

Diplomatic Language

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Strand One. Strand Two. Strand Three. None of the strands yet set in stone. The incredible weave of language. All the little tassels still hanging down. The tiniest atoms. The poorly tied knots. There is the possibility of an annex. The rumor of a rewrite. The suggestion of a delay. (Colum McCann, 2013)

SETTING THE STAGE

Irish novelist Colum McCann (2013, Book One) imagines United States envoy for Northern Ireland George Mitchell suspended between ‘the British and their words’ and ‘the Irish and their endless meanings’ two years into negotiating the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Belfast. ‘All he wants,’ McCann writes, ‘is to get metal nibs striking against the page.’

The pens that diplomats wield can only be mightier than swords when words are found to bridge the differences between international parties to a dispute. Words span across the divide of contesting interests, intentions

and values creating possibilities for agreement and allegiance. To create authority, words are played like strings to hold the tensions between parties until each resonates to the text at its own native frequency, creating harmony. Because language is a social instrument and diplomacy is, in essence, intercultural political communication, Raymond Cohen (1997) contends that achieving this cultural resonance in the management of international relations requires linguistic agility and other diplomatic skills.

One instrument developed over centuries to overcome the natural dissonance arising from different semantic assumptions and frames of reference expressed in the vernacular languages of varying states is a constructed diplomatic style. Marked by restraint, subdued tone, moderated vocabulary, and ‘refined control over nuances in the meaning of words,’ a Diplomatic Language is one established norm within the transnational diplomatic corps (Stanko, 2001: 44). So strong is the norm of civility among diplomats that an inadvertent

verbal transgression can create an international incident, and an intentional violation sends a pointed message. For example, as Henry Kissinger writes in his book *Diplomacy* (1994), Bismarck succeeded in provoking Napoleon III to declare war simply by editing Prussian King Wilhelm's Ems Dispatch to indicate that the customary courtesies had not been extended to the French envoy and then leaking it to public uproar in France.

Framing and reframing arguments to find the convergent wavelengths, diplomats traditionally engage in a particular diplomatic discourse that G.R. Berridge (2003) characterizes as 'typically mild, euphemistic, and circumlocutory.' Diplomats, above all else, are focused on the process of forming and maintaining relationships with those who manage international relations. The aim, as political philosopher Danielle Allen (2004: 87) writes in *Talking To Strangers*, 'is to develop practices that support vigorous argument about political disagreements by sustaining the relationships that make it worthwhile to argue with others in the first place.'

Without those relationships, diplomats would find it more difficult to achieve their political objectives or manage crises that may arise over time. To keep the channels of communication open even in times of hostility, diplomats require a non-abrasive manner of communicating that lubricates, rounds-off the sharp edges, and creates the space for saving face and creating possibility. In their quest for such a language and their ability over time to construct an arbitrary set of signals, codes and conventions that serve their purpose, theorist Christer Jonsson (2012: 21) considers diplomats to be 'intuitive semioticians.'

Constructed slowly, conscientiously, deliberately, and with great subtlety, the concrete might appear to melt into the abstract, as George Orwell (1946) complains of political speech. Yet, E.T. Hall (1973) would recognize the allusive mode of expression characteristic

of diplomats as typical of high-context communal cultures where dignity and honor must be maintained during constant interaction. More recent scholars would point to the logic of appropriateness as a way to understand the speech codes by which diplomats practice their profession in mutual recognition (Bjola and Kornprobst 2013: 104). More classical scholars like Callieres (as quoted in Sofer, 2007: 35) would recognize the diplomatic habits of self-interested political friendship to be those advocated by Aristotle.

Diplomats, as political actors, are deeply embedded in a social context that privileges careful, controlled and cautious behavior. Their language is an expression of their practice. The fact that a Diplomatic Language, in a sociological sense of shared codes and conventions, has been constructed to moderate official international political speech is one indication that diplomats, wherever they serve, may constitute a global epistemic community with their own expertise and domain of knowledge (Davis Cross, 2007: 225). Their general knowledge of diplomacy is, however, always situated knowledge that derives from and is applied by practice.

