DIPLOMATIC AMBIGUITY IN INTERPRETER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

by

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Keywords

Abstract

English

When we observe the interpreters in their booths battling with ambiguity in order to find the accurate meaning of an ambiguous utterance, we inevitably come to the realization of the daunting impact of ambiguities on the latter. Ambiguity in general and diplomatic ambiguity in particular, is a thorn in interpreters' sides. Then, the main question is "what strategies can the interpreter use to cope successfully with diplomatic ambiguity?" How do interpreters manage to find ways of resolving instances of ambiguity when interpreting in a diplomatic setting that requires *immediate* disambiguation. This mini-dissertation investigates the theme of diplomatic ambiguity in interpreter-mediated communication and comes up with responses to these concerns and queries.

It (this mini-dissertation) primarily focuses on interpreting as an act of communication insofar as interpreting is a professional verbal communication activity. It then looks specifically into ambiguity in diplomatic communication. Diplomatic communication is often riddled with ambiguity; in turn, ambiguity, affects and correlates to meaning. And here lies the problem with diplomatic ambiguity: diplomatic ambiguity prevents a proper understanding or reception of the intended meaning. It therefore poses problems to the interpreter. In view of the above, this mini-dissertation has a practical purpose: to provide the interpreter with a clear sense of problem-solving techniques for the resolution of ambiguity. In this respect, coping tactics and strategies will be proposed as a means of clarifying ambiguities, elucidating obscure passages.

French

Lorsque l'on assiste au spectacle d'interprètes s'échinant dans leurs cabines à trouver le vrai sens d'une expression ambiguë, l'on se rend bien vite compte des effets redoutables de l'ambiguïté sur ces derniers. La question de l'ambiguïté en général, celle de l'ambiguïté du discours diplomatique en particulier, constitue une écharde dans le flanc de tout interprète. Alors, la question majeure qui se pose est de savoir «à quelles stratégies les interprètes peuvent-ils recourir pour faire face avec succès à l'ambiguïté diplomatique?». Comment les interprètes arrivent-ils à remédier aux problèmes d'ambiguïté diplomatique surgissant au cours de l'interprétation et qui requièrent une désambiguïsation sur le champ ? Ce mémoire traite de la question de l'ambiguïté diplomatique en

situation de communication médiée par un interprète et vient en réponse aux interrogations et préoccupations ci-dessus.

Ce mémoire aborde en premier chef la question de l'interprétation conçue comme un acte communicationnel dans la mesure où elle se définit comme un exercice de communication orale fait par un professionnel. Ensuite, un accent particulier sera mis sur l'ambigüité dans la communication diplomatique qui en recèle souvent; à son tour, l'ambiguïté entrave l'appréhension du sens [des mots ou concepts] auquel elle étroitement liée. C'est ici donc que se situe toute la problématique de l'ambiguïté diplomatique: l'ambiguïté diplomatique obstrue aussi bien la bonne compréhension que la réception du message à transmettre. Dès lors surgissent des difficultés d'interprétation. Au regard de ce qui précède, ce mémoire se veut pragmatique: susciter au sein des interprètes le réflexe de la recherche de techniques de résolution des problèmes de l'ambiguïté. Pour ce faire, un éventail de tactiques et stratégies susceptibles d'aider à clarifier et élucider les instances d'ambiguïté sera mis à disposition.

I.   Introduction

Owing to the phenomenon of globalization, we are living both in an interconnected world and in an age of swift communication. In such a world, international peace and security can only be guaranteed through effective dialogue and negotiation carried out by diplomats. "Conducting multilateral diplomatic or economic relations in the multilingual mode has become the standard way to do business" (Nolan, 2012, p.xii). The exponential growth in globalization and regional integration of the past decades has resulted in a surge in the number of multilingual conferences (Nolan, 2012, p.1). Communication is at the heart of effective diplomacy, and language the medium *par excellence* whereby communication is carried out. The snag is that most statesmen, diplomats and executives have neither the time nor the talent to master the array of languages required to address each delegate in his/her own language. Interpreters are therefore employed to facilitate communication between the different parties, helping the speakers to make themselves understood and the listeners to understand what is being said (Nolan, 2012, p.xii). As Savory (1968, p.25) puts it, "at all times and places translations [interpreting in this instance] have been made… with no other thought in the mind of the translator [or the interpreter] than to remove the barrier that is placed by a difference in languages".

This research revolves around the axis of *diplomatic ambiguity in interpreter-mediated communication* and it is worth noting right from the outset that the term 'interpreting' is used interchangeably with 'translation'. Both interpreting and translation in the broader sense are equally used to refer to one and the same reality. The two concepts are used here to refer to the oral activity consisting of the transfer of meaning from a source language to a target language. Today, "the world has come to rely on interpretation for cross-cultural communication in real time" (Nolan, 2012, p.xii). Interpreting is concerned with live spoken language and "can be defined in a nutshell as conveying understanding. Its value stems from the fact that a speaker's meaning is best expressed in his or her native tongue but is best understood in the languages of the listeners" (Nolan, 2012, p.xi). Understanding is conveyed from the speaker to the listener by means of a middleman. This alone should suffice to draw the conclusion that "mediation on different levels forms the core of the interpreter's task" (Verhoef and Du Plessis, 2008, p.166). This concurs with Kalina (2000, p.5) who suggests that interpreters do their work with the aim of mediating interlingually. Interpreting calls for listening, comprehension and (re)production skills.

