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VAGUENESS AS AN INSTRUMENT
OF THE DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE

The paper discusses "vagueness" as one of the characteristic features of the diplomatic language which successfully meets the demands of its implication. The prudent application of this "tricky" phenomenon is revealed in public speeches and diplomatic documents, such as the UN General Assembly resolutions, UN Security Council Press Releases, etc. The paper also focuses on certain methods of identification and teaching of this linguistic tool.

Key words: *vagueness, vague expressions, diplomatic language tools, vagueness in public speech, interactive mode*

Diplomatic language is the most carefully designed language due to its distinctive characteristics. It is a language tool to present a country's foreign policy and defend its interests. H. Nicolson in his book "Diplomacy" speaks about the most common significance of the diplomatic language, which is the guarded statement that enables diplomats to say sharp things without being provocative or impolite /Nicolson, 1950/. Being a formal, persuasive, conservative and cautious language, diplomatic language demands flexibility, politeness, commonness and generality as well as terseness. It is used to announce the outcome of a talk, to deal with sensitive questions and harmonize the atmosphere. In this regard vagueness successfully meets the demands of the diplomatic language. Implementing vagueness as a kind of language phenomenon is an effective strategy that diplomats often exercise to achieve certain purposes. Owing to its features such as tactfulness and indeterminacy, vagueness can well satisfy the needs of diplomats and allow them to achieve the best, desirable communicative effects. To avoid misunderstanding and embarrassment, diplomats deliberately use vague language such as euphemisms and metaphors or evade answering questions in order to achieve the communicative purpose, which transforms information tactfully. In Sarcevic's words "negotiators frequently reach compromises using vague, obscure or ambiguous wording, sacrificing clarity for the sake of obtaining consensus in treaties and conventions to represent the diverse interests of the participating parties" /Sarcevic, 1997/.

Still what does *vagueness* mean? The standard dictionary definition of vagueness runs: "not clear in person's mind, not having or giving enough information or details about something; suggesting a lack of clear thought or attention" /Hornby, 2009/. The advocates of linguistic approach to vagueness view vagueness as an epistemic phenomenon, that is, speakers have only inexact knowledge of the language they speak. H. Bussmann defines *vagueness* as a "pragmatic ambiguousness or indeterminacy, which cannot be systematically

described" /Bussmann, 1998: 50/. This would be then indeterminacy in language. And this indeterminacy is expressed in the diplomatic language as well.

Linguistically vagueness is viewed from the perspective of pragmatics and not as an object of internal linguistic representation. Joanna Channell describes the pragmatic functions of the vague language in detail. She holds the opinion that "understanding vagueness requires hearers to bear not just the knowledge of the lexis and grammar of English, but also pragmatic knowledge about how language is used, and how it relates to its settings" /Channell, 2000/. As to the identification of its pragmatics it is considered that "an expression is pragmatically vague with respect to certain semantic features which it leaves unspecified" /Bussmann, 1998/.

Vagueness can be reflected either by speaker's incomplete conceptual system (macroscopic view) or an epistemic phenomenon which is lack of language skills (microscopic view). It can be either intentional or unintentional. The speaker of vague language might not have had a single intention when uttering vague statements. Or on the other hand, vague language might imply the speaker's intent, and thus not imply the speaker's lack of skill. Some authors highlight the positive benefits of vagueness and argue that vagueness is often "desirable" /Dickerson, 1964/. According to Graham it demonstrates the intent to permit the language of enactment so as to take on a life of its own, it delegates the power, or expresses the desire to permit language to evolve /Graham, 2001/.

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the language phenomenon of vagueness from the linguistic perspective as well as its teaching methods. The research material is based on several UN General Assembly resolutions, public speeches, interviews and Security Council press releases.

In some situations diplomats and politicians speak on the issues which are tabooed in the society. These tabooed issues are useful tools for their political aims. To introduce such issues diplomats use vague language, for, as we have already mentioned, vagueness successfully meets the demands of the diplomatic language. To illustrate this let us analyze some examples and see the critical role of this linguistic "trick". Here is a sample from the resolution 66/253 On the Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the second provision says that it

1. (2) "strongly condemns the continued *widespread and systematic violations* of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities, such as the *use of force* against civilians..." /UN,GA Resolution 66/253/.