Mesopotamian clay tablets may give way to digital texts thumbed by diplomats searching for the right words to end an impasse, but the function of Diplomatic Language is the same throughout time: to lubricate the great and smaller gears enmeshing separated political communities into a single international system. By default, diplomats want to reduce friction and maintain civility in external relationships through continuous dialogue while they represent, negotiate and communicate internationally. Diplomatic Language is therefore an instrument of diplomatic society designed to minimize misunderstandings and miscalculations that give rise to conflict. It is not an end in itself. It does not contain magical incantations with the power to convert war into peace. Nor is it used for internal communication within a government where speech acts are grounded by the weight of shared thought, history and culture.

Key Points

- Diplomatic Language is instrumental: it was constructed over time to overcome the natural dissonance arising from different semantic assumptions and frames of reference expressed in the vernacular languages of varying states.
- Diplomatic Language is an arbitrary set of signals, codes and conventions that lubricates, rounds off sharp edges, and creates the space for possibility.
- Diplomatic Language is an instrument of international society designed to minimize misunderstandings and miscalculations that give rise to conflict.

THE BACKSTORY

The first known diplomatic letter was written 4,300 years ago in cuneiform on a baked clay tablet excavated in present day Syria (Podany, 2010). Written in Akkadian, the lingua franca of the Ancient Near East, the diplomatic letter between the King of Ebla and the King of Hamazi in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) demonstrates the essence of diplomatic mis-sives throughout time and place.

At its core, the first known diplomatic letter is a simple bilateral transaction. Kingdom A wants something from kingdom B. That message of want and willingness to give in exchange is written in a lingua franca, a neutral language identified with neither kingdom. Diplomacy makes systematic use of such designated bridge languages to facilitate communication between political communities not sharing a native tongue. In this instance, the lingua franca of the region was Akkadian, which after 2,000 years gave way to Aramaic. In the European system it was Latin and then French. Today, reflecting the dominant power, the world Diplomatic Language is global English.

The kernel of the transactional message in this first known diplomatic letter is encased in stock phrases of comity and good will. Podnany (2010) notes that in accord with kinship terms employed diplomatically at that

time, the word ‘brother’ is used seven times in the brief second millennium BCE text. An emissary who would carry the written message to a most likely illiterate king would have expanded on the message orally in a formal audience according to protocol. The receiving king’s advisor would have interpreted the message into the kingdom’s native language and facilitated an oral exchange of views to be followed by a written reply carried by king B’s emissary back to kingdom A.

What was said might have deviated in nuance from the written messages as the important continuous bilateral dialogue ensued. Potentially provocative or embarrassing communications often remained oral to keep any edges in relationships from being etched in clay. Even written disagreeable messages conveying threat or displeasure would have been delicately woven into the verbal fabric of the lingua franca in ways that could be reworked when passions cooled and needs changed. This pattern, while widespread, was not universal among the ancients given differing cultural and historic contexts. The Greeks had a preference for oration before public assemblies using heralds as diplomatic envoys and conducting negotiations orally. The Chinese, on the other hand, conducted diplomacy primarily by written text in accord with their particular mode of sensibility.

In general, however, shared meanings were constructed by diplomatic use, trial and error as words were translated into and out of the lingua franca. Given the cross-cultural local contexts of international communication, diplomats required sophisticated linguistic skill to ensure that the message sent was the message received in a particular locale. The initiated both constructed and knew the diplomatic code designed to soothe and smooth international relationships grinding through cycles of cooperation and conflict in an ever-expanding international system. The cognoscenti, then as now, know how to read between the lines of constructed Diplomatic Language that purposefully removes affect

and carries softened signals over rougher patches, deeper troughs and higher peaks in the political landscape. They know too the supplementing silent language of gesture and signal integral to the performance of diplomacy on the world stage (Cohen, 1987).

