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PHRASEME – THE SOFT POWER OF DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE

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Frazemul – puterea discretă a limbajului diplomatic

***Rezumat.** Când luăm în considerare diplomația – arta de a convinge – procesul de promovare a intereselor și valorilor naționale, aplicarea de soft power în diplomația publică necesită abilități lingvistice, în special „producerea” și „consumul” lingvistic de frazeme. Considerată mult timp o disciplină auxiliară și într-o anumită măsură o parte a terminologiei, frazeologia se află în prezent în centrul atenției printre domeniile de cercetare. Obiectul nostru de studiu este limbajul diplomatic, care se face remarcabil printr-o gamă vastă de unități frazeologice: colocații,*

restricții semantice, expresii idiomatice, clișee etc. În acest articol vom pătrunde în universul frazemelor din limbajul diplomatic și relațiile conceptuale ale entităților specializate; vom oferi o imagine de ansamblu asupra înserării termenilor în discurs și a frazemelor de specialitate.

Cuvinte-cheie: *soft power, frazem, colocații, restricții semantice, transparență semantică.*

Abstract. *When considering diplomacy – the art of coaxing – one can enchant more followers by using soft power of public diplomacy which implies language acquisition skills, especially the “production” and linguistic “consumption” of phrasemes. Long regarded as a marginal discipline and to a certain extent a part of terminology, at the present time phraseology is in the limelight among a variety of fields. The area of our interest is the diplomatic language focusing on a vast range of multiword units: collocations, semantic restrictions, idioms, cliché, etc. In this article we delve into the universe of the diplomatic language phrasemes, and the conceptual relations of specialized entities. In this regard, it tries to give a comprehensive overview of specialized phraseology and its multiple approaches in relation with diplomatic language.*

Keywords: *soft power, phraseme, collocations, semantic restrictions, semantic transparency.*

Introduction

The evolution over the last decades and the greatest civilization advancement are the consequences of the changes in the people’s way of thinking.” (Le Bon, 1991, p. 9). The social, economic, political, and cultural metamorphoses imply continuous changes in all languages or specific models of expression.

The attainment and interest of the phraseological units (phraseme) research are marked by the fact that phraseology is a relatively young discipline and there is a multitude of controversies regarding both – its status and its object in the linguistic framework, moreover it is difficult to define the combinations of words that can be considered phrasemes. The meaning of linguistic cohesion is not the sum of the values of the components as in a free phrase, but completely different, respectively more or less fixed linguistic “links”/”cohesions”, which can be considered complex lexical units of the language, carry more pronounced semantic load, thus these constant expressions of the language constitute phrasemes or, in a broader sense – phraseological units.

In specialized languages, stronger conventions than general ones act; in many countries, they are the subject of linguistic policy that involves standardization and harmonization, and the fixed character of some combinations of terms responds to this trend.

Diplomatic language is the hallmark of the international community and the characteristic of a civilized nation; a configuration of discourses aimed at

persuading, modeling, directing, influencing certain visions for the resolution of official arrangements. Diplomatic language is the art of negotiation and the expression of reconciliation. The ability to juggle and master the meanings of words and concepts leads to the domination of processes, circumstances, and consequently, the power. “The power of humanity lies in the power of thought, in the power of truth, in the power of the words” (Herzen, 1920).

Diplomatic language peculiarities

Diplomatic language is used to denote the language of official international relations and diplomatic documents such as: notes, memorandum, official correspondence, and aide-mémoire, complementary to this, it is a collection of special terms and phrases, constituting a common diplomatic vocabulary. If we consider diplomatic language as a set of special terms and phrases included in the generally accepted diplomatic lexicon, for example: *casus-belli*, *ad-interim*, *casus foederis*, *apocalypse management*, *bout de papier*, *Wilson vision* (Berridge, 2003), the totality of terms and lexical nomenclature, which in the course of history became a defining element of the diplomatic language formation, likewise the specific way of expression in certain conditions of diplomatic activity, referring to the diplomatic style. This speaking procedure reveals the normative set of documentation and the actual style, which requires clarity, simplicity, synthesis, etc., more precisely, *non multa, sed multum*.