Comprehension, though a *sine qua non* for interpreting, often becomes problematic in diplomatic settings. For Morrison (2010, p.14),

> the nature of spoken language is full of subtleties (and intricacies) such that it makes proper reception of intended messages very difficult. What teacher has never set a test only to find several students returning quite naively an answer to a completely different question than was intended? Or to take a case of speech act, who has never mistakenly provided an answer to a rhetorical question? In a dialogue, people's perception of what is meant by a single word can be drastically different. A.B. Bozeman of Princeton University says that diverse people are often 'speaking of different things even while uttering the same words'.

Utterance or word choice as well as prosodic features including body language and meta-communication (communication about communication) are some factors likely to drastically alter the meaning of a sentence, speech, or entire discussion. To comprehend or to understand is to grasp meaning and to provide accurate interpreting. Meaning, the essential issue in communication, is central to the present topic.

Indeed, the topic is premised on the claim that meaning is the *finis* or *telos*, that is to say, the end goal of communication between human beings. Meaning is typically defined as message fidelity: does the interpreter understand the transmitted message as the sender intended it? The fidelity or accurateness of interpreting can be negatively impacted if the interpreter's perception of meaning is different to the meaning the speaker intended to convey. Jönsson (Morrison, 2010) makes it clear in his research on international bargaining that meaning is the foundation of communication issues.

Meaning is undoubtedly the cornerstone of linguistic issues in interpreter-mediated communication. Meaning is the way the interpreter comprehends and interprets or renders a speaker's words or utterances. In philosophy of language what matters above all is not so much what is said as what is understood. In view of the above, several questions, including the following, come to mind. How do interpreters manage to discern the meaning hidden within words, the intention behind words and, thus, transcend interpretational mishaps in a diplomatic setting? How to ensure a proper transfer of meaning between speakers of different languages? When considering the many possible readings that so many sentences can have, how do interpreters manage to ignore all or most of the impossible ones and finally decide on the correct one? These are some questions

that need to be answered. The relevance of these questions is manifest in the challenges posed by the pervasiveness or ubiquity of ambiguity in interpreter-mediated diplomatic communication.

Savory (1968, p.9) makes it plain that "no one who is interested in language can for long confine his interest to his native language only, and from the moment that his thoughts are tuned to the words and phrases used in other countries he is brought face to face with the [problems of diplomatic ambiguity in interpreter-mediated communication]. Almost as soon as he begins to realize the nature of these problems he is likely to find himself ensnared by their fascination". Ambiguity proves to be a major linguistic issue insofar as it increases the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation, with the interpreter running the risk of picking the wrong meaning. Ambiguity is by nature a word, an utterance or a speech segment the meaning of which cannot be easily and correctly construed. This definition of ambiguity adequately captures the essence of diplomatic language that carries connotations of deliberate doubtfulness, deceitfulness and pretence. With ambiguity the interpreter finds himself or herself in a dilemma and is brought face to face with the paradox of diplomatic communication.

Wilss (1996, p.143) reminds us that "in communicating, we are trying, more or less successfully, to establish 'communality' with someone, i.e., we are trying to share information, an idea, a concept, or an attitude. Hence the essence of communication is getting the sender and the recipient [or different parties] 'tuned' to each other for a specific message", and this is what diplomacy is all about. The prime objective of diplomacy is to create conditions conducive to a mediated and improved relationship between diplomatic entities through communication. Unfortunately, the sad realization is that language, "the medium for debate in diplomatic meetings, is not so straightforward; rather, it is fuzzy and calculated. Diplomatic language comes with hidden baggage, baggage of many shapes and forms: historical and political context, legal precedent, whatever, that shape the words' content" (Morrison, 2010). Herein lies the paradox of ambiguous diplomatic communication: meaning, or the content of the message, is encoded in words carefully chosen by the speaker; and the interpreter's task is to accurately convey this meaning to the listener. To do so, the interpreter needs to understand the speaker to a sufficient degree. The rub is that strategic and deliberate diplomatic ambiguity tends to subvert and annihilate meaning, thereby preventing understanding; hence the paradox of ambiguous diplomatic communication. Still, ambiguity is of the highest importance in diplomatic communication.

Ambiguity casts doubts and allows uncertainty to persist in the interpreter as regards the apprehension of the speaker's meaning. Diplomatic ambiguity is intentionally and cunningly maintained; it has self-evident utility in diplomatic negotiations in the international arena. Jönsson (Morrison, 2010) confirms the ambiguous nature of diplomatic discourse when he says that "communication in international bargaining is inherently ambiguous". Diplomatic ambiguity plays a prominent role in diplomatic circles, for it is a tactic or strategy often used by diplomats. Diplomatic ambiguity is deliberate or intentional ambiguity. While being a trump card in the hands of diplomats, diplomatic ambiguity proves to be a thorn in the flesh of the interpreters insofar as it negatively impacts meaning apprehension.

