

Enhancing Foreign Language Expertise in the Indian Armed Forces

A Focus on Chinese Language Proficiency

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Effective communication is paramount for military success in today's globalised operations and diverse linguistic landscapes. Linguistic support has historically been a crucial component of military operations worldwide. This article explores measures for enhancing foreign language expertise in the Indian Armed Forces, with focus on Chinese language proficiency. It delves into research conducted in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Russia, Ukraine and China on: linguistic support for the forces; military translation; and the roles of translators, interpreters and research scholars. Thematic and content analysis methods are employed to address the research question: 'How to enhance foreign language expertise in the Indian Armed Forces with a focus on Chinese language proficiency?'. The findings highlight the significant role of linguistic support in military operations, emphasising its core importance to combat capability. While the Indian Armed Forces have made strides in improving Chinese language proficiency among translators, interpreters and instructors, there remains a need for specialised translators and interpreters training in the military domain. Further research in 'linguistic support for forces' is essential to address challenges and build robust linguistic capacities. The article calls for the establishment of dedicated translation and interpretation

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institutes to meet the specific linguistic needs of the Indian Armed Forces. It underscores the importance of leveraging the expertise of serving and retired Chinese linguists and advocates for the development of specialised training programmes to cultivate proficient Chinese translators, interpreters, instructors, intelligence analysts and research scholars within the military. Multi-disciplinary collaboration among linguists, defence experts, artificial intelligence (AI) specialists and data scientists is essential to enhance research capabilities and understand the modernisation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The article also recommends creating a separate linguists' cadre and recognising and incentivising Chinese language experts in the armed forces. By proposing strategies for knowledge exchange, indigenous capacity-building and the integration of emerging technologies, the article offers practical recommendations for enhancing linguistic support capabilities within the Indian Armed Forces, with special emphasis on the Chinese language.

Keywords: *Foreign language, Linguistic support, Armed Forces, Chinese Language, Translator, Interpreter*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected and complex global landscape, the strategic importance of linguistic expertise cannot be overstated, particularly in the military context. The Indian Armed Forces, tasked with safeguarding national security and contributing to international peacekeeping efforts, require robust linguistic capabilities to navigate multifaceted geopolitical challenges. This necessity is especially pronounced in the relevance of India's interactions with China, a neighbouring country with which it shares significant strategic, economic and geopolitical interests, as well as periodic tensions.

The need for foreign language experts within the Indian Armed Forces has become more critical due to the evolving nature of modern warfare and diplomacy. Proficiency in languages, such as Chinese, enables more effective communication, intelligence gathering and collaboration with counterparts in different countries. It also enhances the ability to understand and interpret key cultural and socio-political nuances that are vital for strategic planning and decision-making.

This article examines the role of foreign language experts, translators and interpreters in the armed forces of various countries and deliberates on the imperative for such expertise in the Indian Armed Forces, focusing on the demand for Chinese language experts. It explores the models of different countries and draws lessons and insights to apply them in the Indian context.

It also analyses the current state of linguistic capabilities within the military, highlights gaps and challenges, and underscores the strategic advantages of fostering a cadre of proficient Chinese language experts. Furthermore, the article discusses the initiatives necessary to develop and sustain Chinese language proficiency, including targeted recruitment, specialised training programmes in translation and interpretation and collaborative efforts with academic and civilian institutions.

By addressing the need for enhanced foreign language capabilities, the article aims to contribute to the discourse on military preparedness and strategic competence, ultimately advocating for measures that will strengthen the Indian Armed Forces in an era of dynamic global interactions.

LINGUISTIC SUPPORT FOR FORCES (LSF)

Lilly Lindquist, in an article, has underscored the pivotal role of foreign languages in both conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.¹ With reports indicating that in the United States (US), one million soldiers have acquired at least basic proficiency in foreign languages during their military service, the importance of linguistic proficiency in fostering effective communication with native populations cannot be overstated. In the realm of modern warfare, characterised by vast linguistic and cultural disparities across borders, proficiency in multilingual notation systems is paramount for operational success. Translation, long intertwined with the machinery of war, now occupies a central position in military operations within our globalised context. Military translation, as a specialised field, serves to provide linguistic support to the armed forces worldwide.

The concept of 'linguistic support for forces' (LSF) has emerged relatively recently, and was initially proposed by Ukrainian scholar Viktor V. Balabin in the mid-1990s. Balabin defines LSF as a comprehensive framework encompassing various tasks and processes essential for supporting military activities in the armed forces of Ukraine. These tasks include inter-cultural communication, language mediation, military terminology standardisation, language education and linguistic research.²

Balabin emphasises the pivotal role of military translators as primary actors in providing linguistic assistance to forces. He defines military translation/interpretation as a core component of LSF, encompassing a range of activities, such as oral and written translation, interpretation, editing and annotation of military-related documents. Additionally, he describes the essential attributes

and skills required of military interpreters/translators, including bilingual communication, cognitive abilities and professional competence.³

Activities Involved in the LSF System

1. *Translation Support*: Involves translation and adaptation of military documents, including military-general, military-political, military-technical and military-special subjects.
2. *Military Regional Studies*: Focuses on information gathering, processing and analysis related to military and linguistic regions.
3. *Military Terminology*: Involves standardising, normalising and codifying military terminology; maintaining databases of standardised military terms; and compiling multilingual military dictionaries.
4. *Linguo-pedagogical Activity*: Includes planning, organising and conducting foreign language classes, as well as assessing and certifying language competence among military personnel.
5. *Linguistic Research Activity*: Involves conducting research on language-related issues within the context of military operations, as per the prescribed guidelines. Linguistic research within LSF encompasses various aspects, such as language analysis, needs assessment, training development, translation and interpretation and communication technology. This research aims to understand language requirements and challenges faced by military personnel and to develop effective language support strategies and resources tailored to their needs.

