

**Review Article**

**THE USE OF COMMUNICATIVE MITIGATION STRATEGY IN THE MODERN RUSSIAN LANGUAGE (ON THE MATERIAL OF THE DIPLOMATIC DISCOURSE)**

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**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the analysis of particular features of the speech strategy of mitigation in modern Russian diplomatic discourse. The mitigation strategy as a whole is aimed at softening the evaluation of the described situation, as well as reducing the level of (possible) tension in the situation, and avoiding categorical evaluation of something or someone. In the Russian diplomatic discourse, the strategy of mitigation is represented by the tactics of preterition (intentional understatement), generalization, evasion of a direct negative answer, or direct denial, removal (depersonalization of the subject of the utterance), as well as tactics of lithotomy mitigation. The content side and the means of linguistic expression of each of the tactics are also considered in the process of analysis.

**Key Words:** mitigation strategy, speech strategies and tactics, diplomatic discourse, hint tactics, preterition tactics, generalization tactics.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Diplomatic discourse, as a type of institutional discourse, involving communication either within the same social institution (for example, a professional communication between two ministers of foreign affairs), or representatives of two different social institutions (for example, a diplomat with parliamentarians, with representatives of the general public) (Karasik 2000, p. 6), attracts the attention of researchers more and more as a special form of “communicative activity, the main difference of which from other types of communication is its multidirectional nature, which is due to various goals and objectives realized in different contexts - public and closed” (Terentij 2010, p. 48).

In modern linguistics, both foreign and Russian, one can talk about several of the most significant areas in the study of diplomatic discourse, namely: the psycholinguistic branch, in which the intentional structure of successful diplomatic discourse is studied, and a set of intentions is revealed that allows diplomats to achieve their assigned goals in the negotiation process (Terentij 2010; Terentij 2016); linguistic and communicative branch, in which line such linguistic and communicative characteristics of diplomatic discourse as national-cultural marking, communicativeness and information content are presented (Trabelsi 2013); a linguo-pragmatic branch, which involves identifying the most active speech strategies and tactics, while the language means representing them, used to convince the addressee, which can be both a professionally trained corps of diplomatic workers of other countries and the widest masses of the population (D’Acquisto 2017; Kozheteva 2012) as well as an analysis of conceptual metaphors of diplomatic discourse (Wageche1 & Changhai 2017), a study of the specifics of digital diplomacy (Grincheva 2012, Corneliu Bjola & Holmes 2015, Hocking, Melissen 2015), and the use of discourse analysis techniques to study the language of diplomatic negotiations (Jacobs 2016).

Therefore, speech communication in the field of diplomacy, in particular, the problems associated with the selection and adjustment of speech strategies and tactics in the course of professional communication of a diplomat, seem to be insufficiently studied. In particular, the pragmatic potential that this discourse possesses and

which helps to achieve the communicative goals set by the diplomat in the course of solving his professional tasks is relevant for the study.

The necessity to study diplomatic discourse in the aspect of the conscious choice of certain communication strategies and tactics representing them is explained, in our opinion, by the trends in the rapid development of public diplomatic communication. The public form of diplomatic discourse involves, first of all, open informing the society through the media about issues related to international affairs, the state’s domestic and foreign policy in the genres of speeches, statements, interviews, press conferences, as well as speeches by diplomatic workers in various international organizations on foreign and domestic policy of the country. We can say that public diplomatic communication is largely a linguistic activity, the purpose of which is to “directly influence the course of events” (Terentij 2010, p. 49; Terentij 2016), ensuring international security, resolving international conflicts, shaping public opinion by disseminating information in the media, creating a certain vision of intergovernmental contacts and international relations.

Therefore, the topicality of the study is associated with solving a whole range of problems and “practical moves aimed at achieving a communicative goal” (Klyuev 2012, p. 18), namely: we are talking about the study of speech strategies and their representative tactics in the framework of public diplomatic discourse.