As the brotherhood of kings evolved into a community of states, the diplomatic method solidified, settling on terms, expressions and semantic conventions designed to minimize misunderstanding and maintain orderly discourse. Classical Western diplomatic methods, including the restrained manner of speech of the professionalized diplomatic corps that evolved during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, were, according to Paul Sharp (2009: 44), 'all elements of a system that imposed restraints on the conduct of the sovereigns themselves.'

Influenced by Enlightenment thinkers, diplomats saw their role as one of tamping down emotions and contributing reasonableness and rational thought to the process of communication between states. In Sharp's understanding of the rational tradition, diplomats were civilizing influences both on their sovereigns and the emerging international society. Their restrained linguistic style reflected an understanding of their shared responsibility to make collective decisions to advance and protect the system as a whole, while advancing the interests of their sovereign state. Diplomatic Language reflects the mode by which diplomats both recognize each other and reason together.

Scholars disagree on the effects acquiring an audience has had on Diplomatic Language and whether conference diplomacy has led to the creation of an international public sphere in which deliberation is possible. Informed by her case study of the Concert of Europe in 1814, Jennifer Mitzen (2005: 415, 407) argues: 'Forum discussion among states mitigates the problem of violence by generating a structure of public reason.' Assuming a thick notion of international society and publicity, she contends: '[Diplomatic] talk in a public forum produces order while keeping

the foundations of that order open to rational debate.'

Other scholars (like linguists Scott, 2001 and Oliver, 2003) argue that the greater the publicity the more the ambiguity in diplomatic speech. The conference diplomacy context, in particular, causes diplomats to code shift from more precise private diplomatic talk, to more ambiguous speech. The linguists' findings in some way echo the observation by journalist Walter Lippmann (1922: 126), who characterized the ensuing rhetoric as so many hot air balloons:

As you go up in the balloon, you throw more and more concrete objects over board, and when you have reached the top with some phrase like *rights of humanity or the world made safe for democracy*, you may see far and wide but you see very little.

As states democratized, their internal workings became ever more transparent to foreign emissaries. The impulse to speak in the vernacular 'to the people on the wall' of Judea from Biblical times, well documented by Cohen (2013: 18), became a practice now known as public diplomacy. Speaking to the galleries over the heads of the players on the diplomatic stage requires a different kind of affect-tinged political speech in the vernacular. Diplomats have to develop a stage voice to complement the clubhouse voice that soothes relationships within the diplomatic community. They also need to share the stage, and the clubhouse, with political actors visiting from the domestic realms who have brought culturally contingent styles usually too hot for the cooling saucer of diplomacy.

Key Points

- Diplomacy makes systematic use of designated bridge languages, known as *lingua franca*, that facilitate communication between communities not sharing a native tongue.
- Although the essence of Diplomatic Language was constant, the ancients used varying oral and written forms given their different cultural and historic contexts.

- Diplomatic Language reflects the mode by which diplomats both recognize each other and reason together.
- Given the need to speak to the galleries, diplomats have also needed to develop a stage voice to complement the clubhouse voice that soothes relationships within the diplomatic community.

INGATHERING ON THE STAGE

The rapid expansion in the number of independent states in the latter part of the twentieth century brought a heterogeneous array of countries into the international system of states and diversity into the diplomatic community. Diplomatic Language lubricated the culturally contingent gears of the old and new states comprising the increasingly complex international order. The skin of Diplomatic Language might fit some representatives with difficulty given their own historical, cultural, political and social contexts. Still, new diplomats could acquire the established diplomatic style to smooth their socialization into unfamiliar roles by constant adjustment, learned through interaction with other diplomats.

Even the diplomatic emotional repertoire could be learned by exposure to the corps' embodied emotional displays: its silent language. For example, Cohen (1987: 105–6) maintains that diplomats do not usually display fear, disgust, surprise and sadness because they are too personally revealing. But, he argues, culturally appropriate somatic expressions are used to show agreement, displeasure, equanimity and anger because they can be effective and do not sever political bonds.

