

Research Article

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English language in the context of cultural diplomacy

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Abstract

In the context of inter-state diplomacy, the need for English language proficiency remains essential. This would likewise apply to the promotion of the nation's cultures in the interest of establishing and strengthening a diplomacy with other countries. The use of cultural aspects for diplomatic purposes here is referred to as cultural diplomacy. Culture becomes the main aspect to attract the attentions of the projected partnering countries. In this context, culture can take the form of drama and music performances, cultural seminars, painting exhibitions, and others. This article aims to explain the concept of cultural diplomacy and its relevance with the use of English as the medium of instruction. The data were collected through the library study. Meanwhile, the analysis is carried out within a qualitative research framework where the relevant theories and the data were interpreted and synthesized. The research is also characterized by the interdisciplinary approach covering the subjects of culture, linguistics, communication, and politics. The results of the analysis affirm that English plays a significant and strategic position in supporting the exercises of cultural diplomacy. This is also supported by the intensive as well as frequent use of the international language in various forms of cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: Culture; diplomacy; English; language; cross cultural; communication

1. Introduction

English has been continually playing a strategic role in the international relations. The language is a bridge of communication for people from different languages and cultures. As a lingua franca, it remains a politically influential language until today. The use of the language is undoubtedly massive. Most international interactions would require any relevant parties to be fluent in English. The language has been increasingly becoming nowadays' necessity of the wider community.

On the larger scale, the use of English language can be a determinant of a country's success in exercising diplomacies with prospective partners. The concept of diplomacy has been long and closely related to both spoken and written English for communication purposes. The diplomatic messages in which the English language is the medium would in turn take part in the establishment of mutually beneficial diplomatic relations. In the context of the inter-state diplomacy, the mastery of the English language skills is not only individual, but it should be institutional requirement as well.

Among the types of diplomacy is the so-called cultural diplomacy. The concept is basically a form of soft power diplomacy in which cultural aspects are the main subjects as well as the intermediaries. Culture, in this context, is an element that plays a role to attract the diplomatic subjects to explore a continuing stronger relation. The diplomacy can be in the form of music and dance performances, exhibitions of paintings or art installations, seminars on cultural themes, theater or drama, and others in which the exchange of knowledge and cultural backgrounds are occurring. All of the mentioned examples can be diplomatic intermediaries. In this case, the use of English can determine the effectiveness of the exercises of the cultural diplomacy. The clear reflection of cultural values of the

performance, for example, would depend on the articulations of the language skills demonstrated by the performers or any other relevant subjects of the diplomatic missions.

This article will examine the forms of cultural diplomacy and how the English language is one of the significant aspects to the exercises of the concept. There are three major questions that will be answered. First, how English becomes relevant in the exercises of cultural diplomacy. Second, how important is the mastery of English in the context of cultural diplomacy. Third, on what kind of diplomatic occasions English is used.

2. Methods

In collecting the data of the research, I used the library study method. I read and collected relevant sources related to the topic of cultural diplomacy and the use of English for international relations. Furthermore, I sorted the data and theories into a synthesis. The research analysis was carried out within the qualitative research framework. This article applies the interdisciplinary approach where the disciplines of linguistics, communication, and politics of international relations are intersecting.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. *The Concept of Cultural Diplomacy*

According to Tomalin and Hurn (2013), cultural diplomacy deals with a country's deliberate efforts to increase its visibility in the international relations through the promotion of cultures, traditions, lifestyles, and exports. The experts believe that the exchange of ideas, art and other cultural aspects is involved in the process of the diplomacy with which cultural understanding between nations are fostered (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013). Unlike the political or economic diplomacy, the type of diplomacy puts culture a key element in building a stronger bilateral or multilateral relationship between the two countries or more. It is important to note that the conceptual basis of the type of diplomacy lies on the idea of what culture is. Sociologists point out that, "culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. Culture also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society" (Cole, 2019). The term culture, at this point, may still seem too broad or unclearly defined. Despite of the unclarity that might arise, it has actually proposed such enlightening knowledge that it is not only limited to what has been long understood to be art or other traditional things.

