world terminological usage reveals systematic polysemy, synonymy, and contextual variation. Military terminology is no exception: terms acquire multiple related meanings, develop metaphorical extensions in media discourse, and coexist with informal professional variants. This tension between normative prescription and actual usage constitutes a central problematic for both theoretical description and practical lexicography.

Terms do not exist in isolation but form structured systems. The concept of the terminological system (or terminology proper, in the ISO sense) refers to "a set of designations and corresponding concepts belonging to one subject domain" (ISO 1087). Within military terminology, these systems are typically organized hierarchically through genus-species relationships. For example, weapon (generic term) subsumes small arms, artillery, missiles, etc., each of which further subdivides into more specific categories.

Semantic field theory provides a useful framework for analyzing these relationships. Military terminology can be segmented into thematic fields based on functional or conceptual criteria. Isaeva (cited in Biderkesen, 2020) proposes six thematic groups: (1) military commands, (2) military-technical terms, (3) operational-tactical terms, (4) military-administrative terms, (5) military-topographic terms, and (6) military-engineering terms. Alternative classifications follow branch-of-service divisions (ground forces, navy, air force), each with its own terminological subsystem.

The problem of terminological equivalence becomes

acute when comparing languages with different military traditions and institutional structures. Yankova (2015) distinguishes three degrees of equivalence: full equivalence (concepts coincide completely and have direct translation equivalents), partial equivalence (concepts overlap partially, requiring contextual adjustment), and zero equivalence (concepts exist in one language but lack corresponding terms in another). In cases of zero equivalence, translators must resort to descriptive paraphrases, loan translations, or borrowings.

International standardization efforts, particularly within NATO, have attempted to mitigate terminological asymmetries through glossaries such as AAP-6 (NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions) and the NATOTerm database. These resources establish agreed-upon definitions and approved translations, facilitating interoperability among allied forces. However, they do not eliminate all difficulties, especially when dealing with national military structures that lack direct counterparts in other systems.

The analysis proceeds through four stages:

1. **Morphological analysis:** Identification of productive word-formation patterns in each language (affixation, compounding, conversion, abbreviation, syntactic formation).
2. **Semantic analysis:** Examination of polysemy structures, synonymic series, and metaphorical extensions within each terminological system.
3. **Contrastive analysis:** Comparison of corresponding terms and concepts across the three languages, identifying degrees of equivalence and systematic asymmetries.
4. **Lexicographic synthesis:** Formulation of principles for representing multilingual military terminology in dictionary form.

Table 1 presents the dominant word-formation models in each language with illustrative examples and associated lexicographic challenges.

Table 1: Word-Formation Patterns in English, Russian, and Uzbek Military Terminology

Model	English	Russian	Uzbek	Lexicographic Risk
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Affixation	<i>fighter (er), counterattack (counter-)</i>	<i>летчик (чик) сапёр (-ёр)</i>	<i>jangchi (чи), h arbiychi (-чи)</i>	Suffix polysemy; non-obvious translation of affixal meaning
Compounding	<i>battlefield, aircraft carrier</i>	<i>бронепоезд, ракетносец</i>	<i>қўшинбоши, қаршимудафаа</i>	Orthographic variation (solid/hyphenated); component order differences
Conversion	<i>launch (v./n.), target (v./n.)</i>	<i>атака → а таковать (via suffix)</i>	<i>hujum (n.) → hujum qilmoq (periphrastic)</i>	Limited productivity in Russian/Uzbek; periphrastic equivalents
Abbreviation	<i>NATO, C4ISR, A WACS</i>	<i>ПВО, РХБ, Г СМ</i>	<i>БМТ (БМТ), М В (МВ)</i>	Multiple expansions; cross-linguistic mismatches
Syntactic formation	<i>rules of engagement</i>	<i>передний край обороны</i>	<i>mudofaa vazirligi</i>	Variability in established translations

Systematic polysemy characterizes military terminology across all three languages, though with different patterns. In English, terms frequently develop radial polysemy structures where a central meaning generates multiple related senses. For example, shield has evolved from its historical meaning ('protective armor') to denote missile defense systems (defense shield) and cybersecurity measures (cyber shield). Russian demonstrates similar patterns: артиллерия denotes both the branch of service ('artillery') and,

metonymically, artillery pieces themselves. Uzbek military terms also exhibit polysemy, often through metaphorical extension: toj ('crown') historically signified military authority and now carries abstract meanings of supremacy in military contexts.