Political actors, including diplomats, are socialized into the norms and identities of a community by participation in a 'circulation of affect' (Ross, 2013). Civility is the diplomatic norm, but occasionally, as T.H. Hall (2011: 551–2) reminds us in a US–China case study on the Taiwan Straits, a state may choose to violate the norm and make a point

by expressing a vehement and overt state-level display of anger in response to a perceived insult. On the receiving end of China's orchestrated expressions of indignation, American Ambassador Stapleton Roy diplomatically said, 'What the Chinese response in 1995 did is it restored understanding in the Clinton administration about the sensitivity of this issue.'

The socialization of diverse international players into the United Nations was made possible by using French and English as working languages and recognizing six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Given the shifting political demographic, some suggest Spanish, English and Chinese would be more appropriate working languages in this century. As helpful as lingua franca are, the best diplomats know that mastering the native tongues of those with whom they deal is the only sure way of understanding them. As George Steiner (2013: Preface to second edition) reminds us, 'each tongue construes a set of possible worlds and geographies of remembrance.' Less poetically, languages also often lack comparable concepts and words, making translation a diplomatic challenge.

Revolutionary powers that did not share in the collective intentionality of the diplomatic corps could choose to resist co-optation by the matrix and disrupt the process of incorporation. One of the most famous examples of disruption occurred in the 1960 UN General Assembly meeting when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev banged his shoe on the table in reply to a Philippine assertion that the Soviet Union had 'swallowed up Eastern Europe.' Later Khrushchev was reported to say:

It was such fun! The U.N. is a sort of parliament, you know, where the minority has to make itself known one way or another. We're in the minority for the time being, but not for long. (Romero, 2008)

Sharp (2009) explains this undiplomatic behavior in his discussion of the radical tradition of diplomacy with its intent to liberate and subvert international society from within.

In order to achieve their broader goals, however, diplomatic representatives of revolutionary societies have learned to make full use of diplomatic forms and conventions to protect their sovereignty and advance their interests within the system they intend to transform. Ironically perhaps, while many in the West now find and seek the erosion of state sovereignty as the basis for global society, non-Western states seek refuge in the sovereign equality of states that is the organizing concept of the Westphalian order once imposed on the rest by the West. Diplomatic Language is an instrument suited to that purpose because rhetorical displays of sovereign equity have been constructed.

Reflective of new Western thinking, critical scholar James Der Derian (1987) draws on Foucault and uses the term ‘anti-diplomacy’ to characterize those practices that challenge diplomatic authority by scrutinizing its language and practice. From this alternative genealogical perspective, anti-diplomacy is the ideological and political doppelgänger twinned with classic diplomacy at birth. Der Derian (1987: 135) writes, ‘diplomacy is negotiation between states, while anti-diplomacy is propaganda among peoples ... its aim is to transcend all estranged relations.’ A utopian impulse, anti-diplomacy aligns with universalistic forces in counterpoint to the particularistic force field of geographically bound states.

Activists and scholars who believe that the state is the obstacle to be overcome use the grammar of diplomacy to undermine it, precisely because diplomats embody states and organizations created by states. Anti-diplomacy wants to disturb this unjust order, and digital information technology is thought to empower it to do just that (Der Derian, 2009). Language games, designed to jolt the staid status quo, are key to anti-diplomatic practice.

Paradoxically perhaps, practitioner scholar Geoffrey Wiseman (2011) contends that the United States, the current preeminent power in the international system, is itself anti-diplomatic because it wilfully violates diplomatic culture. Wiseman was reflecting on US

‘anti-diplomacy’ prior to the 2003 Iraq War; but a decade earlier in 1991, prior to the first Gulf War, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz refused a letter from President H.W. Bush demanding that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait to avoid war. President Bush wrote, ‘to eliminate any uncertainty or ambiguity that might exist in your mind about where we stand and what we are prepared to do.’ According to Thomas Friedman (1991) writing in the *New York Times*:

‘I told him I am sorry,’ said Mr. Aziz, ‘I cannot receive such a letter. The language in this letter is not compatible with the language that should be used in correspondences between heads of state. When a head of state writes to another head of state a letter and he really intends to make peace, he should use polite language.’