Tomalin and Hurn propose that culture is generally understood to refer to "civilization," "education," and "art" in Western languages (2013). They both agree that it is a limited definition of culture. In line with the views, culture also functions as a type of "mental programming" (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013). For them, by using the analogy of a computer, these thoughts, feeling, and behavior patterns can be explained as a type of mental programming; this concept has been referred to as "mental software" (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013). The notion affirms the idea that culture does not always refer to physical existences. Culture reflects a source of non-materials. It inspires either physical or non-physical manifestations. The two experts point out that,

"A useful method is to divide culture into *implicit culture* – basic assumptions which produce norms and values which show in *the explicit culture* – observable reality which includes language, food, music, dress, literature, architecture, public emotion, work ethic, noise, physical contact and so on" (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013, p.5).

Cummings, further, formulates cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (UNESCO, 2022). Within the notions he mentions the aspects of cultural diplomacy, namely “ideas”, “information”, “art”, and “language” (UNESCO, 2022). All of the mentioned ones are often inseparable parts of multicultural events in several diplomatic contexts. For example, art performances are typical instruments of cultural diplomacy. Through the events, the international communities learn each other's art performances along with the ideas. In fact, not only the dancing performance do they see, they might also internalize the historical backgrounds, philosophies, and other information about it. At this point, more comprehensive interpretations are possible to develop in which the exchange of cultures are also occurring. Lenczowski mentions several instruments of cultural diplomacy. These instruments are “the arts, exhibitions, exchanges, educational programs, literature, language teaching, broadcasting, gifts, promotion of ideas (like rule of law), promotion of social policy (like campaigns against HIV), history and religious diplomacy (like interfaith dialogue)” (UNESCO, 2022).

Cultural diplomacy is, in fact, not a brand-new concept in the context of the international relations. The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (2023) provides evidence that the practice of the diplomacy has been around for a long time. It gives the idea that,

“explorers, travelers, traders, teachers and artists can be all considered living examples of “informal ambassadors” or early “cultural diplomats”. Indeed, any person who interacts with different cultures, (currently or in the past), facilitates a form of cultural exchange, which can take place in many fields such as art, sports, literature, music, science, business & economy and beyond”.

The above-mentioned practices imply the practices of cultural exchange. Those involved in the process are called the cultural diplomats. Diverse communities can play the role of cultural diplomats. The same source further describes the situation of the cultural diplomacy as “a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society” (The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2023). Further, when the cultural diplomacy works well, it can establish a cultural presence in the receiving nation and ensure that it recognizes and comprehends the projecting nation more fully (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013). By itself, though, it can also promote exports and even draw in foreign investment (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013). As pointed out by Tomalin and Hurn, “cultural diplomacy can therefore be seen as the third pillar of foreign policy alongside political diplomacy and economic diplomacy” (2013, p.225).

3.2. The Position of English in Cultural Diplomacy

Tomalin and Hurn (2013) provide a readable elaboration of the instruments of cultural diplomacy. All of these instruments are useful in building a country's visibility in the international arena. There are ten cultural diplomacy instruments as mentioned by the two communication experts. All of them are grouped in the following box.

Cultural missions	Airlines
Language and education	Gastronomy
The arts	Sport
Science and technology (also described as science diplomacy)	National heroes and heroines
Tourist sites and national attractions	Diasporas

Figure 1. (Source: *Cross-Cultural Communication: Theory and Practice*)

Through the instruments, cultural diplomacy can be exercised in the scope of both individuals and groups, formal and informal sectors. In practice, these instruments do not exist in a vacuum. The carried out diplomatic missions require other elements whose position is very vital. It is the English language.

