

Cultural Misunderstanding in Current Diplomatic Communication: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Diplomats' Activities

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Abstract

As the research in the field reveals, successful communications require the two parties involved in the activities to share sociocultural background knowledge and information. The shared expectations, beliefs, attitudes and values enable the different parties to properly infer the conveyed meaning of each other's messages in order to respond or act accordingly and appropriately.

However, diplomats, who use language at almost all times to conduct and negotiate international relations, belong to different cultures. This means they do not share the same or similar cultural background knowledge which is vitally essential for any successful negotiation. It follows, although diplomats are highly educated, knowledgeable and skillful in foreign languages, their activities, this research assumes, are likely to exhibit problems of misunderstanding and misjudgements, which lead to unsuccessful outcomes.

By investigating the empirical data, collected by means of tape-recorded interview as well as by questionnaire, and analyzing a number of activities conducted by the career diplomats who were interviewed, the research revealed unsuccessful outcomes. This confirmed and proved the research assumption.

In order to avoid such unpleasant outcomes, diplomats are encouraged to use certain strategies to minimize their cultural differences, and are urged to build bridges of trust and accountability between them to secure their communication activities and to ensure reasonable outcomes for all parties.

1. Introduction

1.1 Communication is essentially a social phenomenon. It follows that successful communication requires an appropriate use of language that suits the context in which it occurs. In order to achieve this task, communicators need to relate the 'overt content' of language (the linguistic knowledge, the knowledge of grammar and lexicon) to the 'covert content' (the situational, social and cultural knowledge).

Linguistic communication is a two-way process, and has, always, two parties (individuals or groups); partners initiate moves and counterparts produce countermoves (i.e. responses) (Al Mulla, 1991,⁽¹⁾ 1992.⁽²⁾ When a partner conveys a message, this message is associated with his sociocultural background knowledge (Searle, 1975;⁽³⁾ Gumperz, 1982).⁽⁴⁾ On the other hand, his counterpart brings to the communication situation his sociocultural background knowledge. Accordingly, the message conveyed is likely to be affected by either the partner's background knowledge or the counterpart's background knowledge. In such a situation, the counterpart understands the partner's conveyed message and responds appropriately if he belongs to the same culture and shares with his partner same, or similar, sociocultural knowledge.

In communicating messages, partners have certain intentional states (i.e. beliefs, expectations, attitudes and intentions) which accompany the messages. The act of communication will continue and succeed if, and only if, the counterparts understand the partners' conveyed messages and recognize their intentional states (Searle, 1975,⁽⁵⁾ 1983⁽⁶⁾). This means that communication (or negotiation) will be maintained as long as the two parties involved in the activity share each other's sociocultural background knowledge. It means, furthermore, communication activity will progress and produce a successful outcome if the two parties involved in the process acquire knowledge of the covert content of language as defined by their mutual beliefs, shared expectations, attitudes and value system. This is so because, as Gumperz (1982)⁽⁷⁾ observes, partners, in the actual communication, unconsciously reveal their sociocultural background knowledge which constrains both the form and the outcome of what is said.

Miller (1973: 10) argues: ⁽⁸⁾

Most of our misunderstandings of other people are not due to any inability to hear them or to parse their sentences, or to understand their words, although such problems do occur. Our major source of difficulty in communication is that we so often fail to understand the speaker's intention.

Intentions (or intentional states in general) therefore, are the backbone of any communication activity (Al Mulla, 1986,⁽⁹⁾ 1988⁽¹⁰⁾).

1.2 Diplomacy, according to a S. Korean Ambassador, 'is the art of negotiation, and it is the art of promoting relations between countries...' (Y. Park, S. Korean Ambassador - interview). A distinguished British Ambassador has described diplomacy as 'the process of communication between countries. It is a process which is bilateral and is multilateral; is the process which can be a mere exchange of views or it can be a negotiation...' (M. Tait, a British Ambassador - interview).