Much as they’d incline toward the latter, diplomats are tasked with managing relationships of enmity as well as friendship (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013). Diplomatic Language cannot always be ‘language that sits on the fence’ as Oxford linguist Biljana Scott (2012) defines it. When it does, as Ambassador Glaspie learned from her now infamous conversation with Saddam Hussein prior to the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, there can be unintended consequences. Ambassador April Glaspie had made a perfectly diplomatic statement according to her instructions: ‘[W]e have no opinion on the Arab–Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait.’ Three days later, Iraq invaded Kuwait much to American surprise. Finding verbal formulations to signal deterrence that are both precise and avoid giving offense requires consummate diplomatic skill.

Key Points

- In the twentieth century, Diplomatic Language lubricated the culturally contingent gears of the old and new states comprising the increasingly complex international order.
- Activists and scholars who believe that the state is the obstacle to be overcome use the grammar of

diplomacy to undermine it by employing language games designed to jolt the staid status quo.

- Diplomats must manage relationships of enmity as well as friendship, and finding verbal formulations to signal deterrence that are both precise and avoid giving offense requires consummate diplomatic skill.

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Indirect though it may be, the best diplomatic verbal construction, like a suspension bridge, is precisely anchored in bedrock on each side. For all its fragile appearance, its strength lies in cabled strands of language supporting the weight of political traffic traveling between and below the textual towers. Whatever the medium, the twisted grass of sixteenth century Incan mountain passes or modern steel, suspension bridge engineers employ the same principles to make them strong yet flexible. So it is with diplomats and their language. Diplomats may speak in the lingua franca of the time, through interpreters or in the languages of those whom they wish to engage. Whatever the tongue used, the manner of speech is designed to bridge disagreement and maintain connection through continual interaction in a pluralistic external world that exists independently of diplomatic representations of it. The ‘moorings and constraints’ of external realism and the context of power underlie diplomatic speech even when they seek to transform the way things are through words (Searle 2008: 19).

Words are chosen to be precise enough to communicate clearly to diplomatic interlocutors yet elastic enough to plausibly suggest the alternative meanings the diplomat’s political masters need to manage their domestic politics. If the diplomats engaged in negotiations do not truly represent the parties to the dispute and cannot manage their domestic and alliance politics, the negotiated text will not find the necessary purchase in political reality to succeed in transforming it.

In behavioral terms, Robert D. Putnam (1988: 434) calls this a ‘two level game’ in

which some rhetorical differences and slight openings on one board lead to realignment on the other, enabling achievement of ‘otherwise unattainable objectives.’ In a specific example of the 1980s Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) language game, Gavan Duffy et al. (1998: 271) demonstrate that the superpower parties to the negotiations on INF in Europe eventually transformed a security regime through explicit and implicit discourse that led to a ‘Soviet reconceptualization of the Cold War insecurity dilemma.’

By their habit of using ambiguity to create the space for international agreement and room to maneuver politically at home and abroad, diplomats open themselves to the charge of ‘duplicity and theatrical play’ by critical scholars investigating their threshold practice. Constantinou (1996: 152) compares the liminal, or boundary spanning, practice of the diplomat to the games of the mythological ‘Trickster.’ He expands the metaphor in an insightful discussion of how the patron god Hermes, who is at one ‘a medium, a message, and an interpreter,’ represents diplomatic representations.

Other post-positivist scholars, taking the same linguistic turn, use Diplomatic Language against itself (deconstruct) often making it appear strange and silly. Because diplomacy ‘is a practice where the textual plays a key role’ it attracts Derridean analysis (Neumann 2012: 24). Such critical scholars parody diplomatic discourse because diplomats embody the state in an international system that they contend is thoroughly opaque and unrepresentative of marginalized sectors of global society.

Whether Diplomatic Language civilizes or deceives, as contesting scholars posit, speech act theory advanced by philosopher John R. Searle (2010) would help explain how the international state system beginning in 1648 was linguistically created and linguistically constituted and maintained by diplomats. The international states system exists as a social reality because we believe it exists and we act accordingly. By their accreditation as representatives of sovereign states, diplomats

have had the collectively recognized status to create the reality they represent. As Searle (2010: 84) writes, 'once you have the capacity to represent, you already have the capacity to create a reality by those representations, a reality that consists in part of representations.'