Diplomatic language as a special type of communication is implemented in the field of foreign policy or international activity. The specific feature and complexity of this communication is, that the specialists representing this field of activity, can use different languages and language codes, in addition diplomacy covers the entire process of formation and implementation of foreign policy. Moreover, external relations are carried out through economic and cultural ties maintained by government agencies and non-governmental institutions, where professional communication is a social orderly use of linguistic and non-linguistic signs.

Diplomatic language is characterized by several features, inherent only in certain functional varieties of the language which requires a completely clear, precise expression of thought, a special emphasis using various stylistic devices, important statements with a particular rhetorical orientation. A necessary condition for effective diplomatic communication is correspondence between conceptual systems, and semiotic signs. Thus, the language of diplomatic documents is the language in which the state speaks to the outside world, similarly as the language represents an individual and creates its personality, in the same way, the language of diplomatic documents to a certain extent, represent the state.

Language – the soft power asset

Diplomacy is the art of compromise, and it is widely regarded as the central international alternative to war. Nevertheless, the very essence of diplomacy is

the language, which is not only an instrument of communication, but certainly is an instrument of soft power that is the only guarantee of long-lasting peace. One of the aspects of diplomatic soft power is being engaged in persuasion, negotiation, and communication that requires good language skills, and mastering of concepts to produce elevated message and context. Traditionally, power in international relations has been designated and assessed as 'hard', the term generally accepted in the context of military and economic capacity. Hard power is disposed in the form of coercion: using "encouragement" of payment by force, economic sanctions, ultimately using force. In contrast to the intimidating nature of hard power, soft power characterizes the use of positive interest and alignment to achieve foreign policy objectives. Among the diverse meanings of the adjective *soft*, one of which applied to speech is *quietness*, as in the West African proverb distinctively preferred by the early twentieth century US President Theodore Roosevelt "Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far" (Roosevelt, 1901).

Several elusive and slippery definition concerning the two terms – hard power and soft power have lately occurred in the diplomacy of the XXI century. The conceptual foundation is the ability to combine hard and soft power into a successful strategy of smart power (Nye, 2008). Although the term hard power generally refers to diplomacy, it can also be used to describe forms of negotiation which involve pressure or threats as leverage. Nonetheless, soft power is exercised through public diplomacy, which in contrast to hard power, is about the ability to convince, coax, and persuade others to achieve what one desires. To put it in other terms, to coax somebody to share one's views, values, and ideologies, so they are more likely to similar actions, principles, and finally politics.

Carrot and stick strategy is no longer efficient, especially in the long run, at some point coercion is out of the question or has an enormously high cost (Nye, 2008). On the other hand, soft power is harder to build, requiring tremendous intellectual and linguistic capacities, it also takes time, however it is long-term investment. An important aspect evoking attitude change and voluntary acting makes soft power communication undoubtably more desirable. The key aspect is that the soft power of language and especially of phraseology has the potential to reshape the global diplomacy.

It is well known that values can create power, so one of the soft power resources and assets is the language. A good narrative, the exquisite art of playing with phrasemes attract and influence the listener, leading to a major, subtle, and disguised world of diplomacy.

In Shirli Kopelman study, the famous idiom "Actions speak louder than words" becomes "Words speak louder than actions" this language awareness occurs when actions are constrained (Kopelman, 2022, p. 3). The empirical research conducted by Kopelman and her team demonstrates that adopting

a “logic of appropriateness versus a logic of rationality when people come together: words, actions, and emotions have the power to move people towards sustainable cooperative solution” (p. 7). The key aspect discussed in the study is that soft power of communication can mitigate the negative effects of hard power asymmetry. Also, the research particularly reveals the words and actions of the one in power, who are characterized by self-centered behavior and the one constrained of power but who can as well bring their contribution by using linguistic skills.

Thus, language may also occur as a form of action – the unsaid in communication is equally crucial – as the American politician Lincoln Chafee said, “In the world of diplomacy, some things are better left unsaid” (Chafee, 2012).

