APPLYING THE PEDAGOGY OF POSITIVENESS TO DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION: VIEWS OF COMMUNICATION

As one of the key-concepts in human linguistic life, "communication" has prompted several definitions for linguists, for example, that term can broadly refer to every kind of mutual transmission of information using signs or symbols between living beings (humans, animals), as well as between people and data-processing machines (Bussman, Hadumod, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 83).

In its narrowest sense, however, "communication" can be taken as meaning "the transmission and reception of information between a signaler and a receiver" (Crystal, David, *The Penguin Dictionary of Language*, 2nd ed. London: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 62).

If we look at perceptions of communication by communication theorists, we can come across characterisations such as these: "Communication is the generation of meaning "or that "communication is a ubiquitous and powerful source in society" (Bowers, John Waite and James J. Bradac, "Contemporary Problems in Human Communication Theory," in Carroll C. Arnold and John Waite Bowers, *Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984, p. 872, 874).

If we leave the language and communication sciences and turn to international relations, what interpretations of "communication" can we find? That it is a process of negotiation "between states seeking to arrive at a mutually acceptable outcome on some issue or issues of shared concern" (Cohen, Raymond, *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, p. 9).

How about communication in diplomacy, or rather, among diplomats? Here is a definition taken from a dictionary for diplomats: "Communication among diplomats is a two-way street: one cannot expect to obtain much information unless one is able and willing to convey information" (Karl Gruber, 1983, quoted in Chas Freeman, Jr., *The Diplomat´s*

Dictionary, revised ed. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, p. 49).

What is shared in such definitions/characterisations? The shared nature of the process: communication is first and foremost an act of sharing.

HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE ORALLY?

By sharing the language used in a particular context at a specific time, by interacting, by co-constructing a dialogue or a multilogue, by expressing our attitudes, emotions, feelings in a friendly or in an unfriendly manner, by relying on many nonverbal signals (body language, facial expressions), by sometimes emphasising what is said—content—and sometimes emphasising how it is said—form, or we can communicate, more typically by integrating forms and meanings in contexts of use which can create different effects on our interlocutors. We can communicate by being explicit or by preferring implicit speech. We can communicate by hedging, by avoiding coming straight to the point, through purposely vague language. We can communicate by using not only words but terms (typical of different professional fields), as for instance in International Relations, lexical items used for talking about anti-globalisation: inhuman labour conditions, risky technology, abject poverty (cf. Varyrynen, Raimo, "Anti-Globalization Movements at the Crossroads," in Policy Brief No.4. University of Notre Dame: Joan B. Kroc Institute, November 2000, p. 3).

As humans, we can communicate by expressing both positive and negative (or "questionable") perceptions, by delivering both good and bad news, or by leaving out the positive side. We can communicate in socially responsible or irresponsible ways; in other ways, to bring out communicative harmony or disharmony. These reflections would lead us to questions such as: how are diplomats perceived? Why does there seem to be a practice of presenting diplomacy/diplomats negatively in books of quotations, for example? What would be the ratio of positive and negative perceptions of diplomats in such books, if a world bibliographic survey were conducted? How about diplomatic communication? How has it been described and why? What misperceptions are there concerning such process? What positive features and questionable features are being associated to the way diplomats communicate in speaking (face-to-face or on the telephone, etc.) and in writing?

In a recent conference held in Maryland, US, in July last year, US negotiators were described as tending "to be explicit, legalistic, blunt, and optimistic" (*Peace Watch* Vol. VI, No. 6. United States Institute of Peace Press, October 2000, p.1). Note that one of the adjectives conveys a potential negative or questionable meaning: "blunt" (discourteous, abrupt, curt). What is it that sometimes leads negotiators to communicate in such questionable ways? What would seem to be missing in the linguistic/communicative preparation of diplomats?

When I was asked to share a little of the philosophy underlying my Pedagogy of Positiveness, it occurred to me that to make it transparent, I should state some of its principles. Here they are:

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1. Emphasise "what to say" constructively. Avoid "what not to say".

2. Implement diplomatic communication as a humanising form of interaction. Definitions of "diplomacy" of the type Art + Science or Science + Art leave out the humanising responsibility of diplomats' communication.

3. Communicate national and international values constructively. What "national" values do diplomats communicate? How?

4. Learn to identify and to avoid potentially aggressive, insensitive, offensive, destructive uses of languages. Do your best to offset dehumanising ways of communication, often the outcome of human communicative fallibility.

5. Think of the language you use as a peace-building, peace-making, peace-promoting force. Do you challenge yourself to transform your communicative competence into competence in communicative peace?

6. At all times, do your very best to view yourself positively, to view the diplomatic profession positively, to view life positively and to communicate such views as constructively as you can.

7. Learn to exercise your communicative rights and to fulfill your communicative responsibilities in a sensibly balanced way. Remember that you have the right to question and to criticise, but do so responsibly, in a human-dignifying manner.

8. Handle differences of opinion in a constructive way. Remember that "negative talk" tends to predominate or often dominate in face-to-face diplomatic interactions.

9. Treat others with respect by being as communicatively friendly as you can.

10. Choose your words on the basis of their Peace Power rather than on their strategic value alone. Communicate both tactfully and tactically.

11. Try to see and describe both sides of an issue. Challenge yourself to make balanced (rather than biased) statements. Don't be a polemicist.

