

The history of our interest in language and diplomacy is paradigmatic of our activities in the field of information technology and diplomacy. Eight years ago we started research and practical exercises on the influence of information technology in diplomacy. The more involved we became with the Internet and IT, the more we realised the crucial importance of many classical issues in diplomacy. One of these is language. While technology is replacing or at least changing the nature of many functions and methods of traditional diplomacy such as routine consular activities, communications, and information gathering, at the same time it is leading us to re-assert the importance of other core issues and techniques, including language use, negotiation, and such elements where human creativity can be assisted but not replaced by machines.

We have recently noticed a convergence between the centrality of texts in Internet-based communication and diplomacy. The Internet has reinforced the importance of texts as the key medium of modern human communication, in a variety of forms such as e-mail, websites, and hypertext-based documents. And for diplomacy texts have always been crucial: the richness and complexity of diplomatic activities, including negotiations, representation, social activities and media coverage is crystallised in texts - diplomatic documents. Technology is already aiding with the use of texts in diplomacy in a number of ways, contributing to the sharing, storing and preservation of documents. IT assisted methods of analysis such as DiploAnalytica can reveal the layers of information and knowledge, both focal and tacit, contained in diplomatic documents. IT also offers possibilities for the creation of more adequate documents, both in working and final phases. Diplomatic negotiations conducted via the Internet remove the trappings of direct communication such as body language and eye-contact, allowing negotiators to focus on the document text.

From the side of technology, given current trends, it seems likely that the upcoming phase of Internet development will focus on management of unstructured information - texts and documents - as was the initial intention of conceptual fathers of the Internet Vannevar Bush, Ted Nelson and the Internet creator Tim Berners-Lee. Key Internet jargon will shift from bandwidth, servers, and such technical terms to syntax, semantics, analogies and other linguistics-related terms. Techniques and methodologies will focus on extracting relevant information and knowledge from the vast amount of textual resources available.

On a human level, IT has increased opportunities for direct communication between people, making awareness and understanding of cultural differences in communication more and more important. People from different cultures and backgrounds are more often than at any time in the past in direct contact, via e-mail, chat, and other Internet-based communication tools. At the same time, IT is changing the way we use language to communicate: indirectly, as fast and personal communication leads to less formality; and directly, as we begin to explore new possibilities for enriching our communication with IT-based tools. Again, these new communication methods bring us back to text: e-mail and chat are text-based.

Our experience in diplomacy has shown that the Internet can enrich language use: it is not a question of either/or. We believe that this applies also to other language-related fields such as linguistics and literary theory. Linguistics circles are currently debating changes IT will bring to the function and destiny of language and text. While postmodernists are burying narrative altogether, traditionalists are crusading against technology. As in many other situations in the history of technology, time and use will even the playing field and through the interplay between old and new, between old dusty manuscripts and new hypertexts, a new paradigm will develop which won't be either/or but both.

This volume is a collection of papers presented in Malta at two conferences: the Second International Conference on Knowledge and Diplomacy (February 2000), and the International Conference on Language and Diplomacy (January 2001). The papers are ordered roughly by topic, however, the wide range of subjects and approaches make any strict organisation impossible.

The first paper, presented by Professor Peter Serracino-Inglott as the keynote address at the 2001 conference, examines the serious issue of diplomatic communication in a playful manner, through one of the most paradigmatic and creative examples of language use: joking. Inglott takes us through a history and inter-cultural survey of joking, finishing with the proposal that a new type of joke, which he refers to as the "serious joke," may aid the diplomatic practice of the 21st century, inspiring creative approaches to problem solving through new perspectives and shifting frames of reference.

The next several papers introduce language and diplomacy in general terms, each author drawing on his own experience through years of diplomatic practice. Ambassador Stanko Nick takes a practical approach, examining issues such as the choice of language in bilateral and multilateral meetings, the messages conveyed by language choice, difficulties posed by interpretation, and aspects of diplomatic language including nuance, extra-linguistic signalling, and understatement. Language, according to Nick, is not a simple tool but "often the very essence of the diplomatic vocation."

Dr Abu Jaber brings a cross-cultural element to the discussion of language and diplomacy, surveying the historical development of diplomatic language particularly in the Arab world. However, he points out that the very idea of a language of diplomacy "is that it should not be culture-bound but an attempt at transcending such boundaries to create a quasi neutral vehicle of exchange." Abu Jaber notes that the language of diplomacy has to this date not been successful in resolving violence between nations and peoples. Yet he believes that solutions to violent conflict are to be found in diplomacy, and that now more than ever before, the formalised language of diplomacy is necessary.

