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## Diplomatic Language as part of the Language for Specific Purposes

**Abstract:** The goal of this work is to undertake exploratory analyses of the concept of the diplomatic language as part of the language for specific purposes. Specifically, we intend to contribute to the understandings of the relations between the lexicon of the language for specific purposes and the words and phrases of the diplomatic language by establishing relevant features and outlining a specialized vocabulary. The language for specific purposes refers to the use of terms by the members of a particular subject field of activity. Therefore, the language for specific purposes provides a code used by a relatively small group of speakers, the purpose of which is to ensure better communication and comprehension of the message by the recipient. Diplomatic language refers to the words and expressions that, over the centuries, have become part of the general diplomatic vocabulary. It also refers to the euphemistic phrases that allow unpleasant things to be revealed without becoming offensive. The attractiveness of the diplomatic language is rooted in its secular and complex nature, which falls under the competence of several fields, making it an interdisciplinary field of study. The issue investigated in this study confronts the ethics of the diplomatic corps and the interests of states, combining, in a genuine way, the semiotics with political science. Thus, our approach lays at the crossroads of two academic fields that are often distinctive, but also interrelated: on the one hand the political science, as a study of inter-statehood, trans-nationality, and internationality; and on the other hand, linguistics, to be more specific semiotics, at the level of discursive structures and functions.

**Keywords:** language for specific purposes, diplomatic language, euphemism

Over the centuries and until now, the majority of research on diplomatic language has been directed to avow the quintessence of the information diplomats want to convey. Many researchers and scientists have seriously endeavored to unwind the mystery of the use of diplomatic language by way of various purposes. However, the fact that diplomatic language is goal-oriented, where diplomats choose their words consciously and meticulously with a specific aim in mind, should never be ignored. Indeed, many claim that such use of language decreases the harmful form of communication by means of replacing offensive terms with allegedly neutral ones. Diplomatic language is perceived through the clichés offered over time and often wrapped in a glamorous air, which attracts and fascinates, but does not really paint the reality. From a pragmatic point of view, this strategy is referred to as “euphemism”. The intended purpose of this communication is to investigate thoroughly this field by decoding the diplomatic language as euphemistic, discreet, secret, reserved, incomplete, misleading, or as circumstances may impose.

Language is a living, continuously functioning, and changing entity. It does not only reflect the human world and culture. The most salient function of the language is that it preserves culture and transfers it from generation to generation, playing a significant and decisive role in the formation of the national character and ethnic community. On the other hand, the language for specific purposes (LSP) is a structured system of communication used by the members of a particular subject field of activity. It helps communication between the members within a sphere of specific knowledge and refers to the way a language describes certain specialized concepts or states of affairs. Therefore, the language for specific purposes represents a code of the general language used by a relatively narrow group of speakers/users, the purpose of which is to ensure accurate communication, which is comprehensible for all the members of that specific group. The Romanian linguist Ion Coteanu argues that the LSP expresses a version of the general language or the result of certain restraints imposed on that language. He also considers that LSP represents “a linguistic system more or less specialized in rendering the content of ideas, which are specific to a certain professional activity, specific to one or more fields of socio-cultural life. Any LSP is only the language to which a special destination is

assigned” (45-46). Teresa Cabré, on the other hand, holds the opinion that: «special or specialized languages refer to a set of sub-codes (that partially overlap with the sub-codes of the general language), each of which can be specifically characterized by certain particulars such as subject field, type of interlocutors, situation, speakers’ intentions, the context in which a communicative exchange occurs, the type of exchange, etc.» (*Terminology: Theory, methods and application* 59).

Conceived as a communication system, the LSP represents a pragmatic sub-code of the language as a whole, the purpose of which is to convey information. According to Sager, “special languages are semi-autonomous, complex semiotic systems based on and derived from general language; their use presupposes special education and is restricted to communication among specialists in the same or closely related fields” (*Standardization of Terminology in a Model of Communication* 81-104). However, the LSP codified a variety of language, providing information of a specialized nature at any level, both the highest level of complexity, between initiated experts, as well as at a lower level of complexity, aiming to inform or teach other interested parties about an area of knowledge using the most economical, accurate and less ambiguous terms possible. This approach gives some considerable insight into the understanding of the difficulty of defining LSP entirely in linguistic terms, as it is recognized as pragmatic or extra-linguistic subdivisions of a language. The most significant feature of LSP is its communicative potential, unlike general language, the main feature of which refers to the cognitive ability to use systems of complex communication.