Although LSF primarily focuses on translation and interpretation activities, Balabin notes that in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, linguistic support is often limited to these functions. Nonetheless, the comprehensive framework proposed by Balabin underscores the importance of addressing diverse language-related needs within military contexts to enhance operational effectiveness and communication capabilities.⁴

VIEWS OF SCHOLARS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES ON MILITARY INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Several scholars offer diverse perspectives on the roles of, and challenges faced by, military interpreters and translators:

1. Catherine Baker examines the working environment of interpreters, translators and linguists during peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina, highlighting their invaluable contributions to conversations, patrols,

interrogations, as also providing cultural insights. However, according to Baker, only a small number of linguists met professional standards, with recruitment primarily from former Yugoslavia. There were also limited opportunities for professional development, particularly in operational language support.⁵

2. Tian Luo discusses military translation's role in augmenting combat power, defining it as an intangible factor involving information and knowledge. He asserts that interpreters significantly contributed to Alliance victories in the China–Burma–India Theatre, enhancing tangible and intangible combat power factors and influencing conflict outcomes. Luo proposes a framework mapping out how translation impacts the internal mechanisms of war.⁶
3. Mona Baker explores the narratives surrounding translators and interpreters in war zones, emphasising the lack of research in this area. She highlights the significant yet often overlooked role of language mediators during certain conflicts, such as the Iraq and Afghan wars, stressing the need for increased attention to their experiences and contributions.⁷
4. Hilary Footitt underscores the importance of translators in intelligence gathering during war, noting their role in translating coded messages and enemy documents. She discusses the challenges faced by locally contracted linguists during conflicts, who sometimes also act as chroniclers and narrators of war events. Footitt emphasises the crucial role of foreign languages in intelligence work and the necessity of institutional language policies to support effective targeting and intelligence gathering. She warns against translations lacking context, emphasising the potential dangers of inaccuracies in intelligence operations.⁸

These scholars collectively shed light on the multifaceted roles of military interpreters and translators, their contributions to combat effectiveness and the challenges they face in various operational contexts. Their insights underscore the critical importance of linguistic support in military operations and intelligence gathering.

OPERATIONAL LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Operational language support encompasses a wide array of services and resources crucial for facilitating effective communication, cultural understanding and language proficiency within military operations. These services include language training programmes tailored to enhance the

linguistic skills of military personnel, focusing on specialised military vocabulary and terminology. Additionally, operational language support provides translation and interpretation services to bridge communication gaps between individuals speaking different languages, ensuring accuracy and clarity in exchanges. Cultural awareness training is integral, offering insights into local customs, norms and sensitivities, and fostering intercultural competence essential for collaboration with foreign partners or local populations. Furthermore, linguists and language analysts contribute significantly to operational language support by analysing intercepted foreign language communications, extracting pertinent information and providing linguistic and cultural insights crucial for intelligence gathering.

The preparation, translation and management of military documents are also vital components of operational language support, ensuring accuracy and clarity in operational plans, reports and technical manuals. Technology plays a pivotal role, with language-enabled tools enhancing communication, language learning and document translation processes. Moreover, language professionals serve as liaison officers, facilitating communication and understanding between military units from different countries through interpretation, translation and cultural mediation. Effective planning and coordination are essential, with language professionals collaborating with military units and intelligence agencies to develop language support plans, identify language requirements and allocate resources, ensuring seamless integration into overall operational planning. Overall, operational language support plays a critical role in enabling effective communication, cultural understanding and mission success in military operations, essential for overcoming language barriers and navigating complex linguistic and cultural landscapes.

REQUIREMENTS FOR MILITARY TRANSLATORS

Inese Kočote of Riga Technical University, Latvia, emphasises the requirements for military translators and says:

A military translator translating military and military-related texts needs to have strong thematic competence. S/he should have adequate knowledge of military weapons, equipment, and facilities, rank structures, subordination, and military procedures. Translators must also know military jargon and slang terms and must be well-versed in the warfare and army. S/he must be an expert in military terminology and should also be familiar with the terminology in IT, economics and politics. They must possess knowledge of current issues related to global security and military operations. In

reality, a translator can't be a specialist in all the fields so will the general understanding of domain knowledge suffice? It is a question of debate.

LSP translators should also possess intercultural competence, that is, to be aware of the cultural aspects of the two armies they are dealing with. Multi-meanings of abbreviation in military texts are a major challenge for a translator hence must render it precisely. Translator has to seek expert advice rather than merely relying on dictionaries. Faculty of the military translator is not limited to thematic competence; knowledge of military activities and advanced linguistic competence are prerequisites for accurately decoding military-related texts. Faithfulness and terminological precision are the two main expectations of the users of the translated military texts. Pragmatic adaptation of the source texts is rarely acceptable.⁹

Need for Proper Training of Military Translators

There may be adverse consequences of wrong translation of military texts. These translations are crucial for strategic decision-making, hence relevant translator training is of extreme importance. This training should be imparted at both graduate and postgraduate-level translation programmes. If the military-related texts are imprecisely translated, then not only the general public may get inaccurate and faulty information on matters of great public interest but it would also be hazardous for national security.