All three languages display rich synonymy, particularly between official terminology and informal professional usage. Table 2 illustrates representative synonymic series.

Table 2: Synonymic Series in Military Terminology

Concept	English	Russian	Uzbek
Infantry fighting vehicle	<i>IFV (official); Bradley (metonymic, U.S.); battle taxi (slang)</i>	<i>БМП (official); бэха (slang); коробочка (slang)</i>	<i>БМП (from Russian); piyoda jangovar mashinasi (descriptive)</i>
Unmanned aerial vehicle	<i>UAV (official); drone (common); bird (slang)</i>	<i>БПЛА (official); беспилотник (common); дрон (borrowing)</i>	<i>UAV (borrowed); uchuvchisiz uchish apparati (descriptive); dron (common)</i>

This metaphorization serves pragmatic functions—dramatizing events, framing conflicts, and shaping

public perception—but complicates terminological description, as the boundary between specialized meaning and general-language usage becomes porous.

Military discourse relies extensively on abbreviations and acronyms as efficiency mechanisms. The study identifies several cross-linguistic challenges:

The same alphabetic sequence may expand differently across languages. English MP denotes Military Police,

while Russian МП typically abbreviates морская пехота ('naval infantry'). Conversely, identical concepts may receive different abbreviations: NATO's AWACS corresponds to Russian ДРЛО (дальнее радиолокационное обнаружение) and Uzbek descriptive phrases like radiolokatsion patrol uchoqi.

Table 3 illustrates representative abbreviation equivalences and mismatches.

Concept	English	Russian	Uzbek	Notes
United Nations	UN	ООН	BMT	Different initialisms
Ministry of Defense	MOD	МО	MV	Different abbreviations
Airborne Warning and Control System	AWACS	ДРЛО	radiolokatsion patrol uchoqi (descriptive)	Acronym vs. descriptive phrase
Main Battle Tank	MBT	ОБТ	asosiy jangovar tank (descriptive)	Abbreviation exists only in Russian borrowing

The findings challenge purely prescriptive approaches to terminology that insist on monosemy and strict univocity. Military terminology, despite its functional demand for precision, exhibits systematic polysemy, synonymy, and contextual variation. This suggests that terms are best understood not as static labels for fixed concepts but as dynamic units whose meanings are negotiated in professional practice and shaped by linguistic and cultural factors.

The cognitive-semantic framework (Faber, 2019) provides a more adequate model: terms activate conceptual frames that organize knowledge within a domain. For instance, the term operation evokes a frame comprising participants (friendly forces, enemy), activities (planning, execution), instruments (weapons, equipment), and outcomes. This frame may be partially activated in metaphorical uses, explaining how military terms acquire extended meanings in non-military contexts.

The study's findings inform several principles for multilingual military lexicography:

- 1. Conceptual equivalence:** Rather than seeking word-for-word matches, lexicographers should establish equivalence at the conceptual level, verifying that the designated concepts correspond across languages.
- 2. Polysemy representation:** Dictionary entries should distinguish senses systematically, using semantic

indicators and contextual examples to guide users.

- 3. Synonymic series:** Both official terms and common professional variants should be included, with appropriate stylistic labels (official, colloquial, slang).
- 4. Abbreviation treatment:** Abbreviations require dual representation—the abbreviated form itself and its full expansion—with cross-references to equivalents in other languages.
- 5. Cultural annotation:** Where military realities differ significantly, brief explanatory notes should clarify the nature of the designated concept and its relationship to counterparts in other systems.

CONCLUSION

This contrastive analysis of English, Russian, and Uzbek military terminology reveals a complex landscape of structural similarities, systematic differences, and points of terminological tension. While all three languages employ similar word-formation strategies (affixation, compounding, abbreviation), their relative productivity and specific manifestations vary considerably. Semantic phenomena—polysemy, synonymy, metaphorization—operate in all three systems but produce language-specific patterns that challenge direct translation.

The study contributes to ongoing international efforts toward terminology standardization by demonstrating the necessity of conceptually based equivalence assessment rather than superficial lexical matching. For

military translators, lexicographers, and language planners, the findings offer practical guidance for navigating the asymmetries between these three terminological systems.

As military cooperation becomes increasingly international and multilingual, the need for reliable terminological resources grows correspondingly. This study represents a step toward meeting that need, providing both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for the development of truly interoperable military terminology across languages and cultures.

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