Searle (2010) is clear that this deontological power only exists when the declarations by those in authority have the double direction of fit: their representations correspond to the world as it is and also are believed to transform it. For example, the creation of the United Nations at the 1945 San Francisco Conference both reflected prevailing power relations and transformed them by creating a venue for institutionalized multilateral diplomacy. Increasingly, most diplomatic speech acts do not fall into that rare category because, given the diffusion of global and regional power and the consequent evaporation of authority, collective acceptance of diplomatic declarations often cannot be achieved.

As the number of sovereign states has grown, many smaller and middle range states can no longer afford resident missions in all recognized states. They use the United Nations as a site of contact with other states, changing the nature of their diplomacy. Indian scholar-diplomat Kishan Rana (2001: 112) points to opportunity cost in effective diplomatic action when, infatuated by words, the Global South waste time and effort in producing a multitude of UN General Assembly resolutions that have little intrinsic value and no legs in the world as it actually is. The UN General Assembly is just one among thirty thousand international organizations of varying significance available to generate the texts that international political actors choose to accept. As international relations theorist Randall Schweller (2014) points out, from this 'world to word' forum shopping perspective, representatives of a shifting international system write a multitude of ambiguous agreements that can only reproduce its pluralism.

Still, some idealistic scholars, believing that language creates its own reality, analyze diplomatic speech from an alternative 'word

to world' perspective. For example, following a lengthy linguistic and legal comparative analysis between UN resolutions and US congressional documents, Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo (2012) contends that intentional and strategically vague language in UN resolutions contributed to the 2003 Iraq War. Game theorists would not be surprised that 'deliberately vague UN wording allowed the US to build its own legislation with a personal interpretation implying that the UN did not impede military action' (2012: 507). Scotto di Carlo, however, believes that had the international community chosen the right binding words 'there would have been diplomatic solutions to the Iraq crises' (2012: 508). Such a contention belies the political realities of the United Nations Security Council. Neither the US nor the UK, both permanent members of the UNSC, would have agreed to words preventing the use of force, given the post-9/11 context, because of what they intended to do.

Key Points

- Diplomats choose words to be precise enough to communicate clearly to diplomatic interlocutors yet elastic enough to plausibly suggest the alternative meanings the diplomat's political masters need to manage their domestic politics.
- Critical scholars, investigating the diplomatic habit of using ambiguity to create the space for international agreement and room to maneuver politically at home and abroad, see in Diplomatic Language proof of 'duplicitous and theatrical play.'
- Speech act theory explains how the international states system was linguistically created and linguistically constituted and maintained by diplomats.

EXPANDED CAST, CONTESTED SCRIPTS

Although questions of war and peace are dramatic, everyday diplomatic practice rarely concerns the need to signal deterrence while reassuring amity on the eve of war. Diplomats

conduct considerable routine business bilaterally and multilaterally. They keep the international watch works moving with small communicative oscillations: oral statements, remarks, speeches and conversations layered with written communiqués, demarches, notes, non-papers, readouts, and press releases. There is a practice of nearly imperceptible verbal adjustments learned by acquired 'feel' from the doing. Their verbal craftsmanship requires policy orientation wrapped in political sensitivity, fine-tuned to the local context, nested in the larger regional, and then international, whole. Diplomacy's elaborate, time-consuming speech-works mechanisms appear as anachronistic as a seventeenth century mechanical watch to those accustomed to electronic movement.