The students who are specialising in various fields may also acquire expertise in translating military-related texts. Currently, it is a highly competitive field. However, excessive literariness is to be avoided as it is not reader-friendly. Accurate context precision is the main requirement for military and military-related texts. Further, borrowing by transcription should be avoided when translating new terms. An expert in the field has to be consulted to interpret it accurately.¹⁰

RESEARCH ON MILITARY TRANSLATION IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

Military Translation Research in the US

Tristin Hopper highlights the indispensable role of interpreters and translators within the US Army, emphasising their involvement in various critical tasks, from establishing connections with local populations to interpreting enemy messages and participating in diplomatic negotiations. During the Iraq and Afghan wars, the significance of these linguistic specialists was paramount, prompting the US to employ a large number of civilian interpreters to fulfil the requirements. The US considers these linguists as essential as critical weapon systems, maintaining around 14,000 linguists worldwide.¹¹

Sarah-Claire Jordan notes that while the US military maintains a considerable number of linguistic specialists, it also addresses linguistic challenges through outsourcing, either by hiring English-speaking locals or contracting translators and interpreters. These hired resources are compensated well, underscoring their importance in military operations.¹²

Furthermore, the US Department of Defense (DoD) issued a 'Defense Language Transformation Roadmap' in 2005, outlining steps to enhance foreign language capabilities and connect them as strategic assets in military operations and the global war on terrorism. This roadmap emphasises certain goals, such as creating foundational language and culture-specific knowledge; establishing language and cultural resources; and ensuring welfare measures for linguists and foreign area officers. Additionally, the DoD's strategic plan for 2011–16 underscores the importance of language skills, regional expertise and cultural capabilities for the US forces operating worldwide. The plan emphasises the necessity of effective communication in foreign languages and understanding diverse cultures to meet present and future challenges in the world.¹³

Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang analyses the US's new foreign language strategy, noting its elaboration and proactive approach towards foreign language capabilities in defence forces. He outlines three lessons for the Chinese military: (i) constant revision of understanding; (ii) resolving systemic issues; and (iii) enhancing the use of multiple language resources. Despite the US's extensive language capabilities and efficient language preparation systems, substantial investments are made annually to develop military language skills systematically. Wen and Su Jing emphasise the importance of foreign language abilities, detailed planning, effective management and supervision in the US military's strategy. Comparatively, the Chinese military faces challenges in diversifying tasks due to inadequate foreign language skills. Wen urges prioritisation of improving language capabilities through careful analysis, resource utilisation and long-term planning to enhance national security and military personnel quality.¹⁴

Army's Machine Foreign Language Translation System (MFLTS)

Presently, there are two MFLTSs in use in the US Army: one provides two-way real-time speech-to-speech translation; and the other provides text-to-text translation of social media, web pages and electronic documents. Both use state-of-the-art machine language translation technology, with several language packs to choose from. These systems can meet very unique army requirements and need to be stored on the mobiles and computers of the

users. The military's unique language contents can also be used in it, hence supporting the full spectrum of military operations. The MFLTS supports the army's readiness by providing language support in the absence of human linguists. This new adoptable and deployable language translation capability can help remove language barriers in a complex world.¹⁵

In an article, Jesus Baigorri-Jalon has emphasised the importance of languages as weapons. According to him, the military interpreters are not professional and they have only functional knowledge of the languages. The interpreters work for intelligence, counter-intelligence, diplomacy, propaganda, etc.¹⁶

Military Translation Research in Russia and Ukraine

Russia and Ukraine, part of erstwhile Soviet Union, are leading countries in the field of research on military translation. Balabin mentions that L.L. Nelyubin of Soviet Union was the pioneer of military translation studies in the early 1960s, however, in Ukraine, research on military translation began in the mid-1990s.

A few scholars have successfully defended their PhD dissertations in the field of military translation. Several scholars in Russia, including N.K. Grabowski and E.N. Mishkurov, have also published papers on varied theoretical aspects of military translation.¹⁷

Military Translation Research in the United Kingdom (UK): A British National Project

The University of Reading, in collaboration with the University of Southampton and the Lunjiao Imperial War Museum, conducted a three-year national project, 'Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict', that concluded in April 2011. This project examined conflict situations, such as the liberation/occupation of Western Europe by Allied forces during World War II (1944–47) and international peacekeeping in the Bosnia and Herzegovina War (1995–98). The research focused on various aspects, including official foreign language policies, theoretical frameworks, foreign language experiences of personnel, translation and war, role of language experts and English training in international peacekeeping.