In this quote from the UN General Assembly resolution on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic we can see that the expressions "widespread", "systematic violations" and "use of force" have vague as well as subjective meaning, as "widespread", an adjective of frequency, means "existing or happening over a large area or among many people" /Hornby, 2009/, that is we have no idea of the definite area or exact number of people; "systematic" is defined as "done according to a system or plan, in a thorough, efficient or determined way" /Hornby, 2009/, what plan, what kind of violations or certain violations are not mentioned

here. The text under analysis does not detail the expression "the use of force" and does not clarify the exact violent physical action against civilians. The third provision of the same resolution represents:

3. Calls upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic "to *immediately* put an end to all human rights violations and *attacks* against civilians, protect its population..." /UN, GA Resolution 66/253/.

The indeterminacy of temporal expression "immediately" here gives no deadline for the actual implementation of the decision. The word "attacks" does not express what concrete attacks were carried out against civilians.

Another example taken from the Security Council press release, which calls for immediate, durable, fully respected ceasefire in Gaza leading to full withdrawal of the Israeli forces presents the following:

Reaffirming the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, it

1. "stresses the urgency of and calls for an *immediate*, *durable* and *fully respected ceasefire*, leading to the *full withdrawal* of the Israeli forces from Gaza;

2. welcomes the *initiatives* aimed at creating and opening *humanitarian corridors* and *other mechanisms* for the sustained delivery of *humanitarian aid*;

3. condemns *all violence and hostilities* directed against civilians and *all acts of terrorism*. /Security Council Press release, document S/2009/23/.

In this excerpt the expressions "immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire", "the full withdrawal of forces", "the initiatives", "humanitarian corridors", "other mechanisms", "humanitarian aid", "all violence and hostilities" and "all acts of terrorism" are vague, as they do not convey the precise meaning. We have no certain idea of the fully respected ceasefire. What do they mean by saying "fully respected?" What do "full withdrawal" and the noun "initiatives" imply? Or take the "humanitarian corridor". What type of corridors? Or what "other mechanisms?" What does "other" mean in this particular context? What particularly does "humanitarian aid" imply? "All acts of terrorism": what concrete attacks have to be interpreted as acts of "terrorism?" They are inherently vague and can mean almost anything.

The main characteristics of public speech lies in its appeal and implicitness, which are achieved by the speakers' vague thinking pattern. In their speeches, the speakers usually use vague language intentionally to set up certain artistic conception in order to express a strong emotion, which cannot be achieved by using exact description.

Another example taken from a public speech shows the magic power of this linguistic phenomenon.

Here is an illustration of it in the following sample of a public speech which was delivered by the US President Barak Obama at the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

"Now, the crisis in Syria, and the destabilization of the region, goes to the heart of *broader challenges* that the international community must now confront. How should we respond to *conflicts* in the Middle East and North Africa – *conflicts* between countries, but also conflicts within them? How do we address the choice of standing callously by while children are subjected to nerve gas, or embroiling ourselves in *someone else's civil war*? What is *the role of force* in resolving *disputes* that threaten the stability of the region and undermine *all basic standards* of civilized conduct? /UN, GA 68th Session, Barak Obama's speech/.

In this passage the expression "broader challenges" has a vague meaning as there is no certain notion of what challenges and even "broader" ones are implied. Then, the noun "conflicts" does not clarify which or what kind of conflicts B. Obama refers to in the Middle East and North Africa, which particular conflicts he means within them. Then he goes on saying "someone else's civil war". Again he does not mention where this particular civil war is being fought.

Or, let's take the expression "role of force". What force does he really imply? The same stands with the noun "disputes". What disputes does he specify that threaten the stability of the region? Not a definite hint. We also have the expression "all basic standards of civilized conduct". Again we do not have a certain idea of what "all basic standards mean", what they are.

Another interesting demonstration of this linguistic phenomenon can be seen in the public speech delivered by the US president Donald Trump after the US military strike on Syria:

"Tonight I call *all civilized nations* to join us in seeking to end *the slaughter and bloodshed* in Syria, and also to end *terrorism of all kinds and all types*."
(http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-latest-syria-missile-strike-tomahawk-chemical-weapons-attack-idlib-beautiful-babies-a7671471.html)

All three parts in italics – *"all civilized nations"*, *"the slaughter and bloodshed"* and *"terrorism of all kinds and all types"* – bear a significant manifestation of vagueness, as, in the first case there is no any hint about which 'civilized nations' he means, then, in the second piece he does not specify what kind of 'slaughter and bloodshed' have been committed there in Syria and, finally, in the third instance, the uncertainty of the meaning is all-embracing as it is totally unclear what 'types and kinds of terrorism' he refers to or means.