The purpose of the work is to identify the features of the mitigation speech strategy that is most significant for public diplomatic discourse. The main objectives of the study are: determination of tactics of the speech strategy of mitigation and analysis of the repertoire of linguistic means representing this strategy in modern Russian diplomatic discourse.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The concepts of speech strategy and speech tactics are interdependent and correlated as a fundamental goal (strategy) and tasks (tactics) required to achieve this goal. Following a number of researchers, the speech strategy is understood by us as “determination of the direction of speech behavior in a given

situation in the interests of achieving the goal of communication and tactics as a concrete step in implementing a strategy, specific choice and sequence of speech actions within this step" (Parshina 2005, p. 8 – 9).

One and the same speech strategy, presented in various discourses, in particular, the strategy of mitigation (the term was introduced in 1980 by the American linguist Fraser 1980), can have different forms of its linguistic manifestation. Mitigation as a linguistic phenomenon has repeatedly become the subject of study primarily in foreign linguistics. It was examined on the basis of various discourses (judicial (Martinovski 2006)), literary in the aspect of "translation of expressions mitigating speech act of criticizing" (Setyawati, Nababan, Djatmika 2018), medical (María Luisa Carrió Pastor 2016), role-playing discourse (Czerwionka 2014), based on one (Flores-Ferrán 2010; Czerwionka 2012, 2014; Thaler 2012; Flores-Ferrán & Lovejoy 2015) or several languages (Martinovski 2006) from a wide range of perspectives.

Foreign linguistics considers mitigation as not only a special type of a speech act, but as its variety (modification) (Fraser 1980, Holmes 1984). From pragmatic point of view "mitigation is defined as a pragmatic, cognitive and linguistic behavior the main purpose of which is reduction of vulnerability" (Martinovski 2006), "linguistic mitigation can be defined as the action of lessening the illocutionary force of an utterance" (Pastor 2016), as well as a synonym of politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987).

In Russian linguistics, the phenomenon of mitigation is analyzed from a pragmatic point of view in the framework of the theory of speech strategies and tactics. According to Tahtarova 2010, the mitigate strategy is aimed at "preserving the communicative balance in interpersonal communication" (p. 6), which in a potentially conflict situation can be maintained by reducing the level of conflict and categoricity. The main characteristics of this strategy are "anti-conflict, non-categorical, non-negative, glorification (increasing the communicative status of communication partners) and emotional restraint" (Tahtarova 2010, p. 6). The speaker uses a variety of linguistic means of mitigative tactics in a conflict situation in order to eliminate or resolve it. In this regard, Tahtarova accurately observes that mitigative tactics are oriented towards the interlocutor (Tahtarova 2007) and are aimed at maintaining communicative contact and at conflict-free communication (Tahtarova 2011, p. 227; Volkova 2010).

Mitigative strategies and the tactics representing them have already been studied on the basis of the political debates of the 2008 election campaign in the Russian Federation (Parshina 2005), political and diplomatic interviews (Karakulova 2016; Volkov 2010), the literary text (Tahtarova 2008), however, their detailed analysis on the material of the public form of diplomatic discourse has not been carried out yet.

The linguistic means of expression that represent the mitigation strategy, on the one hand, are a characteristic feature of the language of diplomats, on the other hand, are sufficiently conventional and clichéd (stereotyped), which is determined by the institutional nature of this discourse, namely, this type of communication takes place either within the same or different social institutions (Karasić 2016, p. 6). The speaker (diplomat) does not reveal his personal position on a number of issues, however, the position of the country, strictly aimed at protecting the interests of his country, ensuring international security, resolving international conflicts. The addressee during the public speech of the diplomat is the diplomatic community of another country (other countries), that is, the collective addressee (Terentij 2010), as well as the general public. These features of the institutional nature of diplomatic discourse require a strict choice of language tools, their reflection and adjustment, which is expressed in the significant implications of the speech of the diplomat, which, as our study shows, is the main means of mitigation.

Researchers, as a rule, distinguish the following five tactics that represent the speech strategy of mitigation: tactics of emphasizing the subjectivity of opinion, tactics of modus restriction, tactics of lithotomy mitigation and tactics of deictic depersonalization (Tahtarova 2011, p. 234; Karakulova 2016).

#### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In public diplomatic discourse, the mitigation strategy is presented by such tactics as tactics of preterition (intentional understatement), tactics of generalization, tactics of avoiding a direct negative answer, tactics of removal (depersonalization of the subject of utterance), tactics of lithological mitigation. Each of these tactics has their own content side and means of linguistic expression.

In our research we have analyzed the tactics of preterition, evading a direct negative answer and removal (depersonalization of the subject of the utterance) that are most significant for public diplomatic communication.

The tactic of preterition (intentional understatement) is aimed at implicating part of the meaning of the statement in order to mitigate the (possible) tension in the situation with the help of a certain system of linguistic means. Following Ivanyan (2015), the preterition is understood as "imaginary uncertainty, since when using the named concept, the addressee definitely knows what subject, symptom, phenomenon of reality we are talking about. Therefore, the imaginary uncertainty of the indicative situation (of the subject, sign, state of affairs) is based on actual certainty" (p. 49). Absolute understanding by the speaker of the state of affairs // of the subject // of the person being silent in speech indicates the intention of this phenomenon, that is, intentional understatement. They speak of two types of preterition: 1) the preterition itself and 2) the preterition-hint (the preterition itself is usually equated with not saying the end of the phrase) (Ivanyan 2015; p. 49-52). In the oral form of public diplomatic discourse, we can observe numerous cases of using tactics of preterition-hint.

The tactic of preterition-hint is aimed at transmitting "intentional meanings from the speaker to the listener with the expectation of their extraction in the form of implications" (Artemova 2014, p. 8). This tactic has already been the subject of close study (Artemova 2014; Baranov 2006; Shatunovskij 2014), where the hint is attributed to the number of methods of indirect transmission of information and is qualified as "receiving implicit speech exposure" (Baranov 2006).

In public diplomatic discourse, a preterition-hint is used as one of the means of mitigation, allowing the diplomat to avoid tensions or categorical assessments of events, facts, relying on the background knowledge of the communicants, primarily with the aim of 1) implicit pointing out any participants in diplomatic communication or the state of affairs, 2) their non-names, 3) mitigation of the situation of conviction, as well as 4) the formulation of a rhetorical question.

The analysis of the material shows that a number of linguistic means are methods of expressing the tactics of an allusion in the oral form of a public diplomatic discourse.

An implicit hint is contained in statements where there is a metaphorical use of verbs such as *искрить*, *выдохнуться*, *милитаризовать* (sparkling, breathing out, militarizing), as well as phrases such as *уши коммерческих интересов*, *грязевой поток*, *остатки нашей двусторонней посуды*, *собрать черепки*, *санкционированная материя*, *вымести мусор* (ears of commercial interests, mud flow, the remnants of our double-sided dishes, collecting shards, sanction materials, sweep out garbage), etc. For example: "Если же посмотреть шире на то, что мы называем трансатлантической связкой, мы увидим, что связка эта искрит" ("If we look more broadly at what we call the transatlantic ligament, we will see that this ligament sparkles") (Interview of the Permanent Representative of Russia to the EU, V. Chizhov, to the Russia Today news agency, August 4, 2017 (<http://www.mid.ru>)), where a diplomat, using the verb to spark in a figurative

meaning, veils the component of meaning "there are significant problems between the members of the Transatlantic Alliance, evident from the outside."

Another way to create a preterition-hint is to use indefinite and demonstrative pronouns like *кто-то, где-то, у кого-то, какой-нибудь, тех, кто, не то, те, кто, некие, от тех, кто* (someone, somebody, somewhere, some, those who, not that, from those) who and many others, as well as adjectives and phrases with indefinite semantics such as *другие, различные, некоторые, группа избранных, всяческое содействие, целый ряд* (others, various, some, a group of chosen ones, all kinds of assistance, a whole series) + genitive case of a noun, like *простые встречи, конкретные моменты* (simple things, specific moments) containing an implicit component and indicating a person or situation. For example: "*Франция сделала 7 мая свой выбор, и мы с уважением относимся к решению французских избирателей. ...Как вы знаете, в последние годы не по нашей вине была приостановлена деятельность некоторых институтов двустороннего сотрудничества*" ("France made its choice on May 7, and we respect the decision of the French voters. ... As you know, during recent years, it was not our fault that the activities of some institutions of bilateral cooperation have been suspended") (Interview of the Ambassador of Russia in France A.K. Orlov to the TASS news agency, May 26, 2017 // <http://www.mid.ru>). This example contains a hint-directive indicating the suspension of the activities of the Large Russian-French Inter-Parliamentary Commission, in the "two plus two" format - joint meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense.