Employing practice theory, I.B. Neumann (2007) conducts a vivisection of the production of a diplomatic speech and pronounces the process within a foreign ministry to be ceremonial, mundane and incapable of creating any daring innovation without political intervention. Neumann's ethnography raises critical questions about whether Diplomatic Language is a living membrane capable of new feeling and renewal. Or whether, as George Steiner (2013: Chapter 1) writes of dying language systems, 'it is imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches, or matches [only] at certain ritual, arbitrary points, the changing landscape of fact.' It may be that Diplomatic Language conserves, rather than innovates, but it also codifies and summarizes mastery of diplomatic practice. Without the ballast of diplomatic speech, official international political rhetoric could fly out of control and contribute to further disorder.

In the liberal West, political intervention has come by choice, as the democratic states prefer open government with active engagement of private players. It has also come as once domestic policy issues and the political actors who swarm around them push themselves across domestic/foreign boundaries and onto the global stage in search of

solutions to problems that seem borderless. The expansion of international trade, the growth in citizen travel abroad and the intensification of transnational flows, virtually and physically, amplify the work of diplomats by altering the context within which they ply their craft.

In the new global media ecology, diplomatic dialogue has been disrupted and taken on a less scripted, less decorous tone as chirp exchanges between the Russian and American ambassadors to the UN clearly demonstrate (Oglesby, 2014). Diplomats need to adapt to the acceleration of communication enabled by digital technology without losing their sense of purpose: to maintain perpetual systematic relationships with representatives of states and the international organizations created by them, in order to maintain a space for politics in the international political realm. One of the key problems diplomats face in the social media age is the difficulty of calming things down, and moving forward slowly toward consensus, in competition with the roar of 140 character instant reaction.

Significantly, Western diplomats, in particular, conduct their diplomacy in a chaotic environment with a range of actors, from domestic government bureaucracies and private sector entities, who do not share the codes and conventions of Diplomatic Language. The increased use of summit diplomacy also marginalizes the professional diplomatic corps and gives control over speech acts to a different set of political actors (see Chapters 14 and 19 in this Handbook). For all diplomats, the parallel rise in conference diplomacy, according to the late Norman Scott (2001: 153), requires new blends of precision and ambiguity in negotiated texts on a whole range of complex issues. Any diplomatically worded agreement is buttressed by kilos of contesting addenda spelling out what parties to the agreement really mean.

The interface between diplomacy and governance is populated by a range of actors performing in different languages from different

scripts, for different audiences and with varying intent. They both collaborate with diplomats and challenge them as 'rival centers of authority and legitimacy to the state on a range of economic, environmental and other technical issues' (Hocking et al., 2012: 34). Many of these voices argue for replacing the instability of interstate politics conducted by diplomats, with a new order grounded in presumed universal principles. They want prescriptive rules drawn from positive law at the international level, technical expertise, or moral imperative.

With the expansion in the scope of international law, particularly human rights law, challenging the plural legal traditions of the various states, lawyers bring in their legal verbal conventions to compete in writing the rules and standards to order international relations (see Chapter 15 in this Handbook). Their purpose is to avoid the equivocal outcomes accepted by diplomats operating politically, and to compel compliance under an international rule of law. Legal rules of appropriateness require a very different prescriptive language that is 'precise, consistent, obligatory and legally binding' (March and Olsen, 2009: 21). The European Union is a legally integrated political community and its representatives on the broader global stage, in particular, are accustomed to this shift in both concept and rhetoric. Rising non-Western powers that do not share this experience, and find it threatening to their sovereignty, take refuge in customary and indeterminate Diplomatic Language that respects the right of sovereign difference.

Scientists seeking to inform and influence policies on issues ranging from climate change to nuclear proliferation bring their own language conventions onto the diplomatic field. While suitably formal to diplomatic ears, scientific language insists on terminology with fixed meanings and greater specificity than that customarily used by diplomats. It challenges diplomatic representations of political reality by insisting on scientifically determined objective

knowledge of the real world that presumes to lock in only certain courses of action for international policy consideration. What scientists lack, as James C. Scott (1998) argues, are precisely the practical and political skills required to craft and implement any complex international policy involving cross-cultural social interaction.

