

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT

The importance of digital communication to contemporary society is strikingly evident in terms of its scale and visibility. This is especially true in the field of diplomacy, where unforeseen situations nowadays are characterized by frustrations, limitations and altered adaptive abilities, which can also be observed in the communication of diplomats. With the students pursuing international studies, we sought answers to the question that apart from basic diplomatic skills, such as intelligence, tact, discretion, circumspection, patience, self-control, adaptability, creative imagination, the ability to signal and communicate messages precisely to the target audience and linguistic agility to present necessary compromises - how the increased number of actors involved in diplomacy interact and get things done. For the present study online pages and videos have been used, the results of which are presented here.

KEYWORDS

digital communication, diplomacy, diplomatic skills, international studies, language teaching

INTRODUCTION

The communications revolution has forced governments and diplomats to react to world events very quickly, as the 24-hour news coverage expects them to make decisions fast and efficiently [20]. However, diplomats do a lot more than just report on their country of accreditation; they have a profound understanding of the strategies and tactics that can help achieve national goals internationally. A diplomat needs to show genuine interest in the history and culture of the country to which s(he) is accredited and to refrain from making judgement on the behavior and mores of its leaders and people.

Even though the old-fashioned nature of diplomacy has changed in many respects, it still enjoys a special status in preserving the basic rules and rituals that surround its activity. In the past diplomats used to form a brotherhood within their national bureaucracy and met only in extraordinary circumstances, either to discuss important issues, or to resolve conflicts [4]; but nowadays, there is a growing number of personal as well as online summit meetings held on a regular basis, where finding a common ground is paramount. On these occasions, maintaining the balance between the right language to be used while also respecting the needs of the audience, is not an easy task. Consequently, contemporary diplomats must pay as much attention to the public impact of their actions as to their substantive merits. These gatherings build enormous pressures on the leaders to build the kind of rapport that is key to convincing rivals and to deliver results by winning the hearts of their negotiating party in the course of a few days. By communicating the ideas and values or projects that are under way in their home countries to their host societies, diplomats can bridge the gaps between the two countries and lay the foundation for cooperation across a wide array of issues.

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Language use in diplomacy

In media-driven societies like those of the 21st century, media and online platforms help set up, maintain, refine and expand network for diplomats, who are required to have both sufficient command of the subject matter, and to be able to convey that in an easily understandable language [16]. The language of the national interest is ideally used conscientiously in the firm belief that the course of action decided on is indeed in the best interests of the collective polity [19]. However, there are possibilities for error caused by incomplete or faulty information, or flawed diagnosis and analysis. In order to minimize the possibility of these misunderstandings, diplomats must not only be professionally persuasive and constructive in producing language, but they are also required to understand their international counterparts' true intention. [17] When decoding the surroundings, non-verbal communication most likely strengthens the first impression in common situations like attracting a partner. Impressions are on average formed within the first four seconds of contact. Through a look, the softness in the eye, or the tension in the face, people can interpret what others implied. A number of nonverbal signs reveal how someone feels [21], and a trained observer can spot if something is wrong, or someone lacks confidence in what he is saying. Control over body language and the use of the "right" key phrases shapes the immediate perception. If people listen to speeches with a lot of gestures, they are more likely to remember what you have said [7].

In verbal communication, discretion at all levels is expected from diplomats, which applies to information collection and research of any subject. [22] The internet has vastly expanded the horizon of discretionary work and given play to innovation. In order to preserve discretion, one needs to have a broad spectrum of interests and mastery of detail and flexibility to deal with a range of issues. In addition to this, credibility is the crucial resource and an important source of soft power [24], which governments compete for, not only with other governments but with the news and the media to enhance their own credibility and weaken that of their opponents. As a result, many recognize the necessity of transparency in an age when citizens can see quite graphically the effects of their leaders' foreign policy decision and how diplomats cope with them on the ground. [15] Therefore, the credibility of governments must be fiercely protected since the proliferation of information communication technologies has made it easier to expose discrepancies between word and deed. To maintain or cultivate amicable relationships, trust, openness and peaceful conflict resolution, as well as acceptance of different viewpoints and cultures is essential (Friedrich – Gomes de Matos 2016). Building trust is something that takes time and effort but as trust builds, there will be more sharing of information, feelings, and opinions.