As you can see, on the one hand, the use of various groups of vocabulary with an indefinite meaning allows the diplomat not to name objects, faces, countries, situations directly; on the other hand, in such contexts it is not always possible to restore the implicated component unambiguously due to the wide denotative attribution of indefinite pronouns and phrases. The identification of the implicated component is highly dependent on the surrounding context and situation.

One of the infrequent ways to create a hint is euphemization, which is usually understood as replacing an unwanted, uncomfortable for any reason word or expression with a neutral one in order to soften the statement. The peculiarity of euphemisms is that they soften, but do not veil, the subject of the statement. For example: "*Продолжена порочная практика проведения дистанционных расследований «в соседней с Сирией стране»*" ("The vicious practice of conducting remote investigations "in the neighboring country of Syria" was continued") (Speech by the head of the Russian delegation, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OPCW, Ambassador A.V. Shulgin at the 55th meeting of the OPCW Executive Council (report on the investigation of the incident in Khan-Sheikhune), The Hague, July 5, 2017 (<http://www.mid.ru>) - a hint of Iraq, where weapons of mass destruction were allegedly discovered in 2003. In this example, euphemism serves as a non-name.

The tactic of avoiding a direct negative answer, or from direct negation (Trabelsi 2013) is such a way of organizing language means that allows a diplomat to veil a negative answer, or mitigate it, make it less categorical using various methods of implicating direct negation. Certain types of denial, such as direct denial, reinforced denial, softened denial, evasive denial, have already been the subject of research on the material of public American diplomatic discourse (Golovanova 2013; 2014). Within the framework of public Russian diplomatic discourse, the methods of implication of direct negation are the following: 1) an indication of only the reason // condition // consequence of the situation, excluding the negation from the statement; 2) the use of mental verbs, like *думать, считать* (thinking, counting) in their primary meaning of mental activity and verbs of the type like *видеть* (to see) in the secondary mental meaning with negation, as well as *помнить / припомнить* (remembering / recalling) verbs of the memory type in a negative construct and impersonal constructions of the type *мне (нам) не кажется* (do not seem to me (us)); 3)

the use of particles like *едва ли, вряд ли* (hardly), with a value of doubtfulness or improbability.

The use of mental verbs (verbs of other classes in the mental meaning) in a construction with negation in the main part of a complex sentence allows the speaker to shift the listener's attention from an action that actually needs to be denied to a mental verb that gives the expression the value of a subjective interpretation of what is being said in the subordinate clause. For example: "*Не думаю, что это слишком завышенные требования. Япония ратифицировала этот документ...*" ("I do not think these are too high requirements. Japan ratified this document ...") (Speech and answers to media questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at the press conference on the results of Russian diplomacy in 2015, Moscow, January 26, 2016 // <http://www.mid.ru>). In this example, the statement as a whole contains an implicit denial of 'claims are not overstated.' Compare with the use of a direct categorical answer, which is not very characteristic of diplomatic discourse. For example: "*Мы категорически против тех провокаций, которые устраивает Северная Корея*" ("We are categorically against the provocations that North Korea is happy with") (Speech and answers to media questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at the Karber Foundation, Berlin, July 13, 2017 (<http://www.mid.ru>)). The given example contains implicit negation expressing a negative evaluation of the described state of affairs. However, this negative rating function is not the only one. The negative construction with the verbs of memory, like *помнить / припомнить* (remember / recall) expresses a softened refutation of the situation described in the previous context. For example: "*Сейчас я не припомню, с какими просьбами за последнее время мы обращались к нашим западным коллегам*" ("Now I don't remember which requests we have made recently to our Western colleagues") (Opening remarks by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Fourth Ministerial Round of the Russia-GCC Strategic Dialogue, Moscow, May 26, 2016. (<http://www.mid.ru>). Here, the tactic of avoiding a direct negative answer is realized by replacing a construction *никогда не* (never) + a verb with a construction with negation *не (при)помню, с какими* (I don't remember) which contains implicit negation = 'We did not address our Western colleagues with requests'.