Diplomatic ambiguity "directly affects and correlates to meaning, which is the primary place where misunderstanding occurs in any sort of discussion or negotiation" (Pehar, 2005). Different perceptions of meaning represent huge stumbling blocks for the efficiency and effectiveness of any diplomatic communication. Meaning is the intrinsic challenge in the interpretation of live conversation. Meaning rendering or interpreting "is an activity that combines comprehension and… inventive power and therefore requires cycles of receptive and productive competence" (Wilss, 1996, p.52). When meaning is so indeterminate that the interpreter has to resort to guesswork, there is little chance of the message being properly conveyed in another language, regardless of the skills and professionalism of the interpreter: hence the demand for disambiguation, that is, the resolution of ambiguity. A study by Mackay (Kess and Hoppe, 1981) "points to the conclusion that ambiguity interferes with our understanding of meaning. Ambiguous sentences are somehow inherently more complex, imposing more severe constraints on the cognitive processing systems". Meaning is the bedrock of inter-subjective communication; on the other hand, ambiguity proves to be an impediment to the grasp of the intended meaning. It goes without saying that ambiguity poses a serious challenge to the interpreter.

As evidenced in "Man vs. machine: interpreting the ambiguities in diplomatic negotiations" Morrison (2010), ambiguity is the cornerstone of linguistic issues in interpreter-mediated communication. The misunderstanding or confusion generated by ambiguity is the main linguistic impediment to smooth communication in a diplomatic setting. Here is what Morrison (2010) has to say about that:

> Ambiguity represents an obstacle to language based on the view of language as nothing but an information transmission device. If the primary aim of language consists in transmitting information, in conveying knowledge from human being A to human being B, then ambiguity seems to run contrary to that aim as it leaves the interpreter with a less transparent and less usable kind of data, thus increasing the risks of misinterpreting.

By preventing language from fulfilling its function as an information transmission device, ambiguity turns out to be an obstacle to language. Ambiguity throws the interpreter into confusion and total disarray. Ambiguity thus leads to problems in both processing information and communicating.

The interpreter's first impulse is then to solve the problems in the most established manner. And it is this search for solutions that raises many concerns and questions. *"What strategies can the interpreter use to cope successfully with diplomatic ambiguity?"* Such is the main question that runs throughout this mini-dissertation. Can the interpreter process ambiguity given the practically instantaneous and virtually correction-free comprehension and (re)production process of interpreting? How are ambiguous sentences comprehended and processed by the interpreter? How does the ambiguous word activate both the appropriate intended and the inappropriate meanings, as diplomatic ambiguity means multiple potential and even incompatible meanings? Should the interpreter, in cases of deliberate or intentional diplomatic ambiguity, retain the ambiguity in his or her interpretation or choose the meaning he or she deems to be the right or appropriate one? These are some of the major concerns raised by the topic that need to be addressed. In that light, and in view of all those questions, it is needless to expatiate upon the need for problem-solving techniques.

A careful survey of literature reveals a comparatively small amount of critical attention received by the issue of interpreting diplomatic ambiguity. To date, it is hard to find surveys on the processing and interpreting of diplomatic ambiguity. There have been many experimental studies on ambiguity in general, almost beyond the counting, but appraisals of the art of the interpreter with respect to interpreting diplomatic ambiguity specifically are in proportion fewer. A researcher on the interpretation of diplomatic ambiguity is unlikely to come upon a couple of dozen. Scholars who have articulated the issue of interpreting include D. Gile. In his book, *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training*, Gile sets out his understanding of the notion of interpreting and puts forth tactics and strategies to help interpreters cope with interpreting

challenges. In *Man vs. machine: interpreting the ambiguities in diplomatic negotiations* C. Morrison states that there is a pressing need for human interpreters especially when it comes to resolving the ambiguities in diplomatic communication. In fact, language in diplomatic communication serves the purposes of power. Hence the power-centric theory of diplomatic ambiguity proposed by D. Pehar in *Diplomatic ambiguity: from the power-centric practice to a reasoned theory.* Diplomatic ambiguity means several potential and even incompatible meanings, which poses a threat to communication with the interpreter running the risk of missing the point. This issue is taken up by U. Eco in *Interpretation and overinterpretation*. However the good news is that there is a way out. A number of scholars, including J. Nolan in *Interpretation: Techniques and exercises*, have tried to formulate solutions for interpreting or resolving ambiguity. Though laudable, these efforts leave a few questions unanswered; and this gap accounts for the need to undertake this research.

By offering to theoretically analyse the phenomenon of diplomatic ambiguity, this research seeks to fill the void, spark the debate and take it further. It is a small but valuable contribution to the literature on diplomatic ambiguity and how to interpret or resolve it. My interest in this topic has emerged from a very practical situation: that of interpreters attempting to convey to an audience who speaks another language the meaning of a message as the speaker (sender) meant it – only to experience the difficulty of having to deal with ambiguity, which has to be resolved almost on the spot, in real time. The truth of the matter is that ambiguity is a reality in diplomatic communication; something actual that interpreters are faced with in their daily professional routine. This undertaking is an inquiry into ways of coping with ambiguous structures. Its primary focus is to demonstrate the difficulties that the intricacies of language present when interpreting rapid live speech, and to provide the interpreter with problem-solving techniques as an aid in determining meaning. In this respect, coping tactics and strategies will be proposed as a means of clarifying ambiguities, elucidating obscure passages. This means formulating a viable response to diplomatic ambiguity. In other words, this mini-dissertation has an overt practical purpose: to provide the interpreter with a clear sense of strategies in dealing with ambiguity in diplomatic discourse whilst interpreting.