Diplomacy, accordingly, is a profession of language. Limb (1962: 29) ⁽¹¹⁾ suggests that diplomacy should be listed among the categories of the literary and oratorical professions. According to Simpson (1962: 38) diplomacy has primarily relied upon speech not only in the conduct of negotiations but also in the preparation for missions and in the justification of their results.

Nevertheless, diplomats belong to different cultures. This means that they acquire different sociocultural background knowledge. In other words, partners in diplomatic communication, or negotiation, do not share the same, or even similar, expectations, attitudes, beliefs or traditional matters. This is the case even with people of neighboring countries such as those of Western Europe. The covert content of language (i.e. the sociocultural background knowledge) which is central to a successful communication is no longer present in the scene of negotiation. It follows, this research assumes, that diplomatic communication (or negotiation) is most likely to suffer from misunderstanding and miscommunication.

2. In order to examine this assumption, this research investigates current diplomatic communication employing a sociolinguistic perspective. The empirical data to be analyzed here were collected by means of two methods of field work. The first method was tape-recorded interview. During the period from November, 1986 to May, 1987, 25 interviews were conducted mainly in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Khartoum (Sudan), London (United Kingdom), and Washington, D.C. (United States of America). Most of the participants in these tape-recorded interviews were ambassadors and career diplomats.

The second method by which empirical data were gathered was by questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to career diplomats through the United Arab Emirates embassies in Delhi (India), Islamabad (Pakistan), Khartoum (Sudan), London (United Kingdom), Paris (France), New York and Washington, D.C. (United States of America) and Tokyo (Japan). From

December, 1986 to August, 1987, 44 questionnaires were collected.

In both the interviews and questionnaires, the three main questions asked were as follows:

- A. 'By definition, diplomats belong to different cultures. Do you feel, Mr. Ambassador, that this fact can affect the outcome of their communication or negotiation?'
- B. 'Throughout your diplomatic communication have you ever been in a situation where you have misunderstood your counterpart's message?'
- C. 'Have you ever been misunderstood by your counterpart?'

3.1 With regard to the primary class of the empirical data (i.e. tape-recorded interviews), 21 (84%) ambassadors answered these questions positively in a straight-forward manner (i.e. 'yes, very much so'; 'Well yes I do'; 'Yes, no doubt about that'; 'yes, of course'; 'Not merely can affect, but does affect ...'). Only four of the total number of the career diplomats interviewed (i.e. $4/25 = 16$ percent) attempted to avoid answering the questions in a straight-forward manner. Of these four, two career diplomats unintentionally surrendered their previous stances, and revealed positive answers.⁽¹²⁾

In order to mention some of the career diplomats' responses without exhausting all the possibilities of the empirical data, let us consider the following excerpts:

Michael Tait, a British Ambassador, answered the questions as follows:

AA 'Yes, I think it can indeed affect the outcomes of our communication...'

AB 'Well, I think to claim that I had always understood what was being said to me may be the claim of excessive pride that could not be sustained...'

AC 'Well, I think yes...'

An American career diplomat provided the following answers:

AA & AB 'Well, yes I do. And let me say in what sense I think that is true.

Communication is not in words only but it also has to do with attitudes, misconceptions and personal prejudices and cultural prejudices which can affect understanding...'

AC 'Yes! In fact, I think... very often...'

To give one more example, an Austrian career diplomat responded as follows:

'I strongly agree with you because different cultures make also different educations, and different viewpoints'⁽¹³⁾

3.2 Concerning the empirical data of the secondary class derived from the questionnaire and intended to provide quantitative evidence to support the data of the primary class, the results obtained were as follows:

3.2.1 With regard to question A, 77.3% (i.e. 34/44) supported the research assumption, whereas 22.7% (i.e. 10/44) were against it.