The process of cultural diplomacy presents cultural exchanges or at least provides an understanding of the cultures of partnering countries. The same language of instruction is substantial within the aforementioned condition. In this case, the United Nations (UN) legalizes six international official languages. These languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish (United Nations, 2023). Mehtiyev further notes that “among the diplomatic languages English is the most popular; it is the first choice amongst the masses and the elite alike”. He continued,

“With a great tolerance for linguistic variations, English as a global language has become the language of power and prestige and thereby an international gate-keeper to social and economic progress. The current dominance of English as a world language is undisputed. It plays an official or working role in most international organizations” (2010, p.1).

English is considered to have bridged many cultural and linguistic differences in the international arena. The positioning is consequently seen as dominant and strong.

Within the diverse situations language plays three roles, (1) cultural understanding, (2) preventing misunderstandings, and (3) public diplomacy (World Schoolbooks, 2023). In the context of the interstate diplomacy, language is an important instrument for a soft power approach. The approach is defined by Joseph S. Nye as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies” (World Schoolbooks, 2023). Language has a crucial role in promoting and branding the “attractiveness” of a country through cultural promotions. Therefore, it is now evident that the position of English in the context of the interstate cultural diplomacy is determining. It is in line with some conditions as mentioned below,

“English, particularly, has seen an unprecedented rise as a global *lingua franca* in diplomacy. This is not just a reflection of the historical influence of the British Empire, but also the post-war economic and cultural dominance of the United States” (World Schoolbooks, 2023).

The position of the English language for the international communication does not only indicate linguistic phenomena, but it also intersects with the role of global politics where the use of the language can determine and strengthen certain political hegemony. English, in fact, has long played a role as part of the soft power instrument of some English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. A study points out on this,

“...the UK's soft power assets: its values, democracy, economic and political freedom, freedom of speech, education, innovation, the English language, culture (particularly the BBC), the arts

(particularly literature, no doubt reflecting the then focus on the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death), heritage, and sport" (Singh, et. al. p.8).

Language is, theoretically, one of the cultural aspects. Along with the intensity of the use of a language in the global arena, it is very likely that it is commensurate with the visibility of the country. In this case, cultural diplomacy can take place in a soft but effective way.

3.3. The Uses of English for Cultural Diplomacy Purposes

Before explaining the technical uses of English in the context of cultural diplomacy, concrete examples of the forms are needed. The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy exemplifies cultural diplomacy with cultural exchanges, international delegations (such as: American Jazz Ambassadors), or sports competitions. The cultural exchange is usually organized in a large event. In the American context, for example, "President Eisenhower established an Emergency Fund for International Affairs in part to support cultural presentations abroad. The International Cultural Exchange and Trade Fair Participation Act of 1956 established a permanent place for cultural diplomacy" (Bernstein, p.1., 2010). Today, the U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs offers the programs projected to be part of the country's cultural diplomacy instruments. There are several excellent diplomacy programs designed, namely: (1) *American Arts Incubators*, (2) *American Film Showcase*, (3) *American Music Abroad*, (4) *Arts Envoy Program*, (5) *Biennales*, (6) *CenterStage*, (7) *Communities Connecting Heritage*, (8) *Global Media Makers*, (9) *International Writing Program (IWP)*, (10) *Next Level*, dan (11) *OneBeat* (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2023). All of the mentioned programs are professionally managed to carry out educational, artistic, and community missions in which the diplomacy also becomes the purpose. The aforementioned activities are attended by the ambassadors of the partnering countries or other international communities. That way, the missions of cultural exchange and promotion will be carried out. Additionally, the use of English in cultural diplomacy can be divided into two categories. The first category is based on the method. The second category lies on the medium. For the first category, it is divided into two sub-categories namely *spoken* and *written*. For the second category, it includes *electronic* and *non-electronic* sub-categories. All of the sub-categories are very likely to intersect or collaborate with each other. The following are the examples to illustrate the uses of English for cultural diplomacy.