To achieve this end, I shall dwell mainly on scholars whose works are available in libraries, as well as on material available online. For various reasons, a qualitative and literature-based approach would be best suited to the present research. This approach or research method applies

to a wide variety of research fields, including translation and interpreting studies. According to Denzin and Lincoln, "qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world": things are studied in their natural context, with the researcher trying to understand and to interpret them "in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Davies, 2007, p.10). Qualitative research produces descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour… Qualitative research is understanding people from their own frames of reference and experiencing reality as they experience it" (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault, 2015, pp.7-8). The first building block of this research will revolve around the axis of interpreting as an act of communication, in chapter I. This first move will be followed, in chapter II, by an exploration of ambiguity in diplomatic communication. And finally, in chapter III, coping tactics and strategies will be proposed as means of resolving or interpreting diplomatic ambiguity.

II. Interpreting as an Act of Communication

This first chapter of the research addresses the critical issue of interpreting in close relation with diplomatic communication, since interpreting is an essential tool for conducting diplomatic meetings. Diplomatic meetings often bring together people with different linguistic backgrounds; and this is why diplomats resort to interpreters to discharge their duties. It then seems critical right from the start to understand what is meant by 'interpreting' in order to fully capture and appreciate its importance in diplomatic meetings.

II.1 Interpreting

The treatment of the issue of interpreting here is twofold. It first consists in an attempt to grasp the essence of the art of interpreting and, second, in a journey into the history of interpreting through ages. What is interpreting? This is the question to be investigated now.

II.1.1 The Essence of Interpreting

The answer to the above question of what interpreting is can be easily found in the current organization of the world. The contemporary world is organized in such a way that communication is central to interactions between groups or individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We are living in a communication age. The communication and information needs of society generate interest in languages other than one's native language. But there is a problem inherent to the multiplicity of languages: the multiplicity of languages "creates a barrier to intercourse which is encountered whenever men try to communicate with one another across a great distance of space or across a great interval of time. [As a result,] something has to be done to overcome this restriction" (Savory, 1968, p.13). Hence we are brought face to face with the issue of interpreting and we begin to question ourselves on the essence or nature of interpreting. What is then interpreting?

Interpreting, to begin with, is a complex multitasking undertaking involving several operations. Wilss (1996, p.51) sees interpreting as "a chain of mental operations in which processes of analysis, interpretation, comparison, analogizing, inferencing, weighing of possibilities,

planning, combining, routinization, problem-solving, etc., are interactively represented". This idea has been taken up by Verhoef and Du Plessis (2008, p.68), who admit

> the fact that interpreting requires the interpreter to multi-task. First, the interpreter has to listen to the source-language message. While listening to the message the interpreter has to understand and conceptualise the message. Then the message needs to be recorded. As soon as the message has been recorded the interpreter must produce a target-language message with the same content and meaning as the source-language message. When a target-language message has been produced, it is important that the interpreter monitor the message that he has produced. As the interpreter has to deliver the target-language message as soon as possible after the source-language message has been delivered, the interpreter has to coordinate all these tasks.

The above-listed tasks are all cognitive operations and serve as "intermediary agents" (Wilss, 1996, p.51) between the comprehension of the speaker's utterances in the source language and their rendering in the target language. In his effort model in simultaneous interpreting Gile (1995a, pp.159-189) distinguishes between three operations: these are the listening and analysis (comprehension) effort, the production effort and the memory effort. The listening and analysis or comprehension effort (L) includes all the comprehension-oriented operations (Gile, 1995a, p.162) while the production effort (P) encompasses all the activities related to the output (Gile, 1995a, p.165).

Besides, it is well worth noting that some of these cognitive operations are automatic and others are non-automatic. Non-automatic operations, especially, consume a good deal of mental 'energy' Gile (1995a, p.161), which quickly runs out, from the interpreter. This accounts for "one of the most striking and challenging phenomena in interpreting, [that is], its fundamental difficulty for the interpreter" (Gile, 1995a, p.159).

Multi-tasking, i.e. combining several cognitive operations, requires special skills, artistry and knowledge; and "the existence of possible alternatives between which the [interpreter] must make his choice is, as we have said, the essence of his art" (Savory, 1968, p.28). The craft of interpreting can somehow be likened to a game of chess; but it is more than that, it is a process.

> Once you know the 'rules' (of a game of chess) there is an infinite number of ways to apply them and an infinite number of combinations that can be analyzed and understood. Unfortunately, particularly for those learning to

interpret, the 'rules' of interpretation (which are a complex series of practices and forms of thinking) are much more complex than the rules of chess. Interpretation is also a learning process: each act of interpreting teaches us more about the processes involved. Like most activities, we learn by practice (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2004, p. 34),

and, as we all know, practice makes perfect. As an art, a craft or a science, interpreting requires the interpreter to exercise maximum flexibility.