Framework for the analysis of a diplomat's communication style

In the spring semester of 2020, Master students majoring in International studies were given the task to identify and observe an expert diplomat in online contents, who would function as their model or who they would consider interesting for analysis due to any of his/her characteristics.

The selected diplomats for the analyses are: (1) the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un; (2) Princess Diana, the member of the British royal family, (3) Pope Francis, the Head of the Catholic Church, (4) Barack Obama, the former President of the US, and (5) Donald Trump, the current President of the US.

By closely observing the chosen diplomat's behavior, especially the verbal and non-verbal language of his/her talk, students were asked to focus on their communication strategies, how effectively they expressed themselves, what language they used in relation to the context, and what media they selected. The questions that had guided this small-scale research were as follows:

- What verbal and non-verbal language strategies does the diplomat use in different contexts?
- How effective do you think s(he) is in the given context?
- How does the diplomat select appropriate media?

Before the spread of internet use, the confidential nature of diplomacy did not allow public access to authentic language resources and people only had conjectures as to what was going on behind

closed doors. Now, all that has changed and we have the chance to study naturally-occurring language in online contexts, which proves to be more beneficial for language learners than language data available in coursebooks.

Verbal and non-verbal language strategies

The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Un has been selected for the analysis, not as a role model but as someone who has a unique verbal and non-verbal communication style. Under him, the development of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs has continued, therefore, his actions have been criticized strongly all over the world. The Asia Pacific News released a number of photos of Kim Jong-Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in in 2018, at a meeting intended to end the war that started 68 years ago. The two leaders shook hands over the military demarcation line in Panmunjom, South Korea [11]. As we can see in the pictures, the initial restrained conversation during the welcoming ceremony turned into a very cheerful discussion where both heads of state seemed to enjoy themselves (*ibid.*). In the third picture, however, there is an unusual scene where Kim's security personnel run alongside the vehicle carrying him in the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas, which might send the message to the world that he lacks trust in the host country.

A year later, in 2019, the two chairmen, Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump met at the first-ever U.S.-North Korea summit on Singapore's Sentosa Island [26], which was considered as an epochal event of great significance in overcoming decades of tensions and hostilities between the two countries. As the standard greeting in both countries is a handshake, the meeting started off with a 12-second-long handshake, which aroused a lot of media attention. Seemingly, both leaders were in a good mood, they laughed a lot. Moreover, Trump was patting Kim on the back and placing his hand on the North Korean's shoulder as they walked into their first meeting [39]. Their body language was openly friendly, which triggered fierce criticism in the US. Trump's move indicated as if he approved Kim's regime, and his human rights abuses.

Several people have tried to research Trump's micro-expressions, looking for discrepancies between his words and body language but they haven't been able to find any – meaning Trump really believes what he is saying [13]. He draws in crowds and his distinctive gestures and expressive body language captivate and disturb in nearly equal measure. Trump's body language clearly shows that he likes being on camera and never shies away from the spotlight. Donald Trump's body language shows that he sees himself as the alpha male in almost every situation. Every time you see Trump vigorously shaking hands with someone, walking slightly ahead of a group, or even pushing people out of his way, you're witnessing a physical show of power and dominance [23]. Regardless of what he is saying, the President is constantly showing his peers and the world that he is in charge of whatever is happening around him. His extreme confidence is reflected in "steeple", a gesture where the fingers of one hand rest on the fingers of the other in a triangle-like pose. The best known of his hand gestures is the pinched index finger and thumb, which radiates control and precision, associating this gesture with the sentences he considers important. The gesture of an open palm and open arms symbolizes inclusion, which can also suggest honesty as well as being equal to the audience. Looking back on photos of the Trump couple before Donald got elected, it is worth mentioning that his body language toward his wife has changed over time and now is often protective, possessive, and proud.

