

The Pragmatics of Lobbying in Diplomatic Discourse: A Study of United Nations Texts

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ABSTRACT

The study of pragmatic strategies in the language of diplomacy provides an innovative perspective on how lobbying, a form of institutional indirect persuasion, is linguistically realized. Linguistic subtlety pervades diplomatic discourse, which enables its participants to, as in the case of the UN, engage in diplomatic negotiation on substantive issues behind the veil of diplomatic protocols. This article analyses the pragmatics of lobbying devices in the light of several texts at the United Nations, focusing on speech acts, implicatures and presuppositions. Based on the qualitative pragmatic-based analysis, the results indicate that lobbying is mostly realized by means of indirect directive speech acts, conversational implicatures as well as factive and existential presuppositions. These mechanisms prove to be effective in tacitly reinforcing the persuasiveness and then diplomatic player could continue to influence policy change without direct coercion. This study confirms that pragmatics is instrumental in shaping diplomatic lobbying strategies and points toward additional insights on international political communication.

1. Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, language has increasingly been recognized as a strategic instrument in international relations, especially in the realm of diplomatic communication (Zhang et al., 2023). Diplomatic discourse is no longer viewed as an apolitical or benign communicative vehicle; it is now seen as a tightly managed interaction in which political agents negotiate power relations and articulate and propagate their ideologies and global policy options. In this sense, lobbying becomes a key communicative practice, above all in institutional contexts such as the UN.

Traditional lobbying is based on direct persuasion and particularly explicit pressure and, conversely, lobbying in diplomatic communication is naturally indirect. It works through subtle linguistic tools, such as those that speakers use to influence outcomes, while exhibiting politeness, avoiding confrontation, and maintaining institutional credibility. This indirectness is no accident but a hallmark of diplomatic communication today, where the balance of persuasion and cooperation is everything.

While it is vital, lobbying pragmatics has been little studied in linguistics. The focus of the analysis has tended to be on rhetoric or the politics, and less on the micro-level linguistic processes such as speech acts, implicature, or presupposition. Pragmatic strategies play a vital role in the making of diplomatic discourse, as evidenced by the case of the Cairo Peace Summit; however

the specific function of pragmatic strategies in lobbying has not been fully or systematically explored. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which pragmatic strategies are employed to construct lobbying in United Nations discourse?
2. What types of speech acts dominate lobbying strategies?
3. Which contributes more to lobbying effectiveness: implicature or presupposition?

The claim of the paper in the light of above questions is that the lobbying discourse within the UN is scripted, and the scripting is produced by a set of instrumental considerations, which are realized in terms of politeness principle, indirectness and institutionalized framing allowing the enunciator to simultaneously undertake a two-track persuasive (negotiation) and diplomatic endeavor. It re-affirms that commanding and requesting speech acts are dominant; however the study proposes that direct speech acts will be more dominant in the EU lobbying scene, followed by commissives and interrogatives. This study assumes that presupposition exerts more influence on lobbying success than implicature, because presupposition allows the speaker to present ideologies or policy options as matter-of-facts that are common knowledge and an unchallengeable “truth”, which makes a speech more persuasive and undercuts its potential for challenge especially in the sphere of diplomacy.

2. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of the meaning of utterances in context and the information that is necessary in order to understand an utterance, as well as how language users exploit context to communicate information that is not encoded in the linguistic system. Pragmatics is the study of the use of language in communication among people and how the listener is able to understand what the speaker means in a specific moment in time (Levin-son, 1983). This renders pragmatics extremely suitable to analyzing diplomatic discourse where implicit, fairly consensual, and highly context-dependent meanings are common.

Pragmatics is also needed in diplomacy, where the pressing need to achieve several mutually opposed objects at one and the same time makes pragmatic tactics unavoidable: to declare national interests, to maintain cooperation, and to keep from open conflict. Hence, speakers are indirect, polite, and ambiguous when they talk about sensitive topics. These methods are not merely stylistic preferences, they are ways in which lobbying can be pursued without egregious application.