The project led to numerous research publications and training of doctoral students, fostering sustained development in the field. Notable monographs, such as 'Language at War: The Policy and Practice of Language Contacts in Conflict', 'Language and Military: Alliances, Occupation, and Peacebuilding', 'Interpretation of Peace: Peace Operations, Clash and Language

in the Bosnia-Herzegovina War' and 'War Dialogue: Foreign Languages and British War Efforts in Europe (1940–1947)', reshaped understanding regarding the role of foreign languages in warfare. Additionally, Murray and Wang Xiangbing discussed the importance of military translation studies, highlighting its critical role in modern warfare across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. They emphasised translation's integral role in various war activities, including recruitment, propaganda, intelligence gathering, strategy development and peacebuilding. Overall, this research underscores the pivotal role of translation and linguistic support in military operations, shedding light on its significance within globalised contexts and intelligence operations.¹⁸

Military Translation Research in China

Military translation has a long history in China. There were translators and interpreters during the Opium War (1839–42) between Britain and China. Lawrence Wang-chi Wong writes that during this war, both the sides were highly dependent on translators and interpreters. Chinese side took the services of *tongshi*, who were not very competent in Chinese or English. The first Chinese translator was Lin Zexu. He set up his team, but very few Chinese nationals were willing to learn a foreign language at that time. In fact, in China, translators were regarded as traitors or evildoers and condemned as *hanjian*. On the other side, Britain employed translators and interpreters in multiple roles as interpreters, military advisers and local magistrates. Their roles were different and of high status. They were also given good incentives.¹⁹

Recent research on military translation in China is rather comprehensive. According to Chinese scholar Wu Shufan, military translation encompasses four main areas:

1. *Military theory translation*: Military theory, including both military thinking and academic discourse, is crucial for shaping military activities and policies. As military theories vary among nations, the translation of foreign military theories is essential for informing China's warfare strategies, defence policies and military regulations. While military translation itself may not create military theory, its role is indispensable in facilitating military scientific research and informing national decision-making.
2. *Military technical translation*: This involves translating literature on research, production, use, maintenance and engineering of weaponry and equipment. Given the pivotal role of weapon technology in modern warfare, the introduction and assimilation of advanced foreign military

technology becomes imperative for maintaining national defence capabilities. Military translation plays a vital role in this process of technology absorption and dissemination.

3. *Military intelligence translation*: Translating foreign intelligence materials, encompassing military, political, economic, scientific and technological information, is essential for strategic decision-making and operational planning. Military intelligence serves as a fundamental basis for understanding adversaries and formulating effective military strategies. Translation plays a crucial role in transforming raw information into actionable intelligence, thus aiding in the comprehension of enemy intentions and capabilities.
4. *Military foreign-related translation*: This area involves interpretation and translation activities related to military interactions with foreign entities, including enemies and allies. Such interactions may include propaganda dissemination, prisoner interrogation and military negotiations. These activities are integral to psychological warfare, intelligence gathering and diplomatic negotiations during wartime scenarios. Military translation serves as a bridge in facilitating effective communication and negotiation between military forces, thereby influencing the course and outcomes of conflicts.²⁰

China's Efforts in Training Machine Translation

In a recent article, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Jackson Smith have emphasised: 'Translation forms a crucial part of People's Liberation Army (PLA)-directed research'.²¹ This is done to support influence operations (IO); enhance cooperation with the Russian military; and even understand the US policy discussions on social media. Recent research from institutions, such as the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force's (PLASSF; disbanded on 19 April 2024) Information Engineering University (IEU), indicates that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) can conduct cognitive domain operations (CDO; 认知域作战) against not just Taiwan or the US, but almost anywhere—including authoritarian states such as Vietnam. The PLA has spent at least five years building corpora of foreign language texts to train machine translation tools, though the scarcity of quality resources has been an issue in creating useful tools. The extent to which LLMs will become an additional tool in this research is unclear.

The PLA is already planning for IO against Vietnam, while similar efforts are likely underway against Burma, India and others. Indeed, CDO is the new primary operational concept for Chinese military IO. There

are institutions one would expect to provide linguistic support to foreign language IOs, such as CDOs. The PLASSF's IEU theses suggest a specific PLA effort, since at least 2019, to train machine translation tools based on acquiring foreign language texts. This could be intended to support artificial intelligence (AI)-driven CDO against other countries. The IEU produces many master's theses and PhD dissertations that involve some translation, primarily focused on the US, Russia and South Korea. The breadth of translations that are explicitly focused on supporting machine translation, however, suggests the PLASSF may be undertaking a broader effort to build up corpora to support AI-driven CDO.

A 2021 article by two National University of Defense Technology researchers as part of a research grant on 'national defense language capabilities' (国防语言能力) argued that China 'can rely on "cloud" technology to build a comprehensive service platform for the "critical languages" of Chinese military's public opinion struggle', in part involving machine translation, to 'solve the problems faced by Chinese military's news and communication departments at all levels'. Building corpora is also a widely recognised enabler of PLA IO. One 2017 article argued, 'We can rely on currently relatively mature corpus technology, data mining technology, open source intelligence information technology, and subliminal information technology'. A 2019 thesis, meanwhile, built an 'Indian English–Chinese neural translation system' and focused on Indian social media discourse.²²

HOW SIGNIFICANT IS CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES?

China is India's immediate neighbour and a rising military power. Indian military personnel need to understand Chinese language and culture to effectively communicate and interact with their Chinese counterparts during bilateral engagements, joint military exercises and crises. Learning Chinese language can also help Indian military personnel monitor and analyse Chinese military strategies, doctrines and operations. It can provide valuable insights into Chinese military capabilities and intentions, thereby helping Indian military planners to develop appropriate response strategies. In today's era of informatisation and intelligentisation of the armed forces, the role of Chinese linguists is fast changing. It is thus evident that although learning Chinese language may not be a requirement for all Indian military personnel, it can be an asset for those who interact with Chinese counterparts, monitor Chinese military activities and engage with Chinese leaders.