The Phraseme – linguistic soft power

The diplomatic language has its own peculiarities, rules as well as pragmatic and stylistic patterns which can be hardly defined within structural language. Moreover, the focus on the message and meaning rather than the means, is often, what research in specialized language highlights.

When it comes to specialized languages, the importance of phraseology – a long neglected area of language aspect – is undoubtedly recognized by theoretic research and is encountering a vivid and promising revival. In the last couple of decades, scientific interdisciplinary research has enormously advanced due to acknowledgment of the scientific study of the language, especially referring to specialized languages and terminology. This fact has contributed to new communicative models, variety of language discourse and a new vision of phraseology through an interdisciplinary perspective.

It is a well-known fact that almost eighty percent of words in any speech are combined to a certain extent, taking into consideration the selective principle rather than syntactic or grammatical criteria. So, practicing a language is done through the ability to combine words with each other to form expressions and sentences using grammatical criteria. Traditionally, the combination of words or group of words that have a thorough meaning is defined as phraseology. More precisely, phraseology is concerned with the way of incorporating and combining terms through a stable association subject to specific norms in a discourse. Examples of collocations using the irreversible binomial *war and peace* that illustrate the current political and social situation: *to make peace/war, to spark a world war, a full-scale war, fragile peace, relative peace, to threaten international peace, to bring peace, lasting peace, to make peace* (Macmillan, 2002).

Phraseology was defined as the study of phraseological units and the first mentions of the existence of phraseological units or stable combinations of words in a language appear in the 19th century, been considered stable

combinations of words, with unitary meaning, that is, those combinations which meaning does not result from the sum of the meanings of the component elements, a characteristic that gives the language its idiomatic character. However, phraseological research begins to develop only in the middle of the 20th century as a separate linguistic discipline, which is characterized by a great diversity of approaches that is why, the status it enjoys, has been justified. As we anticipated, words do not exist in isolation, but the so-called word combinations that the specialized literature has classified, depending on the degree of cohesion of the component terms, into two categories: free word combinations, characterized by the occasional association of the respective lexemes, and stable word combinations, in which the component elements are syntactically and semantically fixed.

The English language presents a unique collection of predominantly native and borrowed idioms, in some cases impossible to be identified through the process of translation. Therefore, diplomatic language does not thrive in this type of phrasemes, but if we consider the specific field of research and the type of idiomatic expression, the presence of archaic words and phrases used exclusively in the roots of the original language has a regional and significant cultural value. In addition, being colorful and informative units, they are linguistic tools reflecting the history of the country, the mentality of its people, and its traditions. So, the cautious and refined language of diplomacy will have a limited number of idiomatic expressions, but with their help it will become more vivid and convincing. To simplify the analysis of idiomatic expressions, we will refer only to the potential expressions that could slip into diplomatic language:

- **pure idioms** whose original meaning is lost, no logical understanding of its meaning: *stick and carrot politics, the cutting edge, read between the lines, tip the balance of power, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely*;

- **binomial idioms** involve two parts that work together or in contrast to construct an expression: *war and peace, black and white, good and evil, red tape, blue blood, green light*;

- **partial idioms** contain a literal part and a non-literal part, and are often metaphors: *the axis of evil, the empire of evil, the great enemy, a lip in the dark, armed to teeth, the corridors of power, the balance of power, be the power behind the throne*;

- **prepositional idioms** contain prepositional verb plus an adverb: *get away with, double down (smart risk), above board (legal, honest), be on board with, cut something out (sop), stand for peace*;

- **proverbs** are idioms that denote universal truths, advice, and moral: *actions (words) speak louder than words (actions); a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step; the pen is mightier than the sword; time*

waits for no one; you can't have your cake and eat it too; honesty is the best policy; out of sight out of mind; it's the tip of the iceberg; where there's a will, there's a way;

- **euphemisms** are expressions by which unpleasant, ugly, or sad ideas are camouflaged under delicate, gentle, and more politically correct variant of the reality, a comfortable expression for taboo words, and topics: *big brother, collateral damages, custody suit (jail), opportunity/ Challenge (problem), negative growth, workforce adjustment, transfer of population, to be neutralized, economical with the truth, special operation (war), special financial operation –for sanctions (Jussi Tuulensuu,2022), special cooperation (Finland joining NATO, 2022);*