What every [interpreter] needs… is a noticeable degree of malleability or plasticity of intellect, with the ability to shunt at crucial times onto another textual (text type-specific) track yielding a behaviour which can effectively handle a wide-ranging spectrum of [interpreting] tasks, each with the necessary degree of conformity with both the intentions of the (source-text) author and the expectations of the (target-text) listener. Only if this plasticity of mind… is guaranteed will it be possible to determine which transfer strategies are most effective in allowing the [interpreter] to practice a high level of [interpreter] performance and to achieve translation results which reveal the full power of the [interpreter's] intellectual potential (Wilss, 1996, p.145),

which is critical in diplomatic negotiation or mediation. Agility, suppleness, flexibility, malleability or plasticity of intellect are, among other things, indispensable requirements for the interpreter's mediating role.

The bounden duty of the interpreter is to mediate interlingually. Linguistic mediation occurs on different levels, including "the communicative, the pragmatic and semiotic spheres of understanding, because of the importance of these environments for the ways in which different speech communities interpret reality" (Hatim and Mason, 1990, p.236ff.). Elaborating on each of these spheres, Hatim and Mason indicate that "while mediation on the communicative level points at the aligning of intended and received information, pragmatic mediation deals with the subtleties of language and ways in which language is employed to account for the context of language usage. Conversely, semiotic mediation points to ways in which the interpreter succeeds in accounting for the underlying socio-ideological sign systems."

In his or her mediating role the interpreter acts like a 'bridge' between different linguistic entities, or rather a "'switchboard operator' handling and rerouting, if necessary, a particular stream of communication" (Wilss, 1996, pp.143-144). His or her [the interpreter's] role is to

facilitate understanding. The interpreter must always approach the discourse with intensity and have the best possible reading or understanding of it. For Melby (1995, pp.3-4) the picture of the Babel fish is the mascot that best epitomizes the interpreter. He thinks that

> anyone who is a fan of Douglas Adams would probably choose the Babel fish. For the benefit of the reader who has not enjoyed *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Adams, 1979), the Babel fish is small, yellow, and leechlike, and probably the oldest thing in the Universe. It feeds on brainwave energy received not from its own carrier but from those around it. It absorbs all unconscious mental frequencies from this brainwave energy to nourish itself with. It then excretes into the mind of its carrier a telepathic matrix formed by combining the conscious thought frequencies with nerve signals picked up from the speech centers of the brain which has supplied them.

The conclusion Melby draws from the above analogy or representation is that the practical result of placing a Babel fish deep in one's ear canal is that thereafter one can understand anything in any language. Unfortunately, though the Babel fish is a striking illustration of or a mascot for the interpreter, it remains but a virtual reality insofar as no such thing exists. And it is in such a context, void of any alternative that the need for human interpreters originates. In interpreting, the interpreter lends his or her mouth and ear to both the speaker and the listener. The "interpreter listens to a spoken message in the source language and renders it orally, consecutively or simultaneously, in the target language" (Nolan, 2012, p.3).

From all that precedes, the essence of interpreting should by now be evident. Wilss (1996, p.52) defines interpreting as "an activity that combines comprehension…, inventive power and therefore requires cycles of receptive and productive competence". Each time we talk about interpreting, we talk about meaning or understanding. This position is shared by Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad (2004, p.7), who defend the idea that, in interpreting, "we are consciously aware of the activity involved in understanding meaning". Interpreting goes hand in hand with understanding or comprehension. The same authors go further to assert that interpreting is "a way of understanding, which consists in grasping meaning. Every act of understanding meaning is an act of interpretation. To interpret… an utterance is to give it meaning." But the fact that the interpreter is bound to follow a path already laid out by the speaker makes understanding and assigning meaning complex. Indeed, "l'exigence de fidélité oblige l'interprète… à suivre de près la pensée de l'orateur ou de l'auteur telle qu'elle s'exprime dans son discours, c'est-à-dire à le

'comprendre' comme le soulignent à satiété tous les praticiens et les enseignants de l'interprétation et de la traduction" [the need for fidelity compels the interpreter …to closely monitor the thinking of the speaker or author as it unfolds in the discourse, that is, 'to understand' it as all the practitioners and lecturers of interpreting and translation underline it over and over again] (Gile, 1995b, p.18). For a definition of interpreting to be comprehensive, it must include both understanding meaning and transfer competence.

It is obviously true that, in the process of interpreting, understanding and transfer skills overlap and are interrelated. Schäffer and Adab (2000, p.6) are adamant that transfer competence, which is comprised of language, text, subject and cultural knowledge, dominates over all the other competences needed in interpreting. As Nida and Taber (Wilss, 1982, p.70) put it, interpreting "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." In interpreting, the interrelated comprehension and transfer abilities make it possible to convey meaning from the source language to the target language. Yet, "the complex interaction of these processes and the difficulty of coordinating them simultaneously in the oral/aural mode require alertness, sensitivity, intense concentration and mental agility" (Nolan, 2012, p.xi).

