

Linguistic Forms of Diplomatic Relations Between Great Powers in the First Half of the 20th Century

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Introduction: The first half of the twentieth century was marked by profound structural transformations in the system of international relations, driven by two global wars and the rapid development of formal mechanisms of interstate interaction. During this period, diplomatic communication was not limited to the exchange of information; it functioned as a crucial instrument of state policy through which political positions were articulated, tensions were managed, and international responsibilities were negotiated.

In this context, the examination of linguistic forms of diplomatic communication becomes particularly relevant. Diplomatic language constituted a key mechanism through which states interpreted, structured, and justified their actions within the international system. Official formulations transformed political intentions into legally and symbolically acceptable expressions, shaping patterns of interaction among great powers. Analyzing diplomatic language as a historically situated practice allows for a deeper understanding of how international order was maintained, contested, and redefined through textual means rather than solely through military or economic power.

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing scholarly interest in the cultural and linguistic dimensions of international relations. Contemporary research increasingly recognizes that political power is exercised not only through material resources but also through discourse, norms, and symbolic practices. Diplomatic language represents one of the most formalized and influential forms of political discourse, especially in periods of heightened international tension.

For the first half of the twentieth century—a period characterized by systemic instability, shifting power balances, and the emergence of new international institutions—the study of diplomatic language is particularly significant. Linguistic choices in official documents reflected attempts to preserve order, legitimize political actions, and manage uncertainty in an evolving international system. Despite this importance, linguistic aspects of diplomacy are often treated as

secondary to military or economic factors. This article addresses this gap by foregrounding language as a central component of diplomatic practice and historical analysis.

The aim of the article is to examine linguistic forms of diplomatic communication as an integral part of historical practice and to demonstrate how official written language reflected power relations and political conditions in international affairs during the first half of the twentieth century. The study is based on the analysis of official diplomatic documents of European states and the United States within their historical context.

Keywords: Diplomatic communication; linguistic forms; international order; power relations; twentieth-century diplomacy; historical discourse analysis

Main Analysis: Diplomatic communication has historically been a highly regulated activity characterized by established formal frameworks and stable linguistic conventions. Official documents—such as notes, memoranda, declarations, and agreements—formed the legal and political basis of relations between states and ensured continuity in international communication.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, European diplomacy was dominated by formalized language aimed at ensuring predictability and stability. Textual structure, forms of address, and specialized terminology reflected not only diplomatic etiquette but also the hierarchical nature of international relations. American diplomatic communication, while influenced by European traditions, tended to adopt a more pragmatic and action-oriented style, reflecting the instrumental character of U.S. foreign policy.

A defining feature of diplomatic language was the use of restrained and indirect formulations, particularly during periods of political tension. Explicit accusations and categorical judgments were generally avoided in favor of ambiguous or generalized expressions that allowed states to manage responsibility and maintain flexibility. This approach is clearly evident in diplomatic correspondence before the First World War and continued in the post-war period, when official language played a crucial role in establishing international legitimacy.

The First and Second World Wars significantly reshaped diplomatic discourse. During the interwar period, concepts such as security, stability, and international cooperation became more prominent in official documents. Diplomatic texts of the 1930s reflect growing tensions while preserving formal restraint. At the textual level, political developments were framed within legal and normative structures, even as the international system moved closer to open conflict.

One of the most distinctive features of diplomatic communication during this period was the stability of formulaic language. Established expressions and forms of address changed little over time, ensuring mutual recognition and continuity. Such formulaic language served a protective function, enabling states to articulate positions while avoiding direct confrontation, particularly during international crises.

Diplomatic texts combined legal and political elements. Although often presented in legal form, their content clearly served strategic political objectives. Diplomatic language thus functioned as an intermediate space between law and politics, providing formal justification for state actions while preserving room for maneuver.

Diplomatic communication was also closely linked to asymmetries of power within the international system. Linguistic choices reflected not only formal equality but also real political and military capabilities. Great powers enjoyed greater rhetorical flexibility, while smaller states tended to employ more cautious and deferential language. In interactions among major powers,

diplomatic language functioned as a means of asserting status and influence without explicit coercion. This interaction between language and power demonstrates that diplomatic texts cannot be interpreted as neutral instruments but must be understood as part of broader political practice.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed increasing standardization of diplomatic language, closely associated with the development of international law, multilateral diplomacy, and permanent international institutions. Standardized formulations reduced ambiguity and established commonly accepted rules of expression, facilitating communication in an increasingly complex international environment.

International conferences, treaties, and intergovernmental organizations contributed to the consolidation of shared linguistic patterns. The repetition of similar expressions across documents created a sense of continuity and stability, even during periods of profound political uncertainty. Standardization also served a legitimizing function, allowing states to frame their actions as consistent with international norms regardless of underlying political motivations.

Comparative analysis reveals both convergence and persistent differences between Anglo-American and continental European diplomatic language. While shared conventions ensured a common communicative framework, variations in tone and emphasis reflected distinct political cultures and administrative traditions. Anglo-American texts were generally more direct and pragmatic, whereas continental European diplomacy emphasized formal politeness, historical continuity, and elaborate expressions of mutual respect. These differences influenced negotiation styles and interpretative contexts, underscoring the importance of cultural and institutional awareness in historical analysis.

Conclusion: The examination of linguistic forms in diplomatic communication between great powers in the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates that official language functioned not merely as a technical medium of interstate interaction but as a structured political instrument embedded within the broader system of international relations. Diplomatic texts were shaped by established conventions while remaining sensitive to shifts in power, security concerns, and changing political priorities.

The analysis confirms that formalization and standardization did not diminish the political effectiveness of diplomatic language. On the contrary, restrained formulations and legalistic structures enabled states to articulate interests, manage conflict, and signal intentions without overt confrontation. This linguistic restraint was especially significant during periods of crisis, allowing governments to preserve space for negotiation and de-escalation.

Diplomatic communication also reflected asymmetrical power relations. While formal equality was maintained at the textual level, variations in tone and rhetorical flexibility revealed implicit hierarchies within diplomatic discourse. The comparative perspective further demonstrates that diplomatic language was shaped by distinct political cultures, despite growing convergence driven by international law and institutionalization.

The scientific significance of this study lies in its focus on diplomatic language as a central component of historical and political practice. By treating linguistic forms as analytically meaningful rather than purely procedural, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of diplomacy as a culturally and discursively constructed activity.

The research expands existing approaches in international history by integrating linguistic analysis into the study of power relations, legitimacy, and international order. It demonstrates

that diplomatic texts functioned as instruments of strategic communication, reflecting both formal norms and underlying political calculations. This perspective enriches the interpretation of official documents as historical sources.

The findings are also relevant for contemporary diplomatic and international relations studies, as they highlight the enduring importance of language in managing conflict, asserting authority, and sustaining international norms. The study provides a framework that can be applied comparatively to other historical periods and geopolitical contexts, reinforcing its broader scholarly value.

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