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Diplomatic discourse in cross-cultural dimension

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Abstract

From the values, ideas and beliefs that are hidden in the political goals to the characteristic patterns of how a nation communicates with publics everything is reflected with cultural tones. Facing the challenges of 21st century, the issue of intersection between diplomatic processes and cultural discourse becomes very relevant. This article explores the interrelation of culture and diplomacy, paying attention to where their paths meet and what can be learned while pausing at those “meeting points”. The idea is to ignite thinking on culture and create a cultural awakening in diplomacy. The article tries to increase awareness on urgency that this topic will gain in the near future.

Keywords: Cultural Communication, Social Identity, Cultural Identity, Cultural Awareness.

El discurso diplomático en la dimensión intercultural

Resumen

Desde los valores, ideas y creencias que se esconden en los objetivos políticos hasta los patrones característicos de cómo una nación se comunica con los públicos, todo se refleja con tonos culturales. Frente a los desafíos del siglo XXI, el tema de la intersección entre los procesos diplomáticos y el discurso cultural se vuelve muy relevante. Este artículo explora la interrelación de la cultura y la diplomacia, prestando atención a dónde se encuentran sus caminos y qué se puede aprender mientras se detiene en esos "puntos de encuentro". La idea es encender el pensamiento sobre la cultura y crear un despertar cultural en la diplomacia. El artículo trata de aumentar la conciencia sobre la urgencia que este tema ganará en el futuro cercano.

Palabras clave: Comunicación cultural, Identidad social, Identidad cultural, Conciencia cultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are lucky to live in a time of rapid globalization –very important and highly complicated period for all of us. For the first time ever cooperation and dialogue between civilizations and cultures is extremely massive and intense, expressing the main tendency of social progress. The necessity of international, interethnic, interreligious dialogue is becoming obvious under the light of these conditions. It can take any form and shape, but the actual objective is creating a new

culture of interpersonal communication based on the standards of international law, moral principles of humanism as well as social justice. Peaceful contacts between independent groups of people have always required the kind of representational activity which has come to be known as diplomacy. In its modern form diplomacy has retained a broadly constant character and given rise to a flourishing diplomatic profession. Like all professions, it has developed its own terminology, categories, and ways.

History of cross-cultural communication proves that it is directly connected with the development of political, commercial and cultural relations. It is history of international relations where we can trace the establishment of various approaches and forms of cross-cultural communication, which appeared under the influence of numerous factors. First of all, we should recall such a branch of cross-cultural communication as trading, which is considered to be a founder of diplomacy. Middle Ages was the time of mending of diplomatic and trading fences and history of Venice, Rome, Florence can be a spectacular example of it. Development of trading relations fostered dynamic and extensive exchange. People got acquainted with cultural achievements of other nations, which encouraged cross-cultural communication both on transnational and non-state levels.

Discourse is the language, spoken or written, produced by social, informational, and/or rhetorical purposes. Such as conversations, speeches, novels and technical reports. Unlike “language” the word discourse itself is both a noun and a verb. So it is

easier to retain the sense of discourse as an act, where the noun “language” often seems to refer to a “thing”.

Diplomatic language also bears the marks of having found expression in the languages of civilizations beyond those of the West. Furthermore – and again accentuated by the very sensitive nature of this particular representational task – issues of protocol and precedence have been of considerable significance, and have made their distinctive contribution to diplomatic terms. Thus it occasions no surprise at all that diplomacy has, over the centuries, developed a lexicon of specialized words and of other technical usages which it necessarily employs. And as diplomats routinely deal not just with matters of policy but also with the many legal issues which arise between states, these aspects of their work have also made their marks in the diplomatic vocabulary.

Before analyzing the interdependency and correlation between culture and diplomacy, it is necessary to know exactly what the word culture and diplomacy imply.

According to Hofstede, culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another.” In contrast to personality, culture is not individual but collective. Furthermore, mental programming suggests that information has been internalized by an individual, leaving him unable to judge outside of his program’s purview. Culture – as an underlying force that shapes the communication between nations and publics in the global political arena- has been curiously underexplored in public diplomacy, from policy, to practice, to scholarship (8)

Summing up, culture is the social identity that people start to develop when they become aware of belonging to a social group: national cultures as well as political, economic, social, and historical elements form so called national identity. Therefore, culture can be compared to a program; that contains information about the society in which individuals find themselves. It provides information about social roles, the structure of relationships, etiquette and how everyday life should be arranged and governed. Culture is a guidance for social interaction, but it is only valid in the social context in which this program is exercised among its members; therefore, it is necessary to understand the other members of the global society and their program.