Trump shows a paradox in his verbal communication but his deceptive claims are very easy to expose to those who understand and examine it. Some of Trump's texts contain the so-called blue lies, also known as merciful lies. Like any politician, he is on many occasions distorting the truth as the people expect everything to be always good. At the same time, if leaders told the truth, perhaps all leaders, with only a few exceptions, would fail.

The third diplomat selected for analysis was Princess Diana, who became an internationally recognized icon and role model to the people, partly because of her inner and outer beauty and her empathetic personality, and partly because of her controversial private life, which provided the

perfect circumstances for her not to be ever forgotten [9]. Her spotless physical appearance and her unique charisma helped a lot in promoting a very positive image of her. She was very good at putting a brave face on things when she was sad, but she also made people who had problems feel better about themselves. She did that by sharing her own stories, e.g., *“the quest for perfection our society demands can lead the individual gasping for breath. At every turn this pressure inevitably extends into the way we look at eating disorders whether it be anorexia or bulimia”* [37]. When she talked in public about her bulimia, she let a generation of young girls out of the closet on that issue.

In religious diplomacy, when Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill met for the first time in history, the Pope found himself in a very awkward situation. The Patriarch greeted him and then sat down, whereas the Pope continued to stand up [38]. Another interesting moment was that the Patriarch was fixing his eyes on the camera ignoring the Pope, while the Pope was looking at the Patriarch with interest. Some other differences between Kirill and Francis were also evident from the start as they joined arms, or in their vestments. Francis’s white gown and skullcap provided a stark visual contrast to Kirill’s domed hat over his black robes. We may have the feeling that the difference in their vestments was echoed in the spiritual and political differences between Kirill and Francis.

Starting with Barack Obama’s famous saying that *“No matter who you are, what you look like, where you come from, you can make it”* [8], we can conclude that his success can mainly be attributed to his wonderful choice of words. He won the presidency because of his effectiveness at mobilizing media spectacle, whether on the campaign trail, traditional media publicity or through the internet, as well as the circulation of his speeches. As regards his communication techniques, Barack Obama often used anaphora (the repetition of the same word or words at the start of successive sentences or clauses) in his speeches. For instance, *“If you’re tired of arguing with strangers on the Internet, try talking with one of them in real life. If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you’re disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clip board, get some signatures, and run for office yourself.”* [30] Another technique that Obama used in his rhetoric was the Rule of Three (thinking in threes, grouping numbers in threes, speaking in threes. *“You believe in a fair, just, and inclusive America.”* (ibid.) When speaking, Obama used strong, open gestures, two hands above the waist, to emphasize his words. He was described by his fans as intelligent, presidential, good speaker, someone, who stood up for ordinary people.

Efficient communication

Communication skills grow with practice. There is seldom one single way of getting one’s point across in a speech or at a meeting, but some methods are more effective than others. A skill that comes with practice and effort is to answer the question one wants to answer, which may not be the one actually asked. It also means avoiding the verbal traps or even the context that a question may impose, and to respond in the context of one’s own standpoint. Words have the power to move us, to inspire us, to unite or divide. And if not used wisely, words can bring chaos.

The positive or negative impact of a meeting can only be felt over time, as it was the case in the US-North Korea summit. Although during a formal ceremony followed by the landmark summit, Trump said, *“We both want to do something. We both are going to do something. And we have developed a very special bond. So, people are going to be very impressed. People are going to be very happy”* [2] – it still remains a question whether the past and old practices will hold them back or they will overcome everything and will open a new chapter in their relationship. Even Kim himself seemed to acknowledge the surreality of the day by saying that *“many people in the world will think of this as a (inaudible) form of fantasy ... from a science fiction movie”*. (ibid.)

The President of the U.S., Donald Trump is considered to be an effective, although slightly unusual communicator. His shockingly rude behavior has upset many people but he manages to achieve some of his aims. He might talk rubbish, but he makes an emotional rather than a purely intellectual connection with the people he needs to persuade. Therefore, his critics take him literally but not seriously, while his supporters take him seriously but not literally. Trump uses simple, punchy language to say what he intends to say. Unlike his colleagues, he always answers the

question and he is also devoid of the meaningless clichés used by other politicians and business leaders. In addition, Trump’s record on honesty and consistency in communications is a reminder to organizations, spokespeople and business leaders to use simple language and to avoid unnecessary jargon.