Theresa May's Brexit speech is also abundant with examples of vagueness. Here is one of them.

"And as we negotiate that partnership, we will be driven by some simple principles: we will provide *as much certainty and clarity* as we can *at every stage*. And we can take this opportunity to make Britain stronger, to make Britain fairer,

to build a *more Global Britain* too." (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/-01/17/theresa-mays-brexit-speech-full/)

In this passage the phenomenon of vagueness is displayed in the expressions "much certainty and clarity" and, "at every stage". Despite conveying a seemingly definite statement, the true meanings of these words still remain to be specified. Or when she declares her wish of having "a more Global Britain", the audience is in no way nearer to the idea of what definitely she proposes – 'global' in expansion, in economic cooperation or confrontation, through military actions or what? Sounds vague, doesn't it?

As to dealing with the language implication of vagueness several methods are suggested.

a) The most effective of them is the *interactive mode*. It is quite efficient when students work in pairs, or in groups, as the exchange of thoughts on the issue will promote them to guess the real meaning of the expressions that arise many problems, on the exact interpretations or clarifications of the expressions that they deal with.

b) Another interesting way of interpreting the expressions is *paraphrasing*, that is – replacing the vague expressions with phrases or words that students have in mind instead of the so-called vague, mysterious ones.

c) During discussions it is preferable to *encourage students to elicit questions* on vague words and expressions. We should highlight them together with students trying to work out the intended meaning. Students should interpret possible versions relating to these expressions.

d) Another medium to clarify this "tricky" phenomenon may be considered the provision of students with clues to the expressions introducing uncertainty, or to have a pre-reading discussion as it will encourage them to approach the task with clear purpose and help them find out the real meaning of the expression in the context. Of course, many similar questions may not be answered, but the picture will be quite different if students have background knowledge relating to this or that definite fact. This linguistic phenomenon both arouses students' interest and stimulates their imagination.

It is noteworthy to state that vague language tools and vague expressions occur not only in resolutions, political speeches, interviews and dialogues, but in everyday speech as well. People use this linguistic phenomenon of vagueness to their advantage in dealing with other people. We can't say that they do it deliberately, but sometimes they need it just to avoid hurting others or even to improve communication in the given situation. As L. Felkins points out "humans seem to be able to communicate quite well using vague terms" /Felkins, 2009/. It is of great importance to highlight that in personal lives or in social communication it may not create a problem, but in public speeches and diplomatic documents excessive use of vagueness can sometimes cause serious handicaps. That is why it is necessary to consider the implementation of this linguistic tool properly.

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Ռ. ՄԵԼԻՔՅԱՆ – ***Անորոշությունը որպես դիվանագիտական լեզվի գործիք***. – Սույն հոդվածում քննարկվում է դիվանագիտական լեզվի առանձնահատկություններից մեկը՝ «անորոշությունը», որը հաջողությամբ մարմնավորում է վերջինիս պահանջները: Աշխատանքը անդրադառնում է այս երևույթի շրջահայաց կիրառման դեպքերին հրապարակային ելույթներում, դիվանագիտական փաստաթղթերում՝ ինչպես օրինակ ՄԱԿ-ի Գլխավոր վեհաժողովի որոշումները, Անվտանգության խորհրդի մամուլի հրապարակումները և այլն: Հոդվածում ներկայացվում են «անորոշության» լեզվական դրսևորումների դասավանդման մի շարք մեթոդներ: Նաև նշվում են այս հնարքի բացահայտման ուղիները և օգտագործման եղանակները դիվանագիտական լեզուն ուսուցանելիս:

Բանալի բառեր. անորոշություն, անորոշ արտահայտություններ, դիվանագիտական լեզվի գործիքներ, անորոշությունը հրապարակային ելույթում, ինտերակտիվ եղանակ

Р. МЕЛИКЯН – ***«Неопределенность» как инструмент дипломатического языка.*** – В данной статье рассматривается одна из особенностей дипломатического языка – «неопределенность» как один из успешно выполняющих его задачи инструментов. Отмечается необходимость осторожного применения этого языкового феномена во время публичных выступлений и в дипломатических документах, таких как резолюции Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН, пресс-релизы Совета Безопасности и т. д. Предлагаются пути выявления и способы использования данной особенности дипломатического языка при преподавании.

Ключевые слова: неопределенность, неопределенные словосочетания, инструменты дипломатического языка, неопределенность в публичном выступлении, интерактивный метод