Interpreting occurs in various versions, including simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting, the two major ones we are mainly concerned with in this instance. As Danks et al. (1997, p.26) indicate, both simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting are concerned with live speech; input as well as output consist of speech. The only difference lies in the time lag between the input and the output. In simultaneous interpreting, information is made available to the listeners at the same time as the speaker speaks. Unlike to what happens in simultaneous interpreting, in consecutive interpreting the interpreter translates speech segments into the listener's language taking advantage of the pauses and natural breaks the speaker makes. The interpreter alternates between listening and speaking. The speaker speaks for a while, during which the interpreter listens (and generally takes notes); only when the speaker has finished does the interpreter take the floor. Let us now turn to the history of interpreting.

II.1.2 Interpreting through the Ages

Go to, let us go down, and there confound
their language, that they may not understand one
another's speech. Gen. XI, 7.

The above-mentioned analogy of the Babel fish and the interpreter sheds light on both the nature and the origin of interpreting. The demand for interpreting stems from the multiplicity of human languages and the inability of people to understand one another. The Babel fish is reminiscent of the Tower of Babel in the Bible, notably in Genesis 11:1-9. This passage relates how God confounds human beings' unique speech and scatters them around the globe. Savory (1968, p.13) shows how "the story of Babel relates, in the form of a legend, the origin of a constraint imposed on the human race from the early days of its evolution… The habit of speaking in different languages is peculiar to man. Thus there has arisen a situation that is biologically unique, the existence of a species in which some individuals are unable to understand the words and expressions of some other individuals." From then on linguistic mediation proves more than ever necessary, for "we are paying a high price for the luxury of speaking in different tongues", Savory adds. This perception of the history of interpreting from the biblical perspective confirms the existence of the interpreting profession going back to the dawn of history and even before.

There is documented evidence indicating that the interpreting profession existed in Ancient Egypt. The discovery of a hieroglyph meaning 'interpreter' is the proof. In "A History of interpreting", Robinson (2016) points to the existence of an epitaph for one Prince of Elephantine from the 3rd century BC that refers to a headman interpreter. Interpreters, according to Herodot, used to form one of the professional associations in Egypt and were present in all the spheres of society and the administrative machinery. Pharaonic Egypt was opened onto the rest of the world through extensive social, economic and cultural exchanges. The use of interpreters was common practice not only in Ancient Egypt, but also in Ancient Greece and Rome. Still according to Robinson, "Caesar, for instance, in 'The Gallic Wars' referred to the provision of 'habitual interpreters' and Cicero established the eternal rule that only silly interpreters provide literal translations".

In medieval times, multiple factors, including religion, combined to increase the demand for interpreters. For their faith many religious people did not hesitate to brave oceans, deserts and forests, travelling to remote areas. Thus, in the 7th and 8th centuries AD, along with trans-Saharan trade, the Arab merchants felt it was their sacred duty to propagate the Muslim faith in West Africa. Here, again, interpreters played a key role: "interpreters assisted in spreading the word of the Koran to the local villages" (Furmanek and Achenbach, 2004). In the same vein, Christianity did not stand on the sidelines of this religious adventure. Here also, Furmanek and Achenbach

acknowledge that "in 1253, William of Rubruck was sent by Louis IX on an expedition into Asia accompanied by interpreters. This was one of the very first large-scale pure mission trips; William's sole purpose was to spread the word of God." Interpreters were in the vanguard of this undertaking.

The Age of Exploration represents another milestone in the history of interpreting. During this era, interpreting made giant strides in terms of advancement. Openness onto the world, the great discoveries overseas, as well as the colonial enterprise helped interpreting gain a foothold. In the words of Furmanek and Achenbach (2004), "interpreters enabled many pacts and treaties to occur that otherwise would not have been possible; [interpreters] have played a large role in the formation of the world that we know today".

In the 20th century, the 1927 Geneva International Labour Conference together with the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial in 1945 opened a new chapter in the development of interpreting. The new solutions or possibilities offered by simultaneous interpreting were tried out at the International Labour Conference. This first step was taken further by the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial that instituted the use of simultaneous interpreting into nearly every meeting, conference and trial in the subsequent years. In fact, shortly after the trial ended, in 1947, the United Nations' Resolution 152 established simultaneous interpreting as a permanent service for the UN, according to Furmanek and Achenbach (2004). This event marked a new phase in the development of interpreting, which was from then on to be used during international meetings and negotiations. But while the practice of interpreting was putting down roots, its theoretical articulation received little attention.

Indeed, Danks et al. (1997) points out that it is only in the late 1960s that researchers showed an interest in the theoretical articulation of interpreting. Intuitive accounts of the interpreting process were the core of research. Works by Panethin in 1957, van Hoof in 1962 and Kade and Cartellieri in 1971 are cases in point. "It was not until mid-1970s that theoretically motivated and experimental research began to be undertaken in Europe and North America… although the first experimental studies in this area appeared in 1964 - Oléron and Nanpon (1964) on the accuracy of interpretations and Treisman (1965) on the EVS (Ear to Voice Span) of interpreters" (Danks et al.,1997). The late 1970s were marked by the adoption of a multistage view of the interpreting process by most researchers. Speech recognition, storage mechanisms, transfer,

production, and output monitoring were, among things, the research focus. As an act of communication, interpreting is an essential tool in diplomatic communication.