Taking over the diplomatic duties and responsibilities of the Queen, Princess Diana worked tirelessly on behalf of charities around the world, using her fame to raise awareness of a number of important humanitarian issues, such as her visit to Angola, which increased pressure on governments to sign up to a worldwide treaty banning land mines. [36] When she was interviewed about her campaign in Angola, the interviewer quoted some members of the British government, who referred to her as a “loose cannon”. She replied in a calm way, “*there are many trying to highlight a problem that is going on all around the world, that is all.*” (ibid.) She managed to hide her feelings then and only in the car she asked, “*who said I am a loose cannon?*” Princess Diana was definitely the type of person who would go against the wind for her beliefs, no matter the status and position in the society. This attitude was adopted mostly in the last years of her life when she was distancing herself from the royal family. She started to open up in public, presented some very private information (e.g., eating disorder) to the large audience, she started to live freely and took a bald attitude towards life which led to disapprovals and condemnations coming especially from the royal family. At the same time, she felt responsible for the people who loved her by saying, “*I want to reassure all those people who have loved me and supported me throughout the last 15 years that I would never let them down*” (see in ref. 11). Even after her death, she remained one of the most popular members of the royal family throughout history, and she continued to influence the principles of the royal family and its younger generations. [31] During her life she was awarded with distinguished prizes and recognitions for her work as a charity affairs advocate.

Quite surprisingly, Pope Francis has played a key role in international diplomacy by helping to restore full diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. [28] He had written a letter to both Obama and Castro in which he encouraged the two sides to resolve humanitarian questions, resolve the release of political prisoners and initiate a new phase in relations. Of course, Vatican spokesmen declined to provide any details about Francis’s letters, other than that. Due to his activities, Francis has faced increasingly open criticism – particularly from theological conservatives – on many questions, including the admission of civilly divorced and remarried Catholics to Communion, and on the question of the alleged cover-up of clergy sexual abuse. From the beginnings he maintained that the Church should be more open and welcoming. Throughout his public life, Pope Francis has been noted for his humility, international visibility as Pope, concern for the poor and commitment to interfaith dialogue. [35] He is known for having a less formal approach to the papacy than his predecessors. For instance, he chose to reside in the Domus Sanctae Marthae guesthouse rather than in the papal apartments of the Apostolic Palace used by previous Popes. Also, he opposes consumerism and overdevelopment, and supports taking action on climate change.

The efficiency of Obama’s communication lies in his genuine smile and humour that could establish a connection with his audience. By using aspirational language, he often sent personalized messages to the audience. [1] As regards his communication technique, Barack Obama used anaphora, the repetition of the same word or words at the start of successive sentences or clauses, in his speech. Here are a few examples from his farewell speech: “*If you’re tired of arguing with strangers on the Internet, try talking with one of them in real life. If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing. If you’re disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clip board, get some signatures, and run for office yourself.*”

Media appearance

In a world that is interconnected, all diplomats have to anticipate that, whatever their rank, they may suddenly be thrown into a situation of facing the media, which aim either to “catch” or “expose” them. No doubt that bad news sells itself but good news is seldom of interest to the

media, unless it is packaged in a manner that makes an appealing story. Unfortunately, people have experienced on many occasions that media have their own perspective, and do not always respect their subjects.

The attention of the media and the popularity Princess Diana won with the help of the media, for instance, gave her lots of opportunities and lots of struggles as well. In a BBC interview she characterized herself as “a good product that sits on a shelf and sells well, and people make a lot of money out of you”. [6] While being the Princess of Wales, Diana was the most photographed member of the royal family of all times and she was a fashion icon in the 1980s and 1990s. [33] She used her carefully developed personal brand in a way that she could assist her country with the best of intentions - she transformed her drama into a great opportunity. During her active years she carried out numerous campaigns, visits and official engagements (191 in 1988 and 397 in 1991), and all these intense philanthropic efforts led her to be recognized as one of the most influential personality of the century in regards of charity. [34] During her life she was awarded with distinguished prizes and recognitions for her work as a charity affairs advocate.