2. METHODOLOGY

Speaking of diplomacy its aim is twofold: to protect and guide the individual interests of states and to promote global norms and values characterizing the growing sense of a community of states and international unity. Modern diplomacy is a rule-governed activity involving communication, negotiation, and representation between states, international organizations and trans-national participants. These rules help to avoid or settle conflicts. Diplomacy deals with culturally diverse groups by means of interactions and negotiations. The negotiation style of each participant is formed by one's own cultural "program." As different cultural groups communicate differently, the culture of a negotiation party influences its negotiation

style. Therefore, the probability of mistakes and misunderstandings increases when the interaction is cross-national.

Each region of the globe has its own cultural peculiarities, whether it is Europe, Asia, the Arab world, or Latin America. Considering that the cultural background matters for diplomacy, cultural specificities have to be taken into account. The way of thinking, speaking, behaving, and acting is deeply rooted in an individual's particular culture, and therefore influences his conduct during diplomatic affairs and negotiations. For effective and successful diplomacy at all levels, the influences of regional and national cultures should also be taken into serious account.

There is an interesting fact that came along our research. Years-long research of small nations' diplomatic services suggests a conclusion that the flexibility of a country's diplomatic system is inversely proportional to its military, economic and political potential! It means the more powerful the country, the less artful and flexible is its diplomacy, and vice versa. Such suggestion on power and diplomacy of countries may seem as a paradoxical sophism. However, we assume it has its right to exist and may soon become a subject of serious and thorough research in the theory of diplomacy. The urgency for cultural knowledge and cultural awareness for the diplomacy has been given two trends recently that are likely to intensify.

With all the technology we have at our disposal right now, national borders get erased so easily and culture becomes a new frontier for defining identities. Communication that is perceived as challenging or violating a public's cultural identity can inevitably

cause backfire. Such sensitive incidents involving mass media, because of its destroyable and magnifying effects can get out of the control.

For some fears of cultural domination in an age of borderless communication technologies may appear exaggerated and perhaps unfounded. However, for nations who experienced the pain and humiliation of foreign colonial intrusion and domination of their internal affairs, public diplomacy may not be perceived as benign or welcomed. Today's advanced communication technologies and stealth persuasion strategies have the power to cross national boarder with little public scrutiny and even less control by the government in power. If such an intervention was a visible, military assault calls to arms might be raised. In the battle for hearts and minds, such a call to arms might be in the name of cultural identity. (8)

3. RESULT

At the very core of collaboration is the ability to bring people of diverse backgrounds together and have them to combine their efforts to achieve a mutual goal. People with a shared or close perspective often tend to see and approach a problem in a similar way. It should be clear by now that cultural diversity has the most significant impact of problem solving. All mentioned above raises the question of the existence of a common culture of diplomacy shared by all participants involved in the interactive process of diplomacy. Indeed, a wide range

of similarities can be found in the diplomatic profession. Along with these similarities, some original cultural differences still remain, which makes it difficult to speak of a common culture of diplomacy. Individuals, as already mentioned, are formed by their cultural backgrounds which can never be truly neglected or forgotten because they are unable to erase what Hofstede termed the “programming of the mind.”

In the framework of cultural discourse some special habits, basic beliefs, norms and customs that distinguish experts of diplomacy will be observed.

1. **Compromise.** To start with, the words diplomacy and compromise are semantically related. Cultural background of identities stresses the uphold of values, but realities of multicultural interactions require cross-cultural compromises. It is paramount that all participants in a diplomatic process are willing to compromise; if not, diplomatic efforts are destined to fail.

2. **Language.** As we know communication and culture are acquired simultaneously, and language is considered as the key to a culture. Every language is deeply rooted in a particular culture and conveys a unique representation of the world or so called the picture of the world. Good argumentative points and diplomatic techniques are of no use without the ability to pass them through. As there are strong differences in verbal and nonverbal communication across cultures and subcultures, language can also be an obstacle to a successful communication and negotiation process because of possible cross-cultural misinterpretations. Therefore, language skills are one of the

most important tools for diplomats to master. Just imagine what mess can be caused by wrongly translated joke made by a diplomat at a conference!

“words have a remarkable power which can be for good or ill”

Kofi Annan

3. Cultural awareness. Awareness of different cultural fundamentals, such as philosophy, religion, and ideology, which form a cultural identity, must be considered. It is paramount to realize that some issues can evoke and cause strong emotional outbursts and reactions, and are therefore a threat to successful diplomacy. An interesting fact is that the more emotionally responsive a cultural identity is, the more rigid members become when their views are neglected and ignored! Agreed that this cultural awareness exists, we accept the fact that influences the culture of diplomacy in such a way that makes diplomats try to respond to the cultural particularities of their foreign counterparts. Therefore, effective and competent communication is imperative for successful diplomatic interactions.