With examples from a detailed case study of the historical New Zealand Treaty of Waitangi, Aldo Matteucci shows us that the diplomat's job is to decode language. Matteucci writes that all language comes with "hidden baggage": hidden meanings and intentions, historical and political context, legal precedents, etc. In order to find these hidden meanings the diplomat needs a broad understanding of the context of a situation. Diplomats should start with the context rather than the words themselves, because "for all our fascination for the subtlety and suppleness of words, words are but very flexible tools."

The next two papers both address the language of negotiation, each concentrating on a specific cultural setting. Professor Raymond Cohen writes that "when negotiation takes place across languages and cultures the scope for misunderstanding increases. So much of negotiation involves arguments about words and concepts that it cannot be assumed that language is secondary." With numerous examples of the culturally-grounded references, associations and nuances of certain words and phrases in English and the Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Turkish, Farsi and Hebrew), Cohen introduces his project of developing a negotiating lexicon of the Middle East as a guide for conducting or following negotiations in those languages.

Professor Paul Sharp discusses negotiation with American mediators. He notes that most literature on negotiation is written to advise Americans and other Westerners about negotiating with foreigners. However, "for the diplomatic profession...how to talk to Americans is a much larger shared problem than how the Americans talk to everybody else." Sharp points out that many of the problems other nations encounter when dealing with Americans are not cultural at all, but common problems any nation faces when dealing with a richer and more powerful nation. As advice, he suggests the same rules that are given to American diplomats for dealing with others: show respect for other cultures and make necessary adjustments to avoid offence.

Ambassador Kishan Rana introduces the dimension of diplomatic signalling. Beginning with a reference to the Bhagwad Gita, one of the sacred texts of the Hindus, Rana outlines the qualities of good diplomatic dialogue: not causing distress to the listener, precision and good use of language, and truthfulness. With support from a number of case studies based on his vast and varied experience, Rana suggests that diplomacy today calls for directness rather than the traditional subtle signalling which may be unclear and lead to misunderstandings in the current multi-cultural environment. He concludes that the context and setting of today's diplomacy needs to guide our practices and in particular our methods of diplomatic training.

Two papers address the topic of rhetoric and diplomacy. Drazen Pehar writes about historical rhetoric; specifically the historical analogies used by diplomats and politicians to strengthen their arguments and convince others of their views. Using numerous historical and current examples, especially from the Balkans region, Pehar explains why historical analogies are used. He examines the role historical analogies often play in worsening relations between nations and bringing about conflict. To counter these negative effects, he proposes several tactics for enlightened and intelligent diplomats to use when employing rhetoric, involving the "ambiguation" of analogies. Pehar advises that "when it comes to the use of language and its many styles, diplomats must bear in mind that they have a choice."

Benoit Girardin takes a philosophical approach to rhetoric - along with the issues of interpretation and ethics. He examines each of these three fields and its relation to diplomatic practice and negotiations, showing with examples how diplomatic language exhibiting either a lack or an excess of any of these qualities may lead to problems. Girardin pays special attention to the Mediterranean region and the monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam that have featured in its history and culture. He proposes a set of basic principles for diplomats: methods for maintaining or attempting to create a situation in which interpretation, rhetoric and ethics are all balanced and productive negotiation is possible.

Of central concern in the field of negotiation is the use of ambiguity to find formulations acceptable to all parties. Professor Norman Scott looks at the contrasting roles of ambiguity and precision in conference diplomacy. He explains that while documents drafters usually try to avoid ambiguity, weaker parties to an agreement may have an interest in inserting ambiguous provisions, while those with a stronger position or more to gain will push for precision. Scott provides examples from a variety of trade and agricultural negotiations, stressing the different roles played by developing and developed countries, and the evolution of special terminology which has entrenched ambiguous concepts in this sort of negotiations.

Drazen Pehar looks specifically at the use of ambiguities in peace agreements. Pehar explains why ambiguities are so often used and why diplomats and others involved in international relations may think it best to eliminate ambiguities from peace agreements altogether. He goes on to demonstrate, however, with numerous examples, that while ambiguities have led to a continuation or re-starting of hostilities in some cases, in many other cases they have provided the only bridge between conflicting parties and allowed for a cessation of violence. Pehar presents and discusses in detail pros and cons for the use of ambiguities in peace agreements, providing a number of guidelines and considerations for their successful use.

The examination of written documents in diplomacy brings us to the next two papers, both of which deal with documents or texts. Professor Dietrich Kappeler provides an overview of the various types of formal written documents used in diplomacy, pointing out where the practices surrounding these documents have changed in recent years. He also discusses multi-language treaties, including the difficulties of translation and interpretation. Kappeler concludes with an examination of the impact of information technology: its use in the preparation and preservation of documents, its effect on the form of documents, and the problems it brings for guaranteeing the authenticity of texts.