12. Avoid hiding behind pompous language to question someone.

13. In reading diplomatic texts, look for fair comments. Try to reconstruct (infer) the method used by the authors. Learn to apply Discourse Analysis to your processing.

14. Avoid blurring the meanings of key words such as Politics. It is standard polemical practice to blur the meanings of Politics, etc.

15. It is a truism to state that no communication is neutral, so commit yourself to communicating as humanisingly as you can. Remember if language is definitional of what is human, constructive language use is definitional of what is humanising in communication.

16. Communicatively, aim at linguistic probity and integrity.

17. Conflict can be managed to some extent, and so can language use, especially if you adopt a constructive perspective, for expressing your attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. What parts of a diplomat's vocabulary (lexical repertoire) can be systematised for constructive communicative purposes? Educate yourself in identifying "positivisers" in spoken and written texts in your field and challenge yourself to make increasing use of such constructive, human-dignifying adjectives, verbs, and nouns.

18. Learn to monitor more confrontational sentence types by replacing them with listener/reader friendly sentences.

SOME PLEAS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Considering the apparently widespread misperceptions of diplomats and diplomacy in the media and in reference works (see especially books of quotations), in the light of our Pedagogy of Positiveness, a plea is made for (present/emerging/future) diplomats to launch an international movement which would help build an accurate, fairer image of the work (being/to be) done by those who commit themselves to helping bring about a truly interdependent world, through the international discourse of diplomacy. Having come across small but convincing evidence that a positive, public perception of diplomats and their activity is urgently needed—a plea is similarly made for organisations engaged in the education of diplomats to join in such cooperative effort.

2. Also considering that one of the most salient positive senses of "diplomatic"—to the public at large—is that of "being tactful" or displaying a friendly attitude toward other human beings—a plea is similarly made for that "positively marked sense of the term" to be capitalised on, through more research on the spoken/written vocabulary used in diplomatic communication as well as on the teaching of a constructive-human-dignifying use—and monitoring—of such

lexicon to emerging/future diplomats so that they can be deeply aware of language using as a great humanising force in human interaction, especially in situations involving peace negotiation, mediation, and other challenging processes experienced by diplomats as true world citizens. One of the strategies suggested for the semantic preparation of diplomats would be their sensitisation to the functions of "positivisers" in diplomatic discourse (verbs, adjectives, and nouns which reflect/enhance inherently constructive actions and attributes or qualities in human beings). Another strategy would be that of learning how to read diplomatic texts constructively, by identifying "positivisers" in such texts: frequency of occurrence, potential impact, ratio of "positivisers" and "negativisers", confrontational types of sentence structures, types of hedging and vague uses of language, among other features.

3. Considering the pioneering nature of this conference and the growing interest of linguists and other language-related interdisciplinarians in Political Discourse in general and the emerging interest of language-centred researchers on Diplomatic Discourse, a recommendation is made that that conference be sustained and broadened—through workshops, intensive seminars, and other pre-conference events which can enable participants to benefit from the expertise of specialists in the several language-focused domains of theoretical and practical relevance to the challenges of today´s diplomacy.

4. Considering that diplomacy has its own distinctive repertoire of terms (cf. Chas. Freeman, Jr., *The Diplomat´s Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997) and that a profession's lexicon should realistically reflect collective decisions and choices—another plea is made for a project centered on a Dictionary of Diplomacy (as multilingual as possible) to be prioritised on the Agenda of Relevant Reference Works for the Preparation of Diplomats. What I have in mind is a collectively shared, international project which could very well be sponsored by this conference's host institution: the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies.

5. Last but not least, a final plea is made for the study of Human Linguistic Rights to become a required subject in the education of diplomats. As promoters of "communicative peace" among persons, groups, and nations, diplomats need to become knowledgeable in that new category of human rights. A visit to the site of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (www.linguistic-declaration.org) may give an idea of the breadth and depth of the insights which can inspire needed research on the   communicative rights and responsibilities of diplomats. In short, it is my conviction that a Pedagogy of Positiveness can contribute to the education of diplomats, especially in close interaction with International Relations, Linguistics, Communication Science, Peace Psychology, Peace Linguistics, and Human Linguistic Rights, to name but a few of the contributory domains.

We have made some progress since the mid-seventies, when researchers' attention was focused on **DoubleSpeak** (Cf. Daniel, Dieterich, ed., *Teaching about DoubleSpeak*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1976. See especially the chapter on Guidelines for the Analysis of Responsibility in Governmental Communication, by Dennis Gouran, pp.20-32) to the present-day investigation of **DiploDiscourse** (for an example, see Ray T. Donahue and Michael H. Prosser, *Diplomatic Discourse: International Conflict at the United Nations: Addresses and Analysis*. Greenwich, Connecticut and London: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1997) but much more should be accomplished if we are to start transforming Diplomatic Communication into **dignified and dignifying discourse**, thus contributing to harmonising and humanising an important domain within Political Discourse. For a suggested strategy on how to read a political text positively, see my article "Harmonizing and Humanizing Political Discourse: The Contribution of Peace Linguistics" (*Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* Vol. 6, No. 4. 2000, pp. 339-344). In short, if I may adapt my characterisation of "communicating well" therein to the diplomatic context, I would say that "communicating well diplomatically means communicating for the well being of diplomatic interlocutors and, more broadly, for the well-being of humankind."