Therefore, the information stated above allows us to argue that LSP embraces all the lexical elements that refer to a specific activity or a scientific-professional field, used by a group of speakers in their written or oral communication, within a sphere of professional, cultural and social existence. At the same time, the LSP has a limited scope of use, consequently, is understood by a strictly determined social group. Nevertheless, it may not be accurate enough to state that the use of LSP implies special education and is restricted to communication among specialists in the same or closely related fields, as communication between experts is only one of the higher levels at which LSP may occur. Thus, the LSP represents a coded segment of the common language used by a relatively limited number of users, aiming to ensure clear, accurate communication so that the recipient perceives the message accurately.

It is not easy to draw a line between the LSP and the general language. These types of languages often have significant differences that can lead to the conclusion that sometimes they arise from different codes, while some other times they are part of the same code. The code that unifies them is the general language, and the one that separates them is the features of the LSP. Therefore, there is considerable overlap between these two languages. According to the Romanian linguist A. Bidu-Vranceanu, “the difference takes into account several interdependent criteria, such as the circulation or frequency of words, the stylistic-functional feature, which is the interest of the groups of speakers according to the profession and the social-cultural affiliation” (*Lexic comun, lexic specializat*).

The most significant feature that lays off the difference between the general language and the LSP is the presence of terms. Terms like words in the general language vocabulary are distinctive and meaningful signs, which occur in the LSP. Like words, they have a systematic side (formal, semantic, and functional) since they are units of an established code; as well as a pragmatic side because they are units used in specialized communication to refer to the objects of the real world. Terms do not seem to be very different from words when we consider them from the formal or semantic point of view, but they differ from words when we consider them as pragmatic and communicative units. The most salient distinguishing feature of terminology in comparison with the general language lexicon lies in the fact that it designates concepts on specialized subject fields and activities. Therefore, a term is a conventional symbol that represents a concept defined within a particular sphere of knowledge since its salient feature is its content, and its meaning is explicit. The presence of terms in texts or discourses provide a certain degree of difficulty, consequently, bring in some incomprehensible degree. That is why the study of the diplomatic language as part of the LSP involves a proper approach and requires identifying its defining features and establishing a specialized lexicon.

Three centuries ago (in 1716), François de Callières declared: “Diplomacy is a profession by itself, which deserves the same preparation and assiduity of attention that men give to other recognized professions” (cited in Freeman, *Diplomacy as a profession*). Later on, in 1985, the Vienna Congress recognized the diplomatic service as a well-defined profession with its own status. Over the centuries, a very carefully balanced, restricted, and moderate vocabulary has developed, ensuring a particular way of refined control over the different connotations of the words, thus

forming the diplomatic language. In diplomacy, choosing the right words is extremely important because using words without paying enough attention to the communicative aspect can lead to precarious situations. Diplomacy has emerged as the “art du paraître”/ “art of pretending” the word being the essential tool, respectively is characterized by a codified language and aims to cultivate secrecy for the benefit of the powerful. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate thoroughly the studies of this field, which qualify the diplomatic discourse as “euphemistic, discreet, secret, unclear, incomplete, or as circumstances may impose” (Villar, *Discours Diplomatique* 11). The diplomatic language aims to hide reality or various interests.

The diplomatic language consists of elements of the general language and elements of the LSP. This distinctive feature explains the complexity of the diplomatic language, which unravels the so-called “extraordinary” aspect of the language. The diplomatic language represents the linguistic tool used to promote foreign policy and defend the interests of the country. Diplomats are also known to use ordinary words in an extraordinary way, providing them new meanings, which often have veiled connotations. Diplomatic language has to be also diplomatically “correct” and make it taste less bitter. In this respect, we can assume that diplomatic language refers to the process of negotiation between states seeking to arrive at a mutually acceptable outcome on some issue or issues of shared concern. It tends to avoid potentially aggressive, insensitive, offensive, destructive uses of languages. The language of diplomacy uses a peace-building, peace-making, peace-promoting force.

### **Features of the Diplomatic Language**

One of the most distinctive features of the diplomatic language is a particular subdued tone that is some understatement. The real weight of words and terms in the diplomatic language is much stronger than those same words in everyday speech. Like any other well-defined subject field, diplomatic language is characterized by specialized terminology, which may be incomprehensible for those not being part of this activity. Therefore, the diplomatic language refers to all those technical expressions that, over the centuries, have become part of the general diplomatic vocabulary.

One of the distinguishing features of the diplomatic language is the presence of words that have one or more common meanings and one specialized meaning. These are generally polysemic words, produced either

by developing a diplomatic connotation, alongside the meaning or meanings of the general language (*agreement, convention, asylum, bilateral/multilateral negotiations*) or by the semantic extension of various diplomatic terms, such as:

- *full powers* – a document emanating from the competent authority of a State designating a person or persons to represent the State for negotiating, adopting or authenticating the text of a treaty, for expressing the consent of the State to be bound by a treaty, or for accomplishing any other act with respect to a treaty;
- *acceding* – the consent to become a party to a multilateral treaty which has not been signed by the interested party;
- *approval (ratification, acceptance, or accession)* – mean in each case the international act so named whereby a State establishes on the international plane its consent to be bound by a treaty;
- *reservation* – unilateral statement, however phrased or named, made by a State, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a treaty, whereby it purports to exclude or to modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that State (*Vienna Convention on the law of treaties*).