II.2 Diplomatic Communication

Today, "conducting multilateral diplomatic or economic relations in the multilingual mode has become the standard way to do business" (Nolan, 2012, p.xii). Hence, diplomats are often brought to resort to interpreting services, not being able to understand nor learn the language of each and every partner. Unlike ordinary daily communication, interpreter-mediated communication requires a typical setting. In an interpreter-mediated communication setting, conveying the message or the meaning intended by the speaker is critical as diplomatic communication is comprised of several layers and has its own attributes or characteristics. First though, let us investigate the centrality of the message and setting in diplomatic communication.

II.2.1 Setting and Message in Diplomatic Communication

The word 'communication' is often used in close association with the concept 'message'. Communication and message hold something in common. The concept of communication derives from the "Latin word *communicare*, meaning 'to make common to many, share, impart'" (Alleyne 1995). To communicate information or meaning is to impart or to convey message or meaning. As Alleyne (1995) puts it, intrinsic to the definition of communication is the idea of sharing, and communication cannot occur unless something is shared. That which is made common and shared or imparted is the message. Message "is defined not as the statement produced, i.e., the verbal materialization of a communicative intention, but as the information that the sender wants to get across to the receiver and around which the verbal statement will is constructed" (Gile, 1995a). To get a message or a piece of information across is to make someone understand what it means. The ultimate goal of a communicative act is to send or share a message, to impart or exchange information. According to AIIC (2004), the professional interpreter is compelled to communicate the speaker's intended messages as accurately, faithfully, as completely as possible while, at the same time, ensuring the rendering is clear and lively and happens in a fluent, expressive and communicative way. Interpreting requires a special communication setting.

Generally, the central axis of communication in interpreting is conceived of as connecting linearly the speaker, the interpreter and the delegate (Gile, 1995a), as shown below.

Speaker——→   Interpreter——→   Delegate

Fig.1: The central axis of communication in interpreting

In this model, verbal messages move from the speaker, through the interpreter (as mediator) to the delegate or listener. For the communication setting to be complete two more elements need to be added. These are the context and the language conventions. Thus, the setting in interpreter-mediated communication encompasses five elements, as shown in Fig.2 below.

Context   Conventions

Speaker ————→Interpreter ————→Listener

Fig.2: The five elements or components of the diplomatic interpreter-mediated communication setting
(Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001).

The *speaker* has a message he or she intends to get across to the *listener*. The message is wrapped in a package which "refers to the linguistic and paralinguistic choices made by the sender and to the physical medium through which they are instantiated (Gile 1995a)." As the speaker or sender cannot communicate directly with the listener, he or she has to enlist the services of an interpreter. To properly convey the speaker's message or intended meaning to the listener, the interpreter needs to know the context of the words in which the message is wrapped. Finally, the interpreter must be familiar with the conventions of the language in order to complete the interpretative process. The conventions of language can be fraught with, or rather sponsor, different meanings; therefore the speaker's utterances must be understood and interpreted according to the conventions of language taking account of the diplomatic context. Understanding diplomatic jargon is then critical and Danks et al. (1997) recognizes that "the diplomatic setting builds a definite context that forces a conventional meaning and does not leave the interpreter…any room for deviant interpretations".

Wilss's (1996: 106) distinction between three levels of sender/recipient message covariance can be transposed to speaker/interpreter message covariance, as can be seen in Fig.3 below:
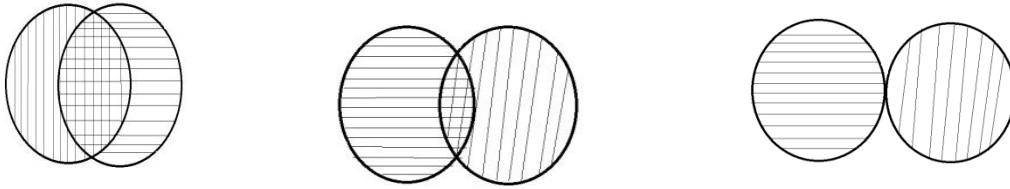
Fig.3: The three levels of sender/recipient message covariance transposed to speaker/interpreter message covariance

The greater the intersection between (the area common to) the two circles (left diagram), the easier the communication. The smaller the overlap between the two circles (middle diagram), that is, when communality [the knowledge or information shared by both the speaker and the interpreter] is drastically limited, the harder it becomes for the interpreter to get the speaker's intended meaning across to the listener. The worst scenario is when the circles do not meet or intersect at all (right diagram). Such a situation means that the speaker and the interpreter have absolutely nothing in common with respect to knowledge or information. As a result, communication "is to all intents and purposes impossible, or it may contain, on the side of the recipient, an element of arbitrariness, uncertainty, or misunderstanding" (Wilss, 1996, p.106).