Table 1: Results of Question A

Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
34/44	10/44	0/44
77.3%	22.7%	0%

3.2.2 As to question B, 81.7% (i.e. 36/44) were in favor of the research assumption, whereas 15.9% (7/44) were against it, and 2.3% (i.e. 1/44) were uncertain.

Table 2: Results of Question B

Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
36/44	7/44	1/44
81.7%	15.9%	2.3%

3.2.3 Concerning question C, 84% (i.e. 37/44) supported the research assumption whereas 13.6% (i.e. 6/44) were against it, and 2.3% (i.e. 1/44) were uncertain.

Table 3: Results of Question C

Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
37/44	6/44	1/44
84%	13.6%	2.3%

4. The results of both classes of empirical data, then, revealed that the majority of the career diplomats supported the research assumption that misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages can occur in current activities of diplomats of different sociocultural backgrounds.

However, subjective analysis is inevitable in a study in which the activities and the analysis were produced by human beings. For this reason, the least result, the result of 77.3% (percent) would be considered here to prove the research assumption. The interpretation of such a result means that the probability of the occurrence of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages and intentions in the activities of international diplomats and negotiators would be 77.3 percent.

5. In order to depict the extent of the problem created by the diplomats' communications or negotiations, let us analyze some activities of the career diplomats' personal experience:

5.1 An Arabic-African Communication:

This activity involved an Arab career diplomat and an African senior official. The two partners negotiated a financial matter.

The country of the Arabic career diplomat (partner one) granted a loan to an African country, and the duty of partner one was to follow up the loan and arrange its reimbursement. After having difficulty tracing the man who was in charge of the loan, partner one thought that the Minister of Finance (partner two) would be the right one who knew about the loan. After several exchanges between the two partners, as the protocol requires, partner one asked partner two about the loan:

- a. Arab "I am sorry... I could not understand... my question is not about the wealth of the country or the wealth of the president, but it is about the loan... where is the loan?"
- b. Afri 'Actually... eh.... the wealth of the country is the wealth of the president... and you know... it is the wealth of our president... is the most important than anything else.'

Although partner two was not the man who was in charge of the loan, as it appeared later that the Governor of the Central Bank was the man who provided partner one with the reference, partner two, from the beginning of the negotiation, politely attempted to inform partner one about the situation (i.e. the loan's story). He was repeatedly advising partner one about the loan, but in terms of his cultural background. The message that partner two attempted to convey to his counterpart was that what partner one considered as a loan was added to the wealth of the president. That is, from the viewpoint of partner two, the loan was no longer considered to be a loan, rather it became a part of the wealth of the president according to the country's cultural rules. It was not strange in this African culture that the president would consider all the

resources of the country to be his own personal wealth.

Given such clues of cultural background, partner two conveyed a very implicit message (i.e. an indirect speech act) to partner one alongside a desire or belief that partner one would understand and recognize the intended message depending on his understanding of the culture of the country in which he was stationed. The indirect speech act, which was performed by partner two was an advice to partner one. That is, partner two, by terming the loan the wealth of the country or the wealth of the president, was actually advising partner one to forget the whole matter and not to disturb or disappoint himself by pursuing the so-called loan since it became a part of the president's assets.

However, it appeared, as the scene indicated, that partner one was repeatedly unable to understand or recognize the intended act performed by his counterpart. This caused a great misunderstanding (i.e. misculturality) between the two partners. What was meant socio-culturally by partner two (according to the factors of the covert content of language) was misinterpreted and misunderstood by partner one who continuously understood the overt content of the message; that is the literal meaning of it (according to the knowledge of grammar and lexicon). This was clear from the repetition of the same question, 'Where is the loan?' throughout the negotiation despite the answer which was provided repeatedly.

As a consequence of partner one's misunderstanding of partner two's intended message, partner two, after acknowledging the circumstances and finding himself unable to provide more information or explain himself more explicitly, issued his final message:

- c. Afri 'Well, I have told you everything that I know and frankly I don't have more information to add... Sorry, Mr. Ambassador... sorry...
- d. Arab OK... thank you...