Some terms have one diplomatic meaning, as well as one or more meanings belonging to other languages for specific purposes (*investigation, ordinance, recidivism*) and terms belonging exclusively to the diplomatic language (*communiqué, protocol, treaty*). Another feature of the diplomatic language is the presence of words of Latin and French origin (*exequatur, consul, diplomacy, accession*).

The most distinctive feature of the diplomatic language, the one that provides vagueness to this language, is considered the deliberate use of words and expressions with flexible meaning. The use of these expressions makes the diplomatic language equivocal in which ambiguous words and phrases (weasel words) prevail, thus deliberately resorting to the flexible. Therefore, depending on the context and the way the words are perceived/interpreted, what is clear becomes unclear, and what is white may be black (*apparently, as soon as possible, availability, extraordinary, unusual, provocative, violent extremism, sustainable development, international climate marked by threats of force, prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts*). This flexibility provides a deliberately vague, unclear, ambiguous inflection, which is troublesome to approach not only for the uninitiated

people but also for the skilled diplomats. This language is mostly felt as vague, high-toned, and ambiguous, which goes hand in hand with the exercise of the diplomatic function. The terms are accessible to all categories of speakers, but the phrases in which they are used (*collateral damage, alternative procedures, peacekeeping operations, friendly fire, surgery, negative growth, dismissal*) change their meaning. This thesis argues that an uninformed receiver is unable to decode the message correctly because there is no accepted code for both the sender and the receiver. Therefore, the attention of the receiver is directed from the meaning of the phrase, which comprehension would lead to the correct decoding of the message, towards the meaning of the terms, which is from the general to specific. Usually, these terms are deliberately chosen to be inoffensive (*procedure, operation*) and conclusive (*friendly, peace, release, growth/rise*).

The above statements determine us to argue that the presence of euphemisms in the diplomatic language serves as the most permeable and most prone to change process. The purpose of the use of euphemisms in the diplomatic language is to avoid the unpleasant aspects of reality, to spare the sender, and to manipulate the receiver, thus masking and altering the reality. Often, the purpose of the sender is to misinform, but at the same time, to be able to claim to have transmitted the information. At the same time, the sender not only pursues the intention of mitigating the impact that the message may have on the receiver but also of persuasion as long as it tries to force the receiver to adopt a particular vision of reality. Diplomatic discourse is an inexhaustible source of euphemisms. The purpose of the diplomatic sender is to consolidate its power, to manipulate the receiver, to impose its own opinion on it, and, often, to veil the message. Ambiguity offers flexibility and protection to negotiators, an essential condition for the exercise of the diplomatic function (Villar, *op. cit.* 53).

Following a thorough analysis of the specialized literature, we can assert that the ambiguity of the diplomatic language takes its origins back in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when they considered that diplomacy meant to speak French, say nothing, and tell falseness. In her research of the diplomatic discourse, Constance Villar, starts from the assumption that diplomats use to speak for the sake of saying nothing, not to act, or to mask something (14). However, it is worth taking into account the diplomatic language as it always had a well-defined purpose, regardless of the circumstances. Diplomatic language represents a kind of conventional form of communication, the purpose of which is to maintain a calm atmosphere while negotiating

on serious issues enabling political leaders to be perceived correctly. The fact that reduces the chances of success and effectiveness of this form of communication is that the public and sometimes even the political leaders are not acquainted with the actual value of the expressions used. On the one hand, ignorant or incautious use of one of these phrases may give to a given situation a gravity, which it does not possess. On the other hand, when a real crisis arises, the public is able to assume from the mildness of the language used that the crisis cannot be as grave as “the alarmists” had given them to suppose (Nicolson, *Diplomacy* 229). To avoid some unpleasant situations, diplomats deliberately use vague language such as euphemisms. This diplomatic language strategy proves to be effective in the achievement of the desired goals. These weasel words cannot convey enough information or exact details about a particular fact. Linguists perceive this pragmatic ambiguity as an epistemic phenomenon that requires in-depth knowledge of both the background situation and the use of language. Ambiguity can be reflected either by an incomplete/imprecise conceptual system of the sender (which is the macroscopic vision) or by an epistemic phenomenon that is expressed by the insufficiency of language skills (which is the microscopic vision). Therefore, diplomats usually intentionally use ambiguous language to conceal some aspects that would compromise the desired result if the exact words were used. The public speech delivered by the President of the United States, Donald Trump after the military attack in Syria, in 2017 may be considered as evidence of this linguistic phenomenon: “Tonight I call on *all civilized nations* in seeking to end *the slaughter and bloodshed* in Syria and also to end *terrorism of all kinds and all types*” (Sampathkumar, *Syria missile strike: Donald Trump’s Speech in full*). We consider that the words: *all civilized nations*, *the slaughter and bloodshed*, *terrorism of all kinds and types*, express a high degree of ambiguity. There is no clear evidence of what is meant by “civilized nations” and which nation is considered civilized; it is not specified what kind of “slaughter and bloodshed” was committed; and, finally, it is not very clear what “types and forms of terrorism” are invoked.