Communication always takes place in a community, between parties or individuals eager to understand or interact with one another. Communication is central to the existence and survival of a community. Communication is the lifeblood of any community. It is through communication that values are shared and passed down from one generation to the next. It is also through communication that conflicts are resolved. Deeply rooted or

> implanted in the assertion that there is such a thing as 'international community' must be the assumption that the members are communicating… We simply cannot have a world community unless the members of that community, be they states, organizations or individuals, are communicating. This fundamental point explains why it is so important to understand the role of communications in international relations (Wilss, 1996, p.107)

as well as in diplomacy. It is then self-evident that the ability to communicate effectively is an asset for diplomats. Communication is the backbone of diplomacy. Just as "the essence of communication is getting the sender and the recipient 'tuned' to each other for a specific message"

(Wilss, 1996, p.143), diplomacy serves primarily the purpose of bringing about a mediated and improved relationship between warring parties through communication. In practice, communication can assume different forms and can occur on different levels.

II.2.2 Levels of Diplomatic Communication

Diplomatic communication always implies reading between the lines. Its ambiguity almost automatically translates into talk about interpretability by leaving room for more than one incompatible interpretation, and thus translates into talk about an 'open space' of interpretation (Pehar, 2005). This accounts for both the denotative level and the meta-communicative level on which diplomatic communication occurs. The denotative level "is the level that deals with what we say – our words, the straightforward verbal content of our messages" (Rossiter, 1998). The interpreter's task is made easier if each word by the speaker corresponds to or matches with one denotation or explicit and direct meaning. Unfortunately literal (or word for word) interpreting does not always work. In a diplomatic setting, the interpreter needs to rise beyond individual words and consider the context within which they are spoken in order to allocate accurate meaning to them.

On the other hand, the meta-communicative level is looked at as "communication about our communication" (Rossiter, 1998). Meta-communication may be straightforward and verbal. It can also take the form of nonverbal indirect communication that calls for prosodic features such intonation, body movements, etc. Thus, "[m]y tone of voice when I [talk] to someone tells that person how to interpret my words… The nonverbal aspects of my voice indicate a request that he or she interpret my verbal, denotative message a certain way" (Rossiter, 1998).

In meta-communication, meaning must be inferred. Inference of meaning adds to the difficulties and complexity of interpreting because the interpreter is never certain about what decision to make or how to interpret a message. When the smooth understanding is blocked, interpretation problems arise. Such is, unfortunately, the case with diplomatic ambiguity. When interpreting messages at both the denotative and the meta-communicative level, the interpreter first decides what he or she thinks the speaker means, and then acts in accordance with that decision (Rossiter, 1998). Of these two levels, the meta-communicative level is the most highly prized and cherished in diplomatic communication that has inherent attributes of its own.

II.2.3. Attributes of Diplomatic Communication

Diplomatic discourse stands out by virtue of its own unique characteristics. Robinson (2003) insists on the strange nature of diplomatic communication, which is remarkable for its deliberately distortive dialogical acts, uncooperative acts, as well as the whole range of pretending, evading, manipulating, and the like, which can lead to misunderstanding and, therefore, to misinterpretation. Language in diplomatic communication is "made strange through unusual combinations of words and images. Because it is made strange, our attention is drawn to language itself, in contrast with ordinary communication where we are generally not aware of it" (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, pp.9-10). The strangeness of diplomatic communication is not fortuitous. Diplomatic communication is designed to yield results. The unusual nature of diplomatic communication is aimed at producing the desired effect in the receiver, i.e. the party for which it is intended. By using ordinary words or phrases in strange and persuasive form, diplomats hope to attain their goals.

Summitries and conference diplomacy are the two prominent forms of diplomatic communication. The term 'summitry' refers to a high-level meeting that brings together high-ranking officials, including heads of states, prime ministers and foreign ministers. Dinh (Morison, 2010) describes summitry as "face-to-face, interpersonal communication between heads of nation-states or their highest representatives". A conference, on the other hand, is a more casual type of meeting of different parties or delegates. Dinh goes on to explain that conference diplomacy "was the approach to 'conflict resolution' embraced by the Great Powers of Europe during the 1920s and 1930s… The premise underlying this peculiar mode of 'diplomatic engagement' was that the international disputes of the day, even the crises, were really just disagreements between reasonable gentlemen. If those gents could only be gotten into a room together to talk things out, the wishful thinking ran, a peaceful settlement agreeable to everyone could surely be reached" (Morison, 2010).

Summits and conferences – the two types of diplomatic communication – laid the foundation for diplomatic gatherings. Summits and conferences usually bring together people who speak different languages, hence the need for interpreting.

II.3 Interpreting: An Essential Tool for Diplomatic Meetings

Diplomatic meetings often bring together entities with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Given the sensitive nature of diplomatic negotiations, understanding the intended meaning of one's interlocutor proves to be a categorical imperative; and as none of the negotiating entities are prepared to be placed at a disadvantage, interpreting becomes the ideal interlingual mode of conducting diplomatic meetings. The interpreter's task and duty is then to perform a mediating role. Interpreting in diplomatic settings is all about conveying the meaning or message of one diplomatic entity to another in a language other than that of the speaker.

II.3.1 Interpreting as Interlingual Mode of Conducting Diplomatic Meetings

The world has become a global village in which no one is an island unto themselves any longer. This situation has fuelled parallel growth in international relations and cooperation; but those actors involved in the international arena are often faced with the language barrier. The interpreter appears to be the ideal response to this specific concern. The interpreter