Briefly, what terminated the diplomatic communication in the above activity was the diversity of the two partners' sociocultural background which caused the unfortunate result.

Partner one, who belonged to the Arabic culture, was repeatedly unable to understand or grasp the intended message (the covert content of the message) which was performed by partner two who belonged to the African culture. The repeated message, 'the wealth of the country is the wealth of the president,' performed by partner two actually disappointed partner one who asked about a specific piece of information, the 'loan' in order to fulfill his duties and free himself of any annoyance.

Partner two, who was deeply involved with his cultural attitudes and norms was unable to free himself from these cultural matters in order to tell his counterpart that they were actually negotiating the same issue yet with different terminologies (i.e. the loan vs. the wealth of the president). The result was embarrassing for both partners and somehow confusing for partner one.

5.2 A European-Japanese communication:

This activity of diplomatic communication involved a European career diplomat and a Japanese counterpart. The European career diplomat (partner one) visited the Japanese career diplomat (partner two) in order to mutually exchange viewpoints concerning a number of international issues which concerned the countries of both partners. At the end of the meeting, partner one initiated the following exchange:

- a. Euro 'Do you have extra copies of the last EEC Summit's communique?'
- b. Japa 'Yes... yes!'
- c. Euro 'Could you send me a copy or two?'
- d. Japa 'Yes... yes!...

After partner two's confirmation of having additional copies of the communique of the last European Economic Community Summit, partner one made a request of his counterpart for having a copy or two of the communique. Partner two answered the counterpart's request positively (i.e. yes... yes). That indicated that partner two would send copies to partner one.

A week later, since partner one had not yet received the requested copies of the communique, he telephoned partner two in order to know the reason for the postponement. His move to his counterpart was as follows:

- e. Euro '... my friend, you have promised to send me copies of the communique of the last EEC Summit, but I haven't received any yet.'

The earlier positive answer provided by partner two was understood by partner one as a 'promise'. In fact, partner two did repeat the positive answer two times (i.e. yes... yes). However, in considering the utterance a promise or otherwise, the total factors of speech situation (the total speech act) in which the utterance was expressed must be considered. That is, the circumstances in which the 'yes... yes' were uttered ought to be, in some respects, appropriate (Austin, 1962: 9-11). On the one hand, considering the earlier positive answer as a promise, partner two must utter the 'yes... yes' seriously (normally with physical or mental actions or uttering further words) as confirmation of having a

certain intention to keep his word (i.e. his promise). On the other hand, partner one must hear, recognize and understand the positive answer to seriously mean a promise. This indicated that a promise should be a two-way intention recognition and conception.

In the case at hand, what was 'linguistically' uttered by partner two was taken or understood by partner one as a real promise. That indicates that, in the view of partner one, partner two must keep his word and fulfill the promise (i.e. to send copies of the EEC Summit's communique to partner one). Nevertheless, as partner two had not sent the requested copies of the communique, partner one telephoned his counterpart in order to remind him and to implicitly signal the annoyance which was caused by the postponement. The answer he received startled him:

f. Japa 'Me... me... **I didn't promise...** oh my friend sorry... **I didn't mean it** sorry... **I don't have them**'

According to partner two's countermove, the positive answer he provided to partner one was not a promise. He did not mean that the earlier 'yes... yes' answer was a promise. Furthermore, he did not even have copies of the last EEC Summit communique. This indicated that his previous answer that looked like an agreement that he had copies of the communique (i.e. 'yes ... yes'), that answer too was not a real agreement (i.e. not a real yes-answer). What was it then? Actually it was no more than a 'feed-back response'.