2.1 Speech Acts

Speech act theory, initially developed by Austin (1962) and later elaborated by Searle (1969), is used to study how statements can constitute acts such as promising, ordering, or apologizing in the context of diplomacy. Searle (1969) differentiates between five different types of SAs, which can be distinguished from one another by means of their felicity conditions. The main five categories of Searle are as follows (Mey, 2009):

- a. Representatives SAs in which the speaker represents the world, in other words, viewed as being the way he or she believes the world is. Therefore making the words fit the world of belief.
- b. Directives are those sorts of SAs in which the speaker tries to make the addressee do something.) Describe each SAs of BOTH with the following attributes: Topics, elements, Strategies a.
- c. Commissives are SAs that the speaker undertakes for some act in the future. They convey the speaker's desire to act.
- d. Expressives are those kind of speech acts in which the speaker manifests his or her psychological state, e.g., happiness, sadness and preferences/disapproval.
- e. Declarations are of SAs that cause immediate changes in some current state of affairs. Diplomatic discourse often employs speech acts to signal intentions, establish commitments, and navigate the complexities of international diplomacy (Grice, 1975)

2.2 Implicature

Implicature, which dates back to H. P. Grice (1975), is the inference drawn by the listener based on an utterance that goes beyond the information presented by the speaker. It is a key pragmatic process by which speakers, in a more or less indirect way, communicate meaning under assumption of and/or knowledge of compliance to conversational maxims. There are two types broadly of implicature.

First, conversational implicature is contextually generated during the process of interaction and influenced by Grice's maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) within the Cooperative Principle. It has two more layers of complexity. (i) Generalized implicature, which can be derived from general conversational rules and that relies less on specific features of the context, and (ii) specialized implicature, which is context-dependent and requires special knowledge of the situation to be correctly understood.

Second, the conventional implicature is associated with particular lexical items or linguistic expressions (e.g. "but," "even," "therefore") and is not dependent on the contextual conversational norms. This manner adds further meaning, which is way attached to certain expressions, rather than superadded.

In the realm of diplomatic interaction, implicature are also used as strategic means through which interlocutors convey proposals, disagree with one another and disclose their intentions implicitly. This is the indirectness in speech acts, which is very important in institutional context like the UN where politeness, ambiguities, diplomatic ways of speaking have to be maintained while addressing sensitive if not controversial issues (Jenny Thomas, 1995).

2.3 Presupposition

Presupposition is a set of assumptions about the world or background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted either in producing or understanding that utterance. It is a basic pragmatic tool for encoding implicit meanings into forms of language. According to George Yule (1996), presupposition has been divided into six types.

- a. Existential presupposition, which assumes the existence of entities (e.g., “the policy,” “the agreement”);
- b. Lexical presupposition, which assumes that one state or action implies another;
- c. Structural presupposition, which is triggered by specific syntactic constructions that presuppose certain information as true;
- d. Factive presupposition, which presents information as factual and unquestionable;
- e. Non-factive presupposition, which implies that the presupposed information is not true; and
- f. Counterfactual presupposition, which assumes the opposite of reality.

In diplomatic discourse, presuppositions are instrumental in setting the parameters of debate and hermeneutics. If presuppositions are embedded within statements rather than articulated explicitly, speakers can subtly influence negotiations, form common ideological ground and represent certain views of the world as taken for granted or unproblematic. This makes presupposition a highly effective persuasion device at least in communication between states and I will concentrate on formal settings (e.g. United Nations (Stephen Levinson, 1983)

3. Lobbying

Lobbying is the process by which individuals or groups attempt to influence policy makers, legislators, or other officials responsible for the formulation of public policy in their own particular interest, issue, or legislative product. It has come to be seen as a way of advocacy that had the potential to influence public policy through communication, negotiation, and persuasion (Beyers, Eising, & Maloney, 2008, p. 1104); lobbying is performing part of politics. From this perspective, lobbying was deemed not only as a direct influence but also as an advocacy-based activity (such as lobbying) including instrumental activities (such as information provision), lobbying encompasses different forms of pressure ranging from direct representation of a specific position to advice on how to handle specific issues (Nicolaidis & Renda, 2006, p. 4).

In institutional and international relations, especially within bodies like the United Nations, lobbying tends to be far more subtle and diplomatically proper. Instead of outright persuasion, actors employ carefully crafted discourse, including official statements, policy recommendations, and negotiating tactics to shape results and also maintain diplomatic decorum and relations (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007, p. 80).

In practical terms, lobbying is accomplished through language use and rhetorical strategies. It often uses indirectness and politeness, and involves implicature or presupposition to achieve persuasive goals, without damaging institutional harmony. As pointed out by Stephen Levinson (1983), such implicit strategies enable speakers to transmit messages behind the explicit layer

of meaning, which is also why they are very effective in delicate political and diplomatic situations. Therefore lobbying may be described as an instrumentally rational, communicative practice, adapted to the political and institutional environment, and is reliant on both explicit and implicit communication for interacting with political decision makers and outcomes of policy.