Rather than individual documents, Dr Keith Hamilton looks at the process and purpose of compiling collections of documents. He focuses on his own experience as the editor of Documents on British Policy Overseas, and particularly on his work publishing a collection of documents concerning the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe from 1972 until 1975. He warns: "Published collections of diplomatic documents have, however, to be approached with caution. They are by their nature selections. Not only do their compilers, the editors, exercise choice in deciding which individual documents should make up the collection; they may also decide on the issues to be so documented, and the periods and geographical areas to be covered."

The next several papers each take a fresh approach to the issue of language and diplomacy. Edmond Pascual interprets diplomatic communication with the linguistic tools of pragmatics. He begins by reminding us that while the diplomat is a "man of action," the particular nature of the diplomat's action is that it consists of speech. Pascual applies three concepts of pragmatics to diplomatic discourse: speech as an intentional act; the effects of the act of speech; and the role of the unsaid in the act of speech. He attempts to answer the question, posed by the French linguist Ducrot, "Why is it possible to use words to exert influence, why are certain words, in certain circumstances, so effective?"

Ivan Callus and Ruben Borg apply a very different set of tools to the analysis of diplomatic discourse. Their paper applies the discourse of deconstruction, a form of literary criticism, to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. They seek not to provide a case study, but rather "to offer some suggestions on how deconstructionist perspectives on language can compel diplomats to look more penetratingly at the language they produce and work with." The purpose and function of deconstruction, and its potential contribution to diplomatic language, is "to force the discipline to which it applies itself to look at its own language and to develop an almost pathological awareness of its own linguistic strategies."

In his examination of the languages used by the Knights of St John in Rhodes and Malta during the 14th to 16th centuries, Professor Joseph Brineat applies the methodology of historical linguistics. As an international and multi-lingual entity, the Order faced difficulties with its administrative methods intimately linked to linguistic issues. Brineat follows the transition in the official written language of the knights through French, Latin and Italian, examining the social, political and linguistic reasons for these changes. He points out that the problems faced by the Knights in choosing and adopting a common language are relevant in our times: they are similar to problems faced in present-day Brussels.

A final group of papers presents different practical applications of language in diplomacy. Dr Francisco Gomes de Matos applies what he calls the "Pedagogy of Positiveness" to diplomatic communication. He proposes a checklist of tips for diplomats to make their communication more positive, emphasizing respect and understanding of the other side, and keeping in mind the ultimate goal of avoiding conflict. Gomes de Matos finishes with a number of pleas, including one for the adoption of the study of human linguistic rights and the pedagogy of positiveness into the education of diplomats.

Dr Donald Sola asks whether software innovation can make a contribution to the needs of those learning the world "languages of wider communication". He presents his work in developing computer-assisted language learning software, a multi-disciplinary activity not based simply on technology but also on the theory and practice of education and linguistics. Excellent software development tools, the far-reaching distribution potential of the Internet, and growing understanding of relevant sociolinguistic and learning-environment considerations allow for successful language software development.

Conference interpreters Vicky Cremona and Helena Mallia begin their paper with the statement: Interpretation is in itself a diplomatic endeavour. The authors outline the different types of conference interpretation, difficulties in interpretation, preparation and techniques, and

team work. On the topic of diplomatic conferences they point out that "confidence in the interpreters is essential. The underlying tensions which may arise between delegates or country representatives can worsen if the interpreters are not trusted..." Cfermona and Mallia finish with the observation that diplomatic skills are not only the realm of the diplomat or the interpreter in diplomatic conferences, but also necessary for the interpreter of other types of discussions including religion, culture, heritage, sales, and marketing.

The final paper in this volume, by Jovan Kurbalija, is based on the experience of ten years of research and development work in the field of information technology and diplomacy. Kurbalija explains the relevance and potential of hypertext software tools for the field of diplomacy. With a number of case studies drawn from the hypertext system developed by Diplo and illustrated with screen shots, Kurbalija illustrates exactly why diplomatic activities are so well suited to hypertext. He concludes with a question: "why, with all of its potential in diplomacy and other fields, has hypertext not yet been adopted on a large scale?"

X While it is difficult to pull common threads out of this widely varied group of papers, several themes emerge. One is a consensus that in more ways than one, language is central to diplomacy, as a tool or a medium, both in theory and in practice. Authors agree that a closer examination of the use of language in diplomacy - historical or current, and with any of a number of linguistic tools - can lead to better communication, better cross-cultural understanding, better negotiation and document drafting skills; in short, to better and more effective diplomacy. Several authors highlight the traditional role of diplomatic language in helping us to avoid direct confrontation or conflict. Pehar says that "diplomacy is primarily words that prevent us from reaching for our swords." Pascual writes that diplomacy is a "a space wherein the power of the spirit is shown through the word." And Gomes de Matos advises us to "think of the language you use as a peace-building, peace-making, peace-promoting force." ✓

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In conclusion, while this volume presents a number of significant first ventures into a variety of aspects of the vast field of language and diplomacy, this is a relatively uncharted topic with significant scope for future research and discussion.