EFFORTS BY THE INDIAN ARMY TO BOLSTER CHINESE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AMONG THE TROOPS

As mandarin is a widely spoken language in China, the Indian Army plans to increase the number of Mandarin speakers within its ranks. In a news article, Huma Siddiqui has mentioned the recent efforts made by the army to bolster Mandarin proficiency among the troops:²³

1. The Army Education Corps (AEC) Training College and Centre is running courses to train officers and personnel in Mandarin. After the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020, the number of courses has been doubled from two to four. Each batch, which consists of approximately 10 officers, 30 junior commissioned officers (JCOs) and other ranks personnel, is put through rigorous training.
2. The institute is also offering tailor-made six-month courses for JCOs and other ranks. Those who have already completed the initial Chinese course are being provided refresher courses, lasting two months. The School for Foreign Languages, Delhi, too is contributing towards training select officers and men in Mandarin.
3. For specific deployment requirements, one to three months duration capsule courses are being conducted for formations stationed along the northern borders. The focus is on teaching basic terms and vocabulary of Mandarin, thereby helping equip soldiers for communication during border talks, flag meetings, joint exercises and border personnel meetings.

The aim of these measures is to bolster language proficiency, so as to enhance overall understanding and communication with Chinese soldiers. This, in turn, is expected to foster a more conducive environment for dialogue, and also reduce misinterpretations during face-to-face interactions. Considering the evolving geopolitical dynamics, investing in linguistic skills is important. In particular, it reflects the Indian Army's commitment towards finding peaceful resolutions and maintaining effective communication channels. By embracing language diversity, the Indian Army has taken a vital step towards promoting peace, ensuring stability and safeguarding its territorial integrity.

Another news article, in *The Economic Times*, highlights the following measures taken by the Indian Army:²⁴

1. A notification has been issued by the army for recruiting Mandarin language experts into the Territorial Army.

2. The language schools based in Northern, Eastern and Central Commands are running various Mandarin language courses.
3. Further, AI-based solutions for translation of various scripts or literature from Mandarin language are being used by the Indian Army.
4. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with Rashtriya Raksha University, Central University of Gujarat and Shiv Nadar University for imparting Mandarin proficiency to army personnel.
5. The vacancies at the Indian Army's Training School at Pachamari and the School of Foreign Languages, Delhi, have also been increased.

The Indian Army believes that Chinese language experts are a functional requirement at the tactical level. In addition, they are required at the operational and strategic levels for providing analysis while catering for futuristic needs. Therefore, the army is making intensive efforts to train its Chinese linguists at different levels.

The various Chinese language courses, being run at the AEC Training College and Centre and command schools, are an excellent endeavour to train officers and men from the armed forces and refresh their language competences at diploma and certificate levels. Troops' training in Chinese at Indian civil universities and foreign institutions is also an effective step to bolster Mandarin proficiency. However, military orientation needs to be enhanced in these postgraduate courses in Chinese. This may be supplemented by internship programmes, dedicated training in military domain and on-the-job training.

Specialised Chinese translation and interpreter training in the military domain needs to be explored for a higher level of proficiency in translation and interpretation. Selected Chinese linguists should be encouraged to join PhD programmes and research projects to address specific requirements of the armed forces. The initiation of multidisciplinary and advanced collaborative research is also needed to prepare for future informatised and intelligentised warfare scenarios.

MODES OF CHINESE LANGUAGE SUPPORT TO THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES

1. *Communication and interpreting.* Chinese language proficiency enables direct communication between Indian Armed Forces personnel and

Chinese counterparts, reducing reliance on interpreters and enhancing clarity in various operational scenarios.

2. *Intelligence gathering*: Proficiency in Chinese facilitates access to open-source intelligence (OSINT), aiding in the analysis of Chinese military strategies and intentions, thereby enhancing situational awareness and decision-making.
3. *Border security and surveillance*: Chinese language skills assist in border security efforts, enabling effective communication with local communities, gathering intelligence and understanding dynamics along the India–China border.
4. *Cultural understanding and diplomacy*: Knowledge of Chinese culture enhances diplomatic engagements, fostering better relationships, mitigating misunderstandings and promoting effective collaboration during negotiations or crisis management.
5. *Cybersecurity and cyberwarfare*: Chinese language proficiency aids in monitoring and analysing Chinese cyber activities, identifying potential threats and countering cyberwarfare strategies targeting Indian interests.
6. *Enhancing military intelligence and special forces operations*: Chinese language skills are valuable in intelligence operations, including signals intelligence (SIGINT), human intelligence (HUMINT) and special forces missions.

In the final analysis, Chinese language proficiency holds significant value in military intelligence and special forces operations. It empowers intelligence personnel to intercept, analyse and decipher Chinese communications, contributing to a better understanding of the Chinese military and political landscape. Additionally, it enhances the effectiveness of special forces units by enabling them to communicate with locals, gather critical information and execute operations with greater precision and success in regions where Chinese language is prevalent.