Additionally, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), used to raising public awareness and support through a kind of morally imperative 'brochure talk,' chafe at the neutrality of customary Diplomatic Language. 'Brochure Talk' is a useful term coined by scholar Sinead Walsh (2014: 14) 'to describe the way in which practitioners in the aid sector give public relations-type descriptions of their work, as might be read in a brochure' even though the reality of implementation in the field falls short. Dr Walsh's exploration of the disjuncture between the ideal and the field reality in NGO speech acts stimulates thinking about the struggles over the representations of reality diplomats will increasingly face as they share the black box theater with a mixed company of actors, and a newly interacting audience, working from contested scripts.

While most actors on the diplomatic stage want to influence global outcomes in the form of international treaties, resolutions and political action, increasingly some use the stage as a springboard to rally their constituents and impact their home domestic politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Unlike the diplomatic corps, these political actors have a different purpose and audience, and therefore their language is focused on building and maintaining relationships within an issue network of their specific concern. Their networks may well be global, but they work in issue specific silos within particular languages, as disciplined academics might well understand. They are not focused on maintaining clear channels of communication between states and the organizations created by them as those

of diplomats are. They are therefore less capable than diplomats of finding cross-binding solutions to wicked global problems when they arise.

Rana (2001) contends that Western states dominate the new more public diplomatic discourse with phrases like 'fair trade' and 'social standards' because they are reinvigorated by the supplementing voices of private actors competing to frame issues. 'They are sharper at shaping these [code] words, and in capturing the deeper concepts behind them and therefore seize the high ground in debates' (2001: 112). Writing from a Chinese perspective on interpretations of rule of law concepts, Yang Mingxing agrees, arguing 'international public opinion is a discourse system overwhelmingly dominated by the Western countries' and only by paying careful attention to the interpretation of Chinese concepts in language that resonates with the international community can misunderstanding and suspicion be avoided (Mingxing, 2012: 9). At a Meta level, some scholars (like Steiner, 2013) speculate that computer languages themselves reflect and reinforce this Western, particularly Anglo-American, hegemony.

Journalists covering it all with increasingly fast, bright lights of new information technology dislike bland, decorous, diplomatic discourse that they feel disguises what is really going on behind the scenes. They want words with edges to mark the conflict that provides a hook for stories that make news. In the age of WikiLeaks, the conflict that makes news is consequently sometimes found when candid internal diplomatic reporting is leaked to the public and juxtaposed with official representations composed in Diplomatic Language. The diplomats' intent to create the space for possibility by saying no more and no less than is necessary, while maintaining external relationships in continuous dialogue, is then read by those, unaccustomed to diplomatic practice, as a cunning effort to obfuscate and deceive. Sometimes it is, even if much, much more is going on.

Key Points

- Diplomats conduct considerable routine business bilaterally and multilaterally with small communicative oscillations: oral statements, remarks, speeches and conversations layered with written communiqués, demarches, notes, non-papers, readouts, and press releases.
- In the new global media ecology, diplomatic dialogue has been disrupted and taken on a less scripted, less decorous tone.
- The interface between diplomacy and governance is populated by a range of actors performing in different languages from different scripts, for different audiences and with varying intent.

AFTERWORD

For some critics it would seem Diplomatic Language is, like oysters, an acquired taste. They mistake a certain order inducing predictability and regularity in Diplomatic Language with unchanging rigidity. In fact, the speech of diplomats is fluid and variable across time and place because the practice of diplomacy itself adapts to changing local conditions and to the international environment that it has helped create.

Young diplomats, who distend their thumbs in an effort to understand, inform and influence global public opinion through short, fast bursts of digital speech, should cast one wary eye back to the cautionary tale of *The Walrus and the Carpenter*. Remember: the purpose of diplomacy is to engage in vigorous argument about political disagreements by sustaining the relationships needed to order the international system. Remember: the interstate public sphere is a babel of bodies politic not one Public Opinion.

Let's give Lewis Carroll (1871) the final metaphoric word on Diplomatic Language:

'O Oysters,' said the Carpenter,
 'You've had a pleasant run!
 Shall we be trotting home again?'
 But answer came there none –
 And this was scarcely odd, because
 They'd eaten every one.

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