4. The intercultural training should include theoretical, practical aspects and personal component. It will lead to a better relationship and understanding among the participants in diplomatic interactions and will also serve as an appropriate instrument to pave the way for diplomatic success. The most effective way to ignite cultural awareness is to try to experience cultural differences in practice and to acknowledge and accept the idea of cultural pluralism To sum up in order to overcome cultural differences and to have

successful diplomatic dialogue it is important to train and exercise cultural awareness and intercultural competence.

5. Behavior. Behavior is a culturally based unique set of characteristics. We shouldn't forget that diplomats are servants of their state, thus their behavior depends on the instructions that they receive from foreign policy makers back home, but conditions during negotiations also affect the actions of diplomats and the better they understand everyone's behavior and reactions the smoother the process can run. Underestimating the cultural component may be a sign of having a limited and probably distorted understanding and vision of others' behavior.

6. Mindfulness. It is crucial for diplomats to cultivate mindfulness. Diplomats should be mindful of the various perceptions that fellow negotiators may have of not only themselves and also of their national identity, but of other participants as well.

7. Nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is as important as verbal exchanges between participants during diplomatic proceedings. They demand particular attention because they are unspoken, and therefore, are always interpreted according to an individual's cultural knowledge of nonverbal communication. The researchers in communication suggest that many more feelings and emotions are perceived non verbally rather than verbally! Nonverbal exchange can produce different feedback especially if the receiver does not understand the message or what can be worse misinterprets the meaning of the message. The situation may be very complicated if the sender and the receiver are from different cultures. Nonverbal

communication is an absolutely unique to every nation. It can to some degree explain why nonverbal exchange is not widely exercised when it comes to diplomacy.

8. Common ground. Diplomats should try to define common grounds or try to build bridges between individuals and what is more important between cultural values. Understanding and appreciating the cultural peculiarities of the other participants of a diplomatic discussion can help in building the bridges and finding common grounds. Cultural and Sport diplomacy has always been trying to transcend differences by promoting a common ideal: shared skills and high goals. The West-Eastern Divan orchestra, for instance, brings Israeli and Palestinian musicians together, capitalizing on the understanding and collaboration which shared music-making generates.

9. Humor. Humor has its potential power. The power is potential as it can produce positive and as well as negative effect because humor has exclusive nature rather than inclusive one. Different cultures have absolutely different sense of humor that is so deeply rooted in it. It can, on the one hand, pave your way to success and on the other, it can ruin negotiation process as well. Once again the importance of cultural awareness can't be overestimated. The British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson says: "I think telling jokes is a very effective way of getting your diplomatic message across...". The only thing to remember, jokes shouldn't be offensive, everyone should be aware of cultural sensitivity.

10. Personal experience. Even intercultural training, as good as it may be, cannot fully replace personal experiences. Cultural variations should not be viewed as a threat to a specific culture, but instead as the possibility to broaden one's mind and to enlarge someone's knowledge. I suggest reading biography or autobiography of diplomats to find plenty example of how personal connection saved the day.

Through mutual respect and understanding, one group will know how to handle the other group, and they will be able to meet in the middle and enrich their association through this understanding.

4. CONCLUSION

Lack of awareness of cultural peculiarities can cause diplomacy initiative to fail. Diplomacy initiative is considered ineffective if it simply fails to resonate with a foreign public in the same way the negotiators hoped it would be. Ineffective initiatives are usually the result of misunderstanding or mismatch about communication patterns and styles. From our observation we may conclude that when issues of cultural identity are involved the audience reacts in a highly negative or even a hostile manner.

Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright alludes to the failure to understand the responses of others to one's own action in her remarks at the opening of a conference on Culture and Diplomacy: "...a successful US foreign policy requires an understanding of foreign

cultures. Without that, we would fail to interpret correctly what others say, and fail to convey clearly to others what we intend. Our actions would prompt reactions we have not foreseen, and we would find ourselves constantly beset with problems to which we have no answers because we wouldn't even know the right question to ask”.

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Remarks at Dinner for White House Conf on Diplomacy and Culture, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, November 27, 2000. As long as culture remains an underexplored subject of study, diplomacy will remain very vulnerable to its own power. Better awareness and knowledge of culture undoubtedly enhances the power of diplomacy. We concluded by showing how implicit communication along with cross-cultural preparation can help to build and define communities, and suggested that the unsaid provides the key link between language and culture. Every attempt at defusing disputes and securing agreement should involve a knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the other party's values and allegiances, at an individual as well as at a cultural level.

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