3.3.1. English as the Language of Instruction in the Events of Cultural Exchange

A cultural event, say an art performance, involving cross-country performers and audiences certainly requires the same and understandable language of instructions. On various occasions, English becomes the medium of such international cultural events with which the audiences are expected to experience of cultural exchanges. The use of the language can be seen in various aspects of the event. The master of ceremony, for example, will use the spoken English in guiding the course of the event. They, additionally, would use the English texts when reading the agenda. Not only does the master of ceremony, the officials, performers, and audiences also use the English language to communicate. The government officials or representatives, similarly, speak English to deliver official speeches. The performers may use the language to explain the meanings of their art performances. The use of the language can be seen in an example of an international cultural event "Indonesia Cultural Night" which was held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2022. The recording can be accessed through the following YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfDsE5JDKgY>.

3.3.2. Written English as the Language of Intercultural and Inter-state Correspondences

In carrying out the diplomatic missions, a strategic plan for bilateral or multilateral relations is a must. The well-planned strategy is, in turn, written, disseminated, and executed. The exercises of the

diplomatic missions require written communications. Institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are often the main actors in the preparations of the diplomatic documents. The exchanges of cultural information can be delivered through the written correspondences. This will allow for the use of the common and understandable language of instruction between the two or more communicating countries. The English language, again, is often the first choice for such matters. In a specific term, the type of course is referred to as “diplomatic correspondence”. Written English, anyway, is unavoidably found everywhere nowadays. It can be in the form of written signs at the airports and tourist sites, manual book of electronic products, food menu, and many more.

3.3.3. *English as the Language of the Electronic Cultural Promotional Products*

In today's so-called electronic and internet era, promotional and cultural exchange are not merely carried out in person. The kind of practice is now very possible to find online on the internet. Various countries strive to promote and brand through interesting contents in the form of videos and electronic leaflets. Here, English is used as the language of instruction in delivering the cultural promotional content. In fact, it has been the language of the internet. It performs a crucial role in delivering and exchanging information online. The followings are some examples of a country's cultural promotional video content:

- New Zealand, There's No Place Like It on Earth
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGp_o_syKIU)
- We're on top of the world | Emirates Airline
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQHhYRuaEtM>)
- Wonderful Indonesia 2022 “Jiwa Jagad Jawi”
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dlBUHhDOQU)

Additionally, promotions and cultural exchanges can be in the form of electronic leaflets. The similar phenomena are presented in the following examples:

- <https://amazingthailand.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/E-Brochure-BangkokEn.pdf>
- <https://www.visitfinland.com/en/>

All of the promotional media use English as the main language of instruction. The language itself is seen as the effective one in conveying the messages to the wider international community. Furthermore, in order to increase their visibility, the countries use the social media for their promotional purposes. Among the popular social media is *Instagram*. Through their respective cultural missions or agents, the countries carry out various advertisements, promotions, and brandings by using the *Instagram* where the English language is the medium of instructions.

3.3.4. *English as the Language of Diaspora*

The role of the countries' diaspora in exercising cultural diplomacy is undoubtedly influential as well. The term is defined as “a large group of people who share a cultural and regional origin but are living away from their traditional homeland. Diasporas come about through immigration and forced movements of people” (National Geographic, 2023). The diasporic community carry out any relevant activities where culture is one of the main elements. The community actualizes its cultural expression. Furthermore, the cultural events held by the community can be formal or informal. The English language is often the first language of the diaspora to be able to communicate in their destination countries. On this, Tomalin and Hurn (2013) state “a significant immigrant population can also

influence the image of a country abroad by virtue of its skills and culture, which add value to the host country and reflect well on their country of origin” (p.232). English, therefore, is pivotal in bridging the situations.

4. Conclusions

The English language plays a strategic role in the context of cultural diplomacy. The language is a politically powerful and popular medium of instruction for the exercises of cultural diplomacy. To increase a country’s visibility in the international arena, the designated institutions or cultural missions should optimally master the English language in the interest of exercising the cultural exchanges. The experts also recognize that English has long been part of the exercises of the diplomacy with a soft power approach. Last, the uses of English language in the context of cultural diplomacy are reflected in various methods and forms of communication.

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