2. Literature Review

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3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to study lobbying strategies in United Nations dialogue. Mixed methods research is an approach for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing, and transforming both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies and reviewing integrated narratives or data displays (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The qualitative analysis in this study is a prospective examination of lobbying discourse in a number of texts of the United Nations. In particular it investigates the way language is strategically used by diplomatic actors to construct lobbying under conditions of implicature, presupposition and speech acts. This entails analyzing the way in which meaning is imparted implicitly, how assumptions are hidden, and how persuasive intentions are achieved institutionally and diplomatically (Levinson, 1983, p. 97; Thomas, 1995, p. 56).

The pragmatic strategies' quantity and distribution, among the chosen data, are instead the object of the statistical analysis component. It counts the number of implicatures, presuppositions and prevalent speech acts to look for regularities and trends in lobbying. This form of quantitative analysis has been successfully employed to complement discourse investigations by identifying distinct linguistic patterns that are quantifiable and comparable (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998, p. 14).

Accordingly, the integration of both methods enables a more comprehensive and systematic analysis, offering deeper insights into how lobbying is linguistically constructed and pragmatically realized in United Nations discourse. The study analyzes five selected speeches to represent lobbying practices within the chosen institutional context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 5).

3.2 Data Analysis

Extract No. 1

“And I ask the people of this chamber to stand up for them.”

In this extract, lobbying is a strategically mitigated directive speech act in that the verb “ask” is a politeness strategy that mitigates the force of the directive and conforms to diplomatic protocol. The speaker employs an indirect order rather than a direct command in order to save institutional decorum and to exhort. Pragmatically, there is a strong implicature that not all member states are at this point sufficiently supportive, which applies indirect pressure on the audience without any explicit accusation. From a presuppositional point of view the snippet implies existential and factive presuppositions: it presupposes that there is a group that requires support (“them”) and that obtaining such support is both necessary and appropriate. This discursive device establishes a shared moral terrain, rendering the envisaged conduct as performing an already socialized obligation. Hence, lobbying is a subtle term, the orator appealing to a collective conscience and yet remaining civil and courteous.

Extract No. 2

“We cannot grow weary. We cannot look away. And we will not let up on our support for Ukraine.”

This extract establishes lobbying with implicit coercion and commissive speech act, with both the obligation and the commitment being strengthened. The constant “We cannot...” is a very straightforward indirect command which adds a collective normative pressure of command to not stand still, while “We will not let up” is a collective promise to continue support. The use of

repetition is also a persuasive fortification device that emphasizes urgency and passion. On the pragmatic side, the excerpt assumes an implicature of potential fatigue or disaffection on the part of those actors at the international level and contributes to preempt such disaffection. The saying presupposes that Ukraine does have support at present, and that ending that support would be harmful. They agree that to quit now would be both crazy and immoral. Therefore, lobbying is written into the retraffordian through the articulation of the collective responsibility and ongoing interaction, pressuring but also committing, in a way that is fitting for diplomacy.

Extract No. 3

“The world now has another choice to make: Will we sustain our support to help Ukraine win this war... or walk away...?”

This text constructs lobbying as an indirect directive politeness realized as a rhetorical question which serves not as a genuine question but as a device of persuasion that nudges the interlocutor under the guide of action to a certain direction. The binary “continue to support us” versus “leave” sets up a contrast frame that narrows the choice and codes one of option as the morally ‘right’ one. This is a two-edged implicature which implies that not only would it be irresponsible or wrong to withhold support, but also that the option of withdrawing the support is “off the table,” as it were, allowing subtle pressure to be applied to an audience without the threat of confrontation. Presupposition is key in this passage, as it assumes that there is already support for Ukraine and that this support for Ukraine is both implicit and mandatory. Furthermore, the expression “another choice to make” implies that the matter is still in progress and that a decision must be made at once. Through this unique fusion of rhetorical question, implicature and presupposition, lobbying can be accomplished by constructing the contextual environment within which an audience assesses choices.

Extract No. 4

“Now is the time for the parties to finalize its terms, bring the hostages home... and end this war.”