CHALLENGES AND COMPLEXITIES OF CHINESE LANGUAGE

The Chinese language presents several challenges and complexities that impact proper LSF. These challenges include:

1. *Linguistic complexity*: Chinese is a tonal language with a complex writing system comprising thousands of characters, making it challenging for non-native speakers to learn and master.

2. *Dialectal diversity*: China has numerous dialects and regional variations, such as Mandarin, Cantonese and Shanghaiese, which can differ significantly in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. This diversity adds complexity to communication and interpretation efforts.
3. *Cultural nuances*: Chinese language and culture are deeply intertwined, with language reflecting cultural values, etiquette and social hierarchies. Understanding these nuances is essential for effective communication and relationship building in Chinese-speaking environments.
4. *Political sensitivities*: Given China's political landscape, certain topics and terminology may be sensitive or subject to censorship, requiring careful navigation and awareness by linguists providing support to forces.
5. *Technological challenges*: Chinese language processing and translation technologies face unique challenges due to the language's complexity, character-based writing system and variations in dialects, posing obstacles to the development of effective language support tools.
6. *Homophones*: Chinese has a significant number of homophones, which are words that sound the same but have different meanings. Distinguishing between these homophones can be challenging, particularly in verbal communication, where context becomes crucial for understanding.

Addressing these challenges requires specialised training, cultural competency and technological innovations tailored to the intricacies of Chinese language and its diverse linguistic landscape.

ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE MODELS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

On analysing language models in various countries and the efforts made by the Indian Army, certain gaps can be seen which need to be addressed:

1. The Ukrainian model suggests a pivotal role of military translators as the primary actors in providing linguistic assistance to the forces. They have also been assigned various duties. We, however, lack specialised training facility for Chinese military translators and interpreters at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
2. Translators' tasks include intercultural communication, language mediation, military terminology standardisation, language education and linguistic research. Research on military linguistics is not much explored in India. We need to carry out research and develop suitable study material for specialised courses. Our Chinese language training at

diploma and master's level needs more military orientation to be able to cater to current and future organisational needs.

3. Tian Luo has discussed military translation's role in augmenting combat power.²⁵ In today's information era, the translator's role has shifted from translator to post-editor of machine translation. Knowledge and skill requirements have increased manifolds. Without dedicated translators' training, we cannot expect quality translation. Inese Kočote also emphasises proper training of translators and interpreters. China is paying much attention to developing machine translation in the language pair English–Chinese. On the same lines, we need to develop natural language processing (NLP) models in the language pair Chinese–English and train them with the help of the Chinese–English parallel corpus of military-related texts. This is the gap area and we need to work in this direction.
4. Mona Baker has stressed the need for increased attention to translators' experiences and contributions.²⁶ We also need to objectively assess: the significance of the role of Chinese linguists in the Indian Armed Forces; future requirements; the efforts made by them in learning and maintaining the desired standards; and the incentives and recognition that should be given to them for their efforts, dedication and hard work. The services of retired linguists of the armed forces should be taken as they are valuable resources in this domain.
5. Hilary Footitt has expressed her views on the importance of foreign languages in intelligence gathering.²⁷ She warns against translations lacking context and emphasises the potential dangers of inaccuracies in intelligence operations. As far as intelligence gathering from Chinese sources is concerned, the difficulty level of Chinese language poses a hurdle in the process and requires multidisciplinary research and dedicated training for effective results. In today's information era when a large amount of data is received with a fast speed, the proficiency requirements for Chinese linguists have increased to a great extent. Generalised Chinese language training should be shifted to specialised task-oriented training based on research and innovation.
6. A few scholars from Russia, Ukraine and China have successfully defended their PhD dissertations in the field of military translation. We should also encourage our Chinese language experts and research scholars to research strategically significant topics. They should be encouraged to choose topics related to our national interests rather than selecting any topic on China. We may also draw lessons from long-term projects, like

the national project on military translation research in the UK, to create literature in this overlooked but strategically significant domain.

7. We may take insight from Wu Shufan's views on military translation and broaden our scope of military translation.²⁸ Translation work and in-depth research is required to be conducted in the suggested areas, that is, military theory, military technical, military intelligence and military foreign related, to understand the PLA.

A NEW MODEL FOR MILITARY TRANSLATION

Based on PhD project, the author has conceptualised a new model for military translation. This model briefly states that military translation is a type of specialised translation, like legal, business and technical translation. Applying the PACTE model of translation competence in the military field, and focusing on China, it has been found that a military translator needs to possess specific competencies, such as bilingual sub-competence in Chinese and English and extra-linguistic sub-competence. Under extra-linguistic sub-competence, a military translator should possess thematic knowledge about the military of the target country. Further, a translator working in Chinese military-related texts must have a thorough knowledge of the Chinese military as well as modern developments in the world militaries. S/he should also possess cultural knowledge, that is, knowledge about the organisational structure, strategies and tactics of the PLA. Besides this, a translator needs to have an encyclopaedic knowledge in all the fields, including politics, economics, science and technology, legal, information technology, etc.

The military translator needs to possess translation knowledge sub-competence. S/he should be well-versed in translation theories, procedures, principles, techniques, etc., so that these can be wisely applied to solve various translation-related problems. The next sub-competence is instrumental sub-competence. The military translator must be aware of modern technologies applied in the field of translation, such as machine translation, computer-assisted translation, management of term base, project management software, use of concordances, use of monolingual, bilingual and comparable corpora, DTP software and other language processing-related tools and techniques. S/he should have the knowledge and skills required for handling various documents and files, and also be familiar with the modern means of online communication, the OCR and text-to-speech and speech-to-text software.