The use of the construction *едва ли (вряд ли)* (hardly (unlikely)) + the verb is associated with the description of a certain state of affairs, which "seems to the speaker doubtful or unlikely" (Baranov, Plungyan, Rakhilina 1993, p. 19), but actually represents a hidden denial. Following Kalinina (2010), we proceed from a narrow understanding of the category of doubt as a category opposed to the assumption, "the markers of which are introductory modal words such as probably subjective-modal particles, like *чай, небось, авось, будто, как будто* (maybe, probably, as if) etc. For example: *Возможно, он придет* (Perhaps he will come) (Issers 2002, p. 108). The particles *вряд ли* and *едва ли* (hardly) serve as markers of doubt, which, unlike assumptions markers, signal the denial of a certain state of affairs. Compare: а) *Вряд ли сегодня он придет = скорее всего, не придет* (It is unlikely that he will come today = 'most likely he will not come) and б) *Возможно, сегодня он придет* is not equal to *скорее всего, не придет* (Perhaps today he will come vs 'most likely he will not come'). Thus, the correlation of the categories of doubt / assumption is directly related to the opposition affirmation / negation, namely: "presumptive statements and statements-doubts are opposed to each other by the positive / negative modal connotations of the reported" (Issers 2002, p. 110). In addition, statements with indicators of presumptiveness and statements with indicators of doubtfulness in the described state of affairs also differ in their communicative orientation, that is, they have a positive or negative attitude. Statements-assumptions have a positive attitude, and statements-doubts have a negative attitude. The latter expresses the negative attitude of the speaker to the described state of affairs.

An introduction to the utterance of particles *вряд ли* and *едва ли* (hardly) allows us to speak of a softened, non-categorical denial. For example: "Вопрос: Некоторые эксперты склонны считать, что эти угрозы зачастую преувеличены. Ответ: Такие суждения несерьезны. Едва ли эти эксперты таковыми являются (Question: Some experts tend to believe that these threats are often exaggerated. Answer: Such judgments are not serious. These experts are hardly so professional)" (Interview with State Secretary and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia GB Karasin to the *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* newspaper, published on April 7, 2016) = "they are not experts in the real sense of the word." The use of a particle *едва ли* (hardly) indicates a discrepancy between what was said and the real state of affairs, veiled in doubt. Compare with the construction *едва ли не* (hardly, if not) + a noun group denoting the statement: *На этот раз перед нами стоят всеобщие глобальные угрозы, которые касаются всех и с которыми мы сталкиваемся едва ли не каждый день, такие, как теракты на Ближнем Востоке и в Европе* (This time we face global threats that concern everyone and that we face almost every day, such as terrorist attacks in the Middle East and Europe) = 'we face every day' (Interview with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov to the National Interest magazine, published March 29, 2017 (<http://www.mid.ru>)). In the following example, "Вопрос: А реален ли повторный референдум в Великобритании? Ответ: Я думаю, что партнеры Великобритании по Евросоюзу такой вариант вряд ли будут приветствовать" ("Question: Is a second referendum realistic in the UK?" Answer: I think that the UK partners in the European Union are unlikely to welcome such an option") (Interview of the Permanent Representative of Russia to the EU, V. Chizhov to the Russia Today news agency, June 29, 2016 (<http://www.mid.ru>)), the usage of particle *вряд ли* (unlikely), on the one hand, creates a softening effect, on the other hand, it reveals an implicit negative evaluation of 'most likely they will not welcome it.' It should be noted that, depending on the situation of usage and the lexical environment, these particles may not introduce the meaning of doubt. Rather, on the contrary, they give the statement a mild form of absolute negation. Such statements are possible both in interpersonal communication, and in the diplomatic discourse we are studying. Compare: a) *Едва ли (вряд ли) команда будет согласна на столь оглушительное поражение* (The team will hardly (unlikely) agree to such a deafening defeat (in a situation, for example, match-fixing)) = "naturally, it will not agree." b) *Сравнение ее действий с «хирургической операцией» вряд ли уместно на фоне многочисленных жертв среди мирных жителей и разрушенной гражданской инфраструктуры* (Comparison of its actions with a "surgical operation" is hardly appropriate against the background of numerous victims among civilians and destroyed civilian infrastructure) = "more than not appropriate, completely inappropriate" (Answers of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov to questions from readers of the newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty* (<http://www.mid.ru>)). We can say that despite the form, such statements in a meaningful way express "a confident statement of the opposite."