This text formulates lobbying into an indirect directive in the form of a rhetorical question, a speech act that is not a genuine enquiry but a persuasive instrument to take the audience towards a desirable course of action. The dichotomous binary choice of “sustain our support” vs “walk away” is a cross fall framing that helps simplify the decision making while implicitly morally ranking one of the options. The implicature inherent in such formulation of the issue is that retreat from support would be reckless or unbecoming, hence exerting soft pressure on the audience in a non-adversarial manner. Presupposition is important in the sense that it is already taken for granted that there has been support for Ukraine and that this should continue. “another choice to make” also presupposes that there is a preceding motivation to keep going, and that decision needs to be made immediately. In this way aided by rhetorical questioning, implicature and presupposition – lobbying is effective in terms of framing the interpretive lens through which the audience considers their alternatives.

4. Results and Discussion

A qualitative study of selected excerpts from the speech of Joe Biden at the United Nations General Assembly shows that lobbying in diplomatic discourse is systematically fashioned through a series of interrelated pragmatic means, among which indirect speech acts, implicature, presupposition are the most salient ones. These tools combine and work in unison to have a convincing effect without compromising on the politeness, the institutional validity or the diplomatic decorum.

First, the results show that lobbying is mainly realized via indirect directive speech acts and not direct commands. Constant throughout the text are neutralizing mechanisms for directives such as requests (“I ask”), agreements of inevitability (“we cannot”), rhetorical questions, and urgency constructions (“now is the time”). With these two words you can manipulate others, influence them and suggest what the other should do without directly assuming power. This is in line with the idea that the diplomatic lobbying style rests on a strategic indirection, in which persuasion is reached by suggestion and not by imposition. Commissive speech act presence is enhanced with a smiling presence “we will not let up” which enhances the credibility of the speaker as it is an commitment to act, further and further more discloses the persuasive power of the discourse.

Second, implicature is also essential when constructing the implication of utterances. The passages consistently contain numerous indirect claims that posit the interpretation and emotional reaction of the listener. For instance, references to the choice of “walking away” or the necessity to “stand up” imply that some players may be falling short of their obligations. They are not stated explicitly but inferred from the context what to say, so the speaker can criticize and make urgency feel without confronting the other directly. This utilization of implicature is consistent with the fundamental precepts of diplomatic rhetoric, wherein face maintenance and avoidance of confrontation are paramount.

Furthermore, presupposing is especially potent technique in lobbying rhetoric. Included are embedded assumptions that are treated as already known and beyond question — the need to support Ukraine, that talks are underway, and the necessity for an end to fighting. By articulating these ideas as common ground, the speaker preemptively disarms any opposition and encourages the audience to conceive of themselves as part of an ideological collective. It makes the argument a lot more compelling because the proposed course of action appears right, obligatory and inexorable and not a matter of debate.

The results demonstrate that lobbying in United Nations discourse is at the very least tacit and discursively fabricated. It eschews explicit pressure and is based instead on pragmatic devices that make persuasion implicit, palatable and effective in the context of diplomatic interaction norms. Further, the study’s predictions and underline the importance of pragmatics in political communication at the international level.

5. Conclusion

This research investigates the pragmatics of lobbying at the level of diplomatic discourse in UN text, with particular focus on speech acts, implicature, and presupposition. The findings suggest that lobbying does not take place through open or direct persuasion, but in a clandestine and pragmatically coordinated manner, through which interlocutors jointly manipulate the decision-making process while maintaining diplomatic politeness.

Resulting from the analysis is that indirect directive speech acts are more dominant among speech acts than other types of lobbying. Such directives are normally linguistically realized in some mitigated form – requests, rhetorical questions, or urgency expressions, and these three types can be all regarded as linguistic strategies in which the speakers attempt to get the hearers to perform without force. Commissive acts exert their persuasiveness by binding the speaker and thus by increasing his ethos but they are currently also two orders of magnitude less important than directives.

In addition, the investigation illuminates the crucial place of implicature in diplomatic lobbying. Speakers manage to communicate critiques, urgency or expectations through these implied meanings without need for a face-off. This, in turn, allows for politeness and institutional harmony, both of which are important to diplomatic discussion. Simultaneously, presupposition is a very powerful tool in rhetorical arsenal as it allows speakers to frame their assumptions and policy perspectives as common and unquestionable knowledge. As such, the use of presupposition in lobbying discourse is encouraged as it complements the persuasive nature of lobbying.

In sum, these results verify that lobbying in United Nations discourse is shaped by a mixture of indirectness, mutually shared presuppositions and connotations. The pragmatic devices are combined to produce an effective persuasion within the limits of the persuasive rules of diplomatic communication. The research therefore enhances the understanding of language as strategy in international relations and underlines the importance of pragmatics in the construction of political and institutional discourse.

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