Moreover, the military translator should possess strategic sub-competence to apply other competences to solve translation problems. In addition, psycho-physiological components, like the right type of attitude and skills, are important in a military translator.

The military translator needs to develop top-level research competence to mine related information. S/he should be well aware of the search engines, advanced search options, information acquisition and processing, etc. The translator should develop sources from where s/he can get expert advice to solve technical/terminology-related problems; should gain expertise in information mining in real-time; and possess translation service provision competence. Linguistic and textual competence in Chinese and English are very significant for military translation.

Translation Standards

When it comes to faithfulness and expressiveness in translation, expressiveness can be sacrificed to some extent for faithfulness. Military translators should use the foreignisation strategy and borrow typical military terms for which there is no equivalent available in the target language. For example, military terms, like ‘中队*zhongdui*’, and ‘支队*zhidui*’, should be borrowed from the source text and footnotes need to be given explaining the term. The Skopos theory is very significant in military translation, that is, the purpose of translation decides the strategy, efforts and level of accuracy and expressiveness. A contrastive study of Chinese–English is of paramount importance for translators.

The significance of cultural nuances in military translation is self-evident. Adhering to the structured translation process outlined by the European standard, EN 15038, proves applicable within military contexts, encompassing key stages, such as translation, checking, revision, review, proofreading and final verification. Building and expanding a parallel corpus of Chinese–English military-related texts is significant for the training of human translators as well as training NLP models. Leveraging the corpus of Chinese military-related texts, the continual development, maintenance and updating of Chinese–English military terminology can be ensured. Central to this process is the pivotal role of the Chinese–English military translator, who navigates complexities with precision and expertise. Moreover, the integration of information and communication (ICT) tools and the development of NLP models are key to further enhancing translation efficiency and accuracy.²⁹

TRAINING OF MILITARY TRANSLATORS

Kočote, emphasising the proper training of translators and interpreters, states: 'Inaccurate translation of military texts can have adverse consequences, that is why the issues of relevant translator training are of utmost importance and should be addressed within both graduate and post-graduate translation programs.'³⁰

As military translation is a very significant field, it is important to impart proper training to military translators and interpreters to foster in them the desired skills, competencies and knowledge. This training should be based on 'training for specialised translation in the military domain'. Professional advancement of military translators is necessary to keep them updated with the technologies in this field. The training is to be provided as per the analysed needs of the armed forces.

Requirements of Chinese Translators and Interpreters in the Indian Armed Forces

Chinese translators and interpreters play a vital role within the Indian Armed Forces. Their services are essential for translating documents and materials related to OSINT, SIGINT and various intelligence-gathering activities. Chinese translators work on translating Chinese books and documents to understand China's military theory and technology. They also translate documents about international meetings, such as border personnel meetings, flag meetings and high-level diplomatic engagements between Chinese and Indian officials.

Additionally, Chinese interpreters are required at different levels for day-to-day interpretation: during interactions between troops from both sides at border posts; during patrols; during a rise in border disputes; for organising friendly events; and for exchange of greetings and gifts during important national festivals. They provide interpretation services during border personnel meetings, flag meetings and high-level commander meetings between the two sides, as well as during joint military exercises. They also cater to the requirements during United Nations peace missions and other scenarios.

Training of Chinese Translators and Interpreters

Before discussing the requisite training, let us take a look at the current levels of Chinese language training:

1. Certificate of proficiency level/survival level;

2. Diploma level;
3. Courses for specific requirements;
4. MA in Chinese; and
5. PhD in Chinese.

There is a need to redefine and restructure the requirements of various proficiency levels in the armed forces and design specialised courses at these academic levels.

Most Chinese translators and interpreters hold Chinese language qualifications at the certificate, diploma or master's level. Specialised training in translation and interpretation is essential and can be obtained through short-term courses, postgraduate diplomas and higher-level programmes. Military interpreters and translators should undergo intensive Chinese language training focusing on PLA modernisation and military culture. They must master advanced military terminology and the competencies outlined in the 'New Model for Military Translation'. Chinese translators should be familiar with Chinese–English translation theories, including translation standards, processes, strategies, such as domestication and foreignisation; language and cultural differences between China and India and their respective militaries; translation methods; literal and free translation techniques; and various translation skills, such as amplification, omission, repetition, inversion, conversion, negation, change of voice and word selection.

Additionally, they should study translation principles of Vinay and Darbelnet. Building parallel corpora of military texts, as well as mining military terminology from these sources to create study materials, is essential for learning. These are just a few tips for self-learning; the complete list of requirements is extensive. During the training, the specific objective must be kept in mind while designing the curriculum, military orientation as per the need analysis, deciding pedagogies and evaluation and assessment rubrics. The services of experienced military translators and interpreters are of paramount importance. Conducting research to develop robust indigenous capabilities is to be given top priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a dedicated translation and interpretation institute tailored to the specific needs of our armed forces, leveraging existing expertise and resource pooling. This institute is to fulfil such requirements as intercultural communication, military regional knowledge, military

terminology work, linguistic pedagogical activities and, most importantly, language research activity.