According to Japanese, **yes** would be used instead of no in the context of a request. Since it would be impolite, according to Japanese cultural norms, to answer a request by using no, they would always avoid utilizing **no** in such a context and try to find another means to convey their negative response. This is one thing about Japanese yes (i.e. **Hi** in the Japanese language). The other thing is that when Japanese utilize **yes**, in a context other than that of a **request**, they do not usually mean that they agree or express a positive answer, or will do or fulfill the thing being asked for. Rather by uttering **yes** they create a 'specific linguistic means', which is culturally bound to inform their counterparts that they will follow, listen to, and hear them without necessarily agreeing with them. According to diplomats who served in Japan (some of them interviewed and tape-recorded for the purpose of this research, e.g. Austrian career diplomat), this **yes** caused a great deal of difficulty for people of different cultures.

Indeed, and a case in point is the one at hand. Partner one, since he belonged to the Western culture understood partner two's first 'double-yes' as indicating an agreement that partner two **did** acquire copies of the communique whereas the

second 'double-yes' was understood by him as conveying a promise by which partner two would fulfill partner one's request in order to satisfy his international states (i.e. desire, belief and intention). However, what happened was contrary to partner one's expectation, attitudes and cultural norms.

According to partner one's culture, and to Western culture, in general, if a partner expressed a yes-answer the counterpart would expect that he would act accordingly. In this case, by saying **yes** (i.e. expressing a positive answer) a partner would actually regard (or place) himself under an obligation to implement the act concerned, at least morally. If he did not carry out the act, he could be challenged by the counterpart (an Austrian career diplomat-interview). This could probably be the reason behind the evasive answers (i.e. perhaps, maybe; I think so; and so on) which are sometimes provided by western counterparts in order to avoid unnecessary trouble.

In light of such an explanation, partner one was severely disappointed by the misinterpretation that happened between the two partners as a result of their different sociocultural backgrounds. The diversity of the cultural attitudes and norms between partner one (the West-European partner) and partner two (the Japanese partner) resulted in a critical misinterpretation on the side of partner one. That is, partner one was unable to understand partner two's message and intention.

In brief, in the activity of diplomatic communication which was analyzed above, two career diplomats belonged to different cultures, negotiated certain issues which had mutual interest for the benefit of their countries. The key problem which intervened in the activity was the different usage of yes (i.e. the linguistic morpheme indicating a positive answer) in the two cultures involved (i.e. West-European and Japanese). The overlapping is between the linguistic knowledge of **yes** as a morpheme expressing a positive response to a yes/no-question according to overt content of language and a sociocultural knowledge of **yes** as a 'cultural device' used by Japanese to fill a 'cultural gap' of a polite negative response (instead of using **no**) in answering a request, or as a **merely** feed-back response to inform partners in communication activity that their counterparts would actually be following and listening to what partners were saying without necessarily agreeing with what they said. Such an overlapping created problems of misinterpretation and misunderstanding for partner one which caused him dismay and eventuated the breakdown of the diplomatic activity.

5.3 A Greek-Bangladesh communication:

This activity occurred between a Greek career diplomat and a Bangladesh

counterpart. After playing tennis, a number of career diplomats had an informal discussion in a club. While the Greek career diplomat was taking his turn in the discussion of British history and talking about Alexander the Great, the Bangladesh career diplomat (partner one) gazed at the Greek career diplomat (partner two) and said:

- a. Bang 'Look, Alexander was great to you but to me he **was Alexander the invader**. And here, **he had no business to come to my country without an invitation**'
- b. Gree

It appeared that partner one, in the above move, was provoked by the way and attitudes of partner two while he was talking about the Greek greatest hero, namely Alexander the Great. The situation and the attitudes of partner two touched on partner one's past and invited his sociocultural background (i.e. belief, value and traditional matters). These factors reminded partner one of the deep past and related him to the ancient history where he remembered a traditional anecdote about the invasion of his country by Alexander the Great whom partner two spoke of as the greatest hero. Such a situation invited an initial cultural interference between the sociocultural backgrounds of the two partners. Although the situation of the discussion was very intimate, and a number of career diplomats were participating in the discussion, the situation prompted partner one, and probably spontaneously and without any intention to disappoint his friend (partner two), to initiate the above exchange with certain excitement which was dictated by the situational as well as by the sociocultural factors.