Quentin Crisp the English humorist affirms that *euphemisms are unpleasant truths wearing diplomatic cologne* (Crisp, 1985);

- **cliché** is an overused term, considered unoriginal, intellectually lazy when used: *the struggle is real; all for one and one for all; read between the lines; lasted an eternity; time flies;*

- **non-English idioms** Latin or French origin: *non multa sed multa* (concise), *mis en scene* (event setting), *manus manum lavat, ad hoc* (formed for particular purpose), *bona fide* (genuine), *compos mentis* (in control of the mind); *de facto* (in reality); *sine qua non* (essential); *status quo* (existing state); *persona non grata* (unwelcome person).

To illustrate the occurrence of idioms in diplomatic language, the following extracts from famous discourses will reveal the necessity of such types of phrasemes in official speech.

- And I think the service our country needs right now is to face up to our really big challenges, to confront our problems, to take difficult decisions, to lead people through those difficult decisions, so that together we can reach better times ahead (David Cameron, 2010);

- My government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and to strengthen national defences ... will play a leading role in global affairs (HRH Queen Elizabeth, 2016); To tackle poverty and the causes of deprivation, including family instability, addiction and debt, my government will introduce new indicators for measuring life chances. Legislation will be introduced to establish a soft drinks industry levy to help tackle childhood obesity (HRH Queen Elizabeth, 2016);

- Russia's hands are covered in the blood of Syrian children after alleged chemical attack (US Ambassador to the United Nations-Nikki Haley, 2018);

- perhaps this gets to the root of the matter, to the most fundamental distinction of all between East and West, All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden (Ronald Reagan, 1981);

- I have the honor to greet you on behalf of the Ukrainian people, brave and freedom-loving people who, for eight years, have been resisting the Russian aggression, those who give their best sons and daughters to stop this full-scale Russian invasion (Volodymyr Zelensky, 2022a);

- Criminal mobilization is used by Russia not only to prolong the suffering of Ukrainians, but also to exterminate representatives of indigenous peoples – address by the President of Ukraine (Volodymyr Zelensky, 2022b).

It is important to be mentioned that besides idioms these famous discourses abound in euphemisms, metaphors, oxymorons, and collocations. Diplomatic language relies on a system of preferred expressions, and collocation is a fundamental mechanism that allows new formulations to occur throughout the text. Since collocations are part of the communicative competence of foreign language users, who are specialists in a field, it is necessary to provide information about the type of conventional and combined restrictions in terminological resources and materials for learners, language mediators and, in general, for anyone who needs information about how these lexical items are combined in a particular discipline.

Conclusion

In the century of globalization, information technologies, mass media without borders, political and economic challenges, interethnic and intercultural communication is a necessity. Diplomatic language, using the linguistic soft power, can contribute to a constructive dialogue not only in the political-social dimension, but also in fields such as: education, medicine, social services, etc.

Language is the vehicle through which human beings communicate, thus every language recognizes expressions, phrases, combinations of words whose lexical value is distant from the meanings of each word taken separately. They constitute a rich treasure, in which the people's wisdom, life experience and way of thinking have been immortalized forever, moreover it expertise traverses the complexities of language and diplomacy, highlighting the chain relationship that exists within them.

Diplomatic language represents the major attribute of the international community and an insignia of a civilized nation. It is a major instrument in modelling the specialized discourse and international relations; in managing the semantics of the contexts and concepts and in controlling the process and ultimately in controlling the power.

Diplomatic terminology includes terms and expressions that have a specific meaning in diplomatic language, different from the literal meaning or the one assigned in common language or in other sciences.

Sociolinguistic politeness theory is a tool for evaluating language use in diplomacy, thus the correct use is related to peaceful coexistence between nations. Therefore, it is recommended that the more pertinent politeness

strategies, positive politeness, and negative politeness be better realized in this case by applying a strictly appropriate use of language in diplomacy to strengthen a cordial diplomatic relationship between the nations. Diplomats should always examine their language before speaking it in the course of their duties.

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