2. Emphasis should be given to research work and designing training programmes aimed at cultivating proficient Chinese translators, interpreters, teachers and research scholars.
3. Creation of a distinct cadre of linguists, devoted full-time to language-related tasks and responsibilities, and to ensure continuous linguistic support.
4. At the operational level, we would need a language cell at the divisional, corps, command and Army Headquarters level. Outsourcing, as done in the US, could be done in static establishments.
5. Promotion of research endeavours to assess diverse linguistic requirements within our forces, facilitating the training of efficient translators, interpreters, educators and scholars to meet these demands effectively.
6. Encouragement of research initiatives focusing on Chinese language sources, enhancing capabilities in this critical domain.
7. Facilitation of collaboration and multidisciplinary research endeavours involving Chinese language experts, defence and strategic analysts, software engineers, AI experts and data scientists, to understand various aspects of the PLA's current modernisation drive.
8. Recognition and incentivisation of Chinese language experts, acknowledging their mastery of the language—one of the most challenging languages worldwide—and rewarding their achievements and contributions accordingly.
9. Promoting academic research in the field of military linguistics and guiding research conducted by Chinese language scholars in alignment with national requirements. Provide grants/funds to support research projects serving national interests.
10. Facilitation of knowledge exchange through seminars, conferences and study groups, fostering the sharing of research, experiences and best practices.

To develop strategies and policies for enhancing linguistic support capabilities, investments should be made in language training, translation and interpretation training, expanding language recruitment programmes and integrating emerging technologies. Additionally, dedicated training programmes should be established to build a proficient cadre of Chinese translators, interpreters, instructors, intelligence analysts, NLP model developers and research scholars. Furthermore, their training

should be aligned with the ethos and methodologies of the special forces.

CONCLUSION

The concept of 'linguistic support for forces' (LSF) was first introduced by Viktor Balabin of Ukraine, emphasising the crucial role of military translation. Translation has always been an integral part of military operations, with translation and interpretation at the core of linguistic support for the armed forces. The LSF system comprises five components: intercultural communication; military regional knowledge; military terminology; linguo-pedagogical activity; and linguistic research activity. Interpreters facilitate conversations during meetings, patrols and interrogations, provide cultural and historical insights and offer language support. Translators play a vital role in intelligence gathering by translating decrypted coded messages and seized enemy documents.

Accurate intelligence relies on a robust linguistic infrastructure; it is particularly relevant in the context of the Chinese language, one of the most challenging languages globally. The importance of learning Chinese, Chinese–English translation, military translation and conducting research using primary Chinese sources is evident for the Indian Armed Forces.

Military translators need strong thematic knowledge; familiarity with military weapons, equipment, procedures and jargon; intercultural competence; and expertise in military terminology. Proper training is essential to meet organisational requirements. The US regards linguists as critical weapon system and part of the core combat capabilities, underscoring the need for language skills, regional expertise and cultural capabilities. Despite the advanced state of military translation research in the US, Russia, Ukraine and the UK, India has yet to prioritise this field. Now it is the time to focus on this strategically significant area, leveraging indigenous research to address challenges and build capacities.

Chinese scholars have drawn lessons from the US and emphasised English language training. The US has developed advanced systems, like the army's MFLTS. We may take insights from military translation research in Russia, Ukraine, the UK and China to strengthen foreign language capabilities and provide robust linguistic support to our armed forces.

China, as an emerging superpower and India's neighbour, presents both opportunities and challenges. With the country being India's largest trading

partner, and also having long-standing border issues, learning Chinese language is crucial for maintaining good relations and military preparedness. In today's era of informatisation and intelligentisation of the armed forces, proficiency requirements for our Chinese linguists have increased manifold. The rapid influx of data with fast speed, despite the availability of machine translation and AI tools to translate data, requires human oversight for authenticity. Chinese linguists have to equip themselves to handle emerging situations in the AI era.

Research is vital for meeting linguistic requirements and training proficient Chinese linguists, translators, interpreters, teachers, analysts and research scholars. Collaboration between AI experts, data analysts, Chinese linguists and military strategists is essential for conducting needs analysis and developing suitable NLP models for various tasks. Compiling modern Chinese military terminology, creating a parallel Chinese–English corpus, training Chinese linguists for future needs, promoting research, developing specific courses, creating study materials and fostering civil–military collaboration are essential milestones in this direction.

In the final analysis, we can see that the various models mentioned in the article highlight the significance of linguistic support for the armed forces. The translators, interpreters, instructors, analysts and research scholars play the main role in this domain. The Indian Armed Forces are paying greater attention to building capacities in this strategically significant domain. There is a need to give more military orientation to our Chinese translators and interpreters and providing task-based specialised training. The experience and expertise of serving and retired army personnel can be harnessed to further bolster our in-house capacities.

Specialised translation and interpretation courses in the short term, as well as at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, are required to be planned to boost the proficiency level of our translators and interpreters. Considering the difficulty level of the Chinese language, the complexity of tasks and increasing future requirements, more long-term efforts are required to enhance the level of Chinese proficiency of our translators and interpreters. Research at postgraduate and PhD levels needs to be encouraged in this domain to solve the problems, and to fulfil the current and future requirements of our armed forces in an informatised and intelligentised warfare era. Creating a separate cadre of Chinese linguists and training them on the ideology and ethos of 'special forces' will further bolster the invincible power of the Indian Armed Forces.

NOTES

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