### **Functions of the Diplomatic Language**

Following a thorough analysis of the diplomatic data allows us to claim that the primary function of the diplomatic language is to manage relations between independent states through the *negotiation* process. This function generates the bivalent aspect of the diplomatic language, which



is identified with the *communicative and informative* components. These aspects are essential in the establishment and maintenance of international relations between states. To achieve this communicative goal, the speakers need to have a common level of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, being aware of the diplomatic, political, cultural, extra-linguistic norms and customs, which are reflected in the language. Thus, diplomats use various linguistic strategies to hide the stigmatized features and facts, aiming to accomplish the communicative-informative purpose. This purpose is governed by the *oratorical component* of the diplomatic discourse. Since the organization of the diplomatic language is essentially aimed towards the recipient, this type of language is feasible to individual stylistic phenomena. Therefore, the *persuasive* component comes into the process. This component is related to the personality of the sender, who comes or tends to come out of anonymity. The persuasive component conveys the language a tone of eloquence and confidence. Communication, being closely related to information, generates a wide range of elements such as negotiation, defense of citizens, and commercial and legal interests, promotion of cultural, economic, and scientific relations. Therefore, through communication, there is dialogue, negotiation, and interaction between diplomats. In both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations, communication is pervasive, during which information is exchanged. It is also worth mentioning that the progressive evolution of communication has had a considerable impact on the development of diplomatic relations. It evolved from face-to-face diplomacy to digital diplomacy or e-diplomacy.

*Negotiation* is a salient element in defining the diplomatic language, namely in maintaining international relations. “Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business or the art of the diplomat” (Nicolson, *op. cit.* 15). Negotiation is the function of the diplomatic language that avoids the application of force and can be considered as a form of a dialogue between states. As we have already stated above, one of the axioms of the diplomatic language is the informative component. It is the bivalent aspect of diplomacy alongside the communicative one that represents the main principle that is generally accepted to be correct and from which further actions arise. Information can be formal or substantial. The formal dimension of diplomatic information refers to the diplomatic protocol and presence in official events. The substantial dimension of diplomacy is more significant than the formal

one and refers to the implementation and defense of the state policy and the exertion of foreign policy. Today, the world can be characterized by a constant change that is asserted in rapid steps. Diplomacy is a dynamic activity open to change, which implies, among other things, high mobility of diplomatic vocabulary, especially in extra-linguistic conditions. Thus, diplomatic practice and substance are shaped according to the changing nature of political actors. The era of democracy has brought pressure for open and transparent diplomacy, negotiations, and treaties. As a result, both the diplomatic character and the traditional means of foreign policy have changed their form, while the utmost functions of diplomacy have remained the same. The states and representatives of the diplomatic world regularly interact with each other considering the new resources of public diplomacy.

## **Conclusion**

Reflecting on the continuity of diplomatic art and examining the evolution path of the diplomatic language, we can notice that it represents an upward trajectory. The essence of the diplomatic language does not lie in impeding one's plans but in convincing oneself of the common interests and disadvantages of a non-cooperating position. Diplomatic language refers to technical phrases, which in the course of the centuries have become part of the ordinary diplomatic vocabulary. It also describes that guarded understatement which enables diplomats to say sharp things without becoming provocative or impolite. Diplomats are known to practice a hidden and deliberately tangled discourse that makes it inaccessible/beyond reach. The most distinctive feature of the diplomatic language but also the one, which provides an enigmatic tone, is considered the deliberate use of weasel words. Defining diplomatic language as part of the language for specific purposes and establishing its features and functions allows us to conclude that the main factor of the diplomatic language is the indirect representation of facts through weasel words, which constitutes the euphemistic dimension of the diplomatic language. Euphemisms allow the exposure of disagreeable things without becoming offensive. The euphemism in the diplomatic language performs relevant political and social functions, masking taboo areas or the obstructive effects of taboos, carrying out the role of mitigating the impact of diplomatic language, which in its direct essence evokes unpleasant realities, opting for a gentle expression. Therefore, it is utmost to develop a tool that

understands this evasive practice/language by removing ambiguities and proving the discursive knowledge of diplomats.

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