Although Pope Francis is a Catholic priest representing the Catholic Church, from the day he became the Pope, he changed the old, rather conservative practices of the Vatican. Consequently, his attitude has been criticized by theologians, bishops and cardinals “who would like him to resign or promptly disappear from the scene while they wait for a new conclave to change the current direction of the church”. [3] He adapted quickly to the new media possibilities having an official twitter and Facebook profile where he is reaching his followers on a daily basis. He is the first Pope using different technologies and opportunities in connecting with the world, so he became reachable. On a daily basis he is sending short texts from the Bible, which are in connection with the events that are happening around the world. If there is a serious crisis, like migration, he reacts immediately, trying to bring peace and asking the stakeholders to solve the problem peacefully. As a Jesuit from Argentina, he has not forgotten all the way he became Pope, therefore, by living a simple life, he is a hard fighter against poverty and inequality. He refused also to wear the ornate papal clothes and jewels, he is always in white, showing the pure simplicity of the life he is living.

Donald Trump is one of the most frequently featured politicians in the media and his communication with the media is very worth studying. The New York Times and some others are quite understandably furious with him and his pronouncements, which have offended millions of people, but still he resonates with his core supporters. He speaks on Twitter from the White House [32], disaster-stricken areas, campaign events. He has more than 42,500 tweets. He shares his thoughts several times a day, adorned with keywords called hashtags, the most common being #MAGA (Make America Great Again), #Americafirst, #trump2016, #celebapprentice #celebrityapprentice. His most famous and most viewed post is a GIF in which Trump's person is hitting a CNN icon. He has more than 77 million followers, mentioning his name more than 10,000 times in an announcement every 20 minutes.

Still, Trump is the least transparent person ever to serve as President of the United States. He is alleged to have had mafia ties, been involved in unscrupulous business dealings, racial discrimination and alleged marital rape. [25] In 2013, in an interview with David Letterman, when Trump had been asked about doing business with organized crime groups, he answered, “*I really tried to stay away from them as much as I could*”. This answer made the interviewer take this issue less seriously by saying: “*that goes without saying*”. [27] Trump has denied all of the allegations, demanded a retraction from the Times, and has threatened to sue several outlets.

In his working relationship the President has shown his strong character and criticized his former US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson who opened a dialogue with North Korea. Mr. Trump told him in a tweet that he was “*wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man*”. [10] On several occasions there had been public disagreements between the two over national security issues, and finally Mr. Trump fired him in a tweet. Donald Trump frequently uses Twitter and other social media platforms to make comments about other politicians, celebrities, private citizens and

daily news. Since early in his presidency, his tweets have been considered official statements by the president of the United States. At the same time, he often posts controversial or false statements (Leonhardt –Thompson, 2017). During his time in office, Trump retweeted 217 accounts that have not been verified by Twitter.

In the case of the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Un, it was his disappearance from public that sparked a storm of international media speculation about his health. After 21 days away from the public eye, he reemerged on May 1, 2020. A CNN story on April 20 reported that he was in “grave danger” after supposedly undergoing surgery. [12] This speculation about his well-being had started because Kim recently missed the celebration of his grandfather's birthday on April 15. One rumor that repeatedly came up was that Kim was dead or in a coma from his cardiovascular procedure.

As we could see, global media has increasingly proved its usefulness in recent years. Its success or failure, however, can only be judged by its intended audience. The most critical criterion is the media's credibility, which can be achieved by the freedom of media.

CONCLUSION

Raising awareness of the various communication styles of diplomats as described above enables students to have a wider perspective of how (1) to develop meta-cognitive strategies for analyzing expert diplomats' verbal and non-verbal communication; (2) to define their preferred language use; (3) to promote an understanding of the interconnectedness of language and context; and 4) to master the complex words and phrases that characterize diplomatic discourse.

The Internet has a profound effect on information and communication, on current topics, language use and in the environment, diplomacy is conducted. The demand for transparency makes citizens become aware of the complexity of international issues, encourage informed discussion, and involve a wide community of supporters for the country's foreign policy.

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