In fact, partner one had great respect for Greek civilization, and he regarded Greeks as the most civilized people in the Western world for which Alexander was one of the greatest heroes of his time.

However, as mentioned above, partner one's message, although it was delivered among friends in an information discussion, caused a great misunderstanding between the two partners and thereby partner two was disappointed.

At the linguistic level (at the level of the overt content of language according to grammatical and lexical knowledge), partner one's message was a 'statement'. It stated a piece of historical information of which the conditions of satisfaction (whether it was true or false) rested with the very deep past; with ancient history. Whether Alexander was the invader of partner one's country, or he visited (or invaded) his country with or without an 'invitation', was already left to ancient history to decide. Unless something else influenced the diplomatic

activity, these matters by themselves might not constitute a basis for dispute, and inspire misunderstanding or misjudgement between the two partners. In fact, the cultural attitudes and beliefs of both partners in dealing with this very theme was at the heart of the matter. The informal discussion and the intimate atmosphere turned gradually into a sort of competition between the two partners in which each partner, driven by his cultural attitudes, attempted to 'score a point against the counterpart'. That is, each partner, given his different beliefs and values, tried to 'defeat' his counterpart.

Partner two, by integrating all factors of the situation, regarded the discussion as a 'humiliation' of his culturally fundamental matters. In this respect, the 'purely linguistic' meaning of the phrases in partner one's move was no longer seen by partner two as **merely** having literal meaning. Rather, their overt contents were 'colored' by the social and cultural factors of the situation which were 'colored' by the social and cultural factors of the situation which 'converted' the literal meaning of those phrases to sociocultural meaning (i.e. according to the covert content of language). That is, the overt content of the message was influenced by the sociocultural background of partner two.

The first part of partner one's above message, 'Alexander was the invader' was 'covertly' interpreted by partner two as an **accusation** that the Greek civilization was a civilization of invasion of other countries as Alexander was one of the greatest heroes of that civilization who made history, whereas the other part of the message, that Alexander 'had no business to go to partner one's country **without invitation**', was understood by partner two as a criticism (at best) and as a humiliation (at worst) to the Greek cultural attitudes and values which constituted the Greek's fundamental matters. As a consequence, partner two broke down the diplomatic communication with partner one without issuing a countermove (see line b). That is, partner two did not respond to partner one's move since he left the discussion swiftly and angrily. This indicated a collapse of the activity.

Unfortunately, the outcome of this activity was severe on partner two and therefore it produced an unpleasant effect which affected not only the relationship between the two partners (i.e. the two friends) but also the relationship of their wives!

This was by all means an unfortunate 'effect' which was unexpected from a friendly, intimate discussion whose consequence led other participants to laugh.

In summary, the activity analyzed above involved two career diplomats from different cultures who had mutual misunderstanding of the situation, messages and intentions.

Partner one, who belonged to the Bangladesh culture, was drawn by the surrounding circumstances (e.g. cultural attitudes of his counterpart) and uttered a message which had two contents; overt and covert. The overt content of the message denoted the literal meaning which was produced by its linguistic structure (i.e. a statement). Linguistically, the proposition of this statement was either true or false depending on the situation which had deep roots in ancient history. The covert content of the message, which was associated with various social and cultural factors, connoted a number of indirect (implicit) speech acts including accusation and criticism (as discussed above).

Unlike partner one who stated what he felt as historical facts but probably unintentionally misused the occasion and mismanaged the situation, partner two, who was a member of the Greek culture, misunderstood and misinterpreted partner one's message as if it conveyed an accusation and criticism of his culture. Such a misunderstanding, unintentionally, involved partner two in an intolerant position as his cultural beliefs, attitudes and tradition were attacked, and his civilization was criticized. However, instead of rejecting or wisely challenging what he mistakenly understood and judged as an accusation and criticism, he preferred not to utter a word as a counter accusation or otherwise as his civilization did not need to be defended.