The statement in the construction with *вряд ли* кто-то (*кто, кто-нибудь, где, где-то, где-нибудь, кому-то*, etc. (hardly anyone (who, someone, where, somewhere, someone, etc.)) + a verb is interpreted somewhat differently. For example: "Вряд ли кто-то может оспаривать, что это естественная тенденция, связанная с перераспределением глобального баланса сил" (It is unlikely that anyone can dispute that this is a natural tendency related to the redistribution of the global balance of power), where *вряд ли кто-то* (unlikely that anyone) implicitly contains a cumulative (double) denial = "apparently, no one can dispute."

The tactic of removal (depersonalization of the subject of the utterance) is aimed at a certain intentional distancing of the speaker, allowing you to step back a bit and thus express a softened assessment of events, facts. This tactic is implemented by using, for example, impersonal constructions, like it seems to

be important (unlikely, incomprehensible, unconvincing, not entirely correct, necessary), it would be erroneous to believe that, it would be right to consider (think), etc. For example: "Разумеется, говорить о выходе на какие-либо соглашения пока преждевременно, но, как представляется, взаимный интерес государств-членов ЕАЭС и АСЕАН налицо (Of course, talking about reaching agreements is premature, but it seems that the mutual interest of the EAEU and ASEAN member states is evident)" (Interview of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia I.V. Morgulov to TASS News Agency, May 13, 2016 and // <http://www.mid.ru>). Another example: "Ошибочно полагать, что Россия ангажирована на поддержку здесь какой-то одной политической силы (It is a mistake to believe that Russia is biased to support one political force here)" = "The Russians are not biased to support any one political force here." (Interview of the Ambassador of Russia in Macedonia ON Shcherbak to the newspaper *Nova Macedonia*, published April 23, 2016 // <http://www.mid.ru>)

The speaker's (diplomat's) detachment can also be achieved by referring to the fundamental principles of international law, an officially stated point of view, ethical standards, insufficient information (or its quality), as well as a declaration of the principle of non-interference in the domestic politics of other countries. For example: "Каждая страна имеет право выстраивать самостоятельный диалог с любой страной, в том числе и по вопросам терроризма. Такое право есть у США и Турции (Each country has the right to build an independent dialogue with any country, including on terrorism. The United States and Turkey have such a right)" (declaration of the principle of non-interference in the domestic politics of other countries) (Briefing by Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson M.V. Zakharova, Moscow, May 18, 2017 (<http://www.mid.ru>)).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the mitigation strategy as a whole is aimed at softening the evaluation of the described state of affairs, as well as reducing the level of (possible) tension in the situation, and avoiding categorical evaluation of something or someone. Such mitigation is achieved with the help of speech tactics, which are based on various types of implication, aimed at preterition (intentional underestimation), a hint with the expectation that the listener will guess the true meaning, generalization of the topic of conversation, avoidance of a direct answer, suspension, or the speaker's distancing, which allows not to express personal interest in any issues. The choice of tactics and language means representing them is a strictly thought-out, absolutely conscious and verified series of speech decisions strategically aimed at resolving a real or potential conflict situation; a professional tool of influence, allowing the diplomat to maintain a high level of communicative competence to solve the tasks facing him to protect the national interests of the country.

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