The final outcome of the activity in question was the collapse of the diplomatic communication, deterioration of the two partners' and their wives' relationship.

All these unfortunate consequences happened as a direct result of the diversity of the two partners' cultural background knowledge (i.e. the covert content of language which interfered with the overt content of language and eventuated the severe results.

6. What can be done about this situation? How can diplomats avoid misunderstanding and the consequences which follow? Actually, unless a diplomat is fully aware of the cultural aspects of the country of his counterpart, he would not be able to avoid cultural misunderstanding. As Nehru (the late Prime Minister of India) (1950: 58) realized:⁽¹⁴⁾

'It is not easy for a person of one country to enter into the background of another country. So there is great irritation....'

Misunderstanding, according to a British career diplomat,

'... happens frequently, and it is something that we all seek to avoid, but it is inevitable if you are talking across... a cultural divide....' (a British Career diplomat - interview)

However, acknowledging the problem, diplomats should attempt to minimize its effects from impeding the progress of their activities. By realizing such a problem, diplomats are urged to utilize the following strategies to sustain their activities and persist in negotiating them until they reach desirable results.

Michael Tait, a British Ambassador, who has been in diplomatic service for more than thirty years, provided the first strategy:

'... the process which I normally use, if there is any doubt, is to reformulate the proposition in a different way... because if the proposition is based on his language that might not be clear to you in your language what it is therefore if he says to you, "Do you agree with that X?" You might say, "Well, I am not sure that I do, but I agree with Y!..." "And in the same way if someone says, "My view is as follows:", then you can seek clarification after the discussion or after the exchange by saying: "I see, if I have understood you, your view is as follows:" So what you are doing really is a sort of 'cultural jump' and rephrasing out what the man has said to you in a way which is like a confirmation and is like a redefinition of his point of view in terms of which that is totally clear to you whereas to him the expression was not totally clear.' (M. Tait, a British Ambassador - interview)

Nevertheless, in order to employ such a strategy, diplomats should observe and satisfy its conditions. That is, they must use clear, accurate and precise variety of language and negotiate in a very straight-forward manner⁽¹⁵⁾ Michael Tait Continued:

'... I was always very forthright in the way I express myself because I think it is best to be forthright. Although I am a diplomat, I like to be as forthright as I can since I am trying to avoid giving offense that I will turn down what I want to say. I don't want to offend the other person because that is going to make him react badly to what I am saying, but I think it would be good to get him understand very clearly what my point of view is, and what my government's point of view is. Therefore, I don't hold with some of my European colleagues who always express themselves in a very convoluted way...' (M. Tait, a British Ambassador - interview).

The second strategy of which diplomats should take advantage was provided by a Syrian Ambassador:

'This is an important problem which can occur between diplomats, but it has not happened to me so far because when I don't understand the other party, I try twice and three times until I

do - unless he does not want to understand!... Sometimes the other party understands what I meant and sometimes he doesn't, but we overcome that by postponing the meeting because of the need of more clarifications of the subject under discussion and negotiation...' (a Syrian Ambassador - interview)

In addition to the two strategies provided above, diplomats and negotiators should achieve mutual trust and accountability. The two parties in diplomatic communication, or negotiation, should exhibit close attention and real concern to what the other side is trying to convey in a sincere attempt to digest his message and grasp his intention. Mutual trust, accountability and reciprocity are indispensable virtues to any successful negotiation⁽¹⁶⁾ (Al Mulla, 1992: 327) because the time when

'... every one of them speaks of his own interests and how he achieves such interests neglecting or intentionally avoiding to touch upon the other party's interest....',

as stated by Fawzi Abdullatif, a U.A.E. Ambassador (in interview), has already passed. The era when 'either you had the cake or I had the cake', according to Ambassador Ishrat Aziz, has ended:

'Now... it is very easy with science and technology to increase the size of the cake! So with cooperation everyone can survive in a much better way... Cooperation means better understanding... better understanding means better communication and better communication means better diplomacy....' (Ishrat Aziz, an Indian Ambassador - interview)

Also, diplomats and negotiators should take advantage of what was described by the American President Bush, after the meeting (on Saturday, Feb. 1, 1992) with the Russian President Yeltsin, as 'the dawn of a new era' in which the United States and Russia started a 'New relationship... based on trust, based on a commitment to economic and political freedom... to turn former enemies not only into friends but allies...'⁽¹⁷⁾

This relationship was described by the Russian President as that, 'There has been written and drawn a new line and crossed out all of the things that have been associated with the Cold War... From now on, we do not consider ourselves to be potential enemies!'⁽¹⁸⁾

A similar message was repeated in Paris when the leaders of France and Russia signed a treaty (on Feb. 7, 1992) which prescribed unprecedented political, economic and military cooperation between the ancient continental rivals.⁽¹⁹⁾

Following the signing ceremony, Yeltsin said, 'We are no longer enemies,

or even potential adversaries. ... We want to become allies.' French President, Mitterand, replied, 'Russia and France are friends and now say so'.⁽²⁰⁾

Should 'the dawn of a new era' be real, and the new relationship which is based on trust and commitment come true, then the following situation described by a Russian Ambassador would no longer be continued:

'... diplomats as servants of their governments... are the phenomena of everyday political life of the globe... sometimes the reality is different, very much, from idealistic picture. ... and who to blame? Of course, all the governments are to blame for this that they did not learn enough from previous experiences to be more reasonable, to be less egoistic and to pursue the line of common goodness. Unfortunately, the world is more cruel; there are economic contradictions, ideological contradictions, political contradictions, differences between political and social systems which prevent the family of nations to live in without war and conflicts, without trouble, without clashes of interests....' (a Russian Ambassador - interview)

Therefore, diplomats and negotiators should benefit from 'the dawn of a new era' and from 'the new relationship which is based on trust and commitment,' and realize that it is impossible for one side of the negotiation to obtain everything while the other side loses everything. A state of total winning or total losing does not exist in negotiation; both sides lose and gain by virtue of 'give and take processes'⁽²¹⁾ (Al Mulla, 1992: 329). That is, each side should relinquish some of what it considers its right in order for both sides to overcome the differences and reach mutual amicable solutions by observing and satisfying the conditions of trust and commitment,

7. In conclusion, this research demonstrates that successful communication requires that the two parties involved in the activity share socio-cultural background knowledge. The shared expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and cultural values enable counterparts to appropriately infer the intended meaning conveyed by the messages of their partners.

As revealed above, people of different cultures experience problems caused by their differences when they communicate. The diversity of their sociocultural background knowledge tends to create a context of misunderstanding, misinterpretations of messages and intentions and misevaluation.

Building on such a premise, this research assumed that although diplomats are elite, highly educated and knowledgeable, the activities conducted by them

are not exceptions. That is, since diplomats belong to different cultures, the diplomatic communications conducted by them are likely to exhibit misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages and intentions.

Employing a sociolinguistic perspective, the analysis of the empirical data, collected by means of tape-recorded interview as well as questionnaire, confirmed and proved the research assumption.

The result obtained demonstrated that the frequency of misunderstanding that occurred in the diplomatic communication activities was 77.3 percent. This means the probability of misunderstanding in current diplomatic communication or negotiation would be 77.3 percent.

In order to avoid such unpleasant results, diplomats are encouraged to use certain strategies to minimize their cultural differences and to obtain an advantage from the Post Cold war era and the new era of cooperation by building bridges of trust and accountability to secure their communication activities and to ensure reasonable outcomes for all parties.

Notes

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- 21 . See Al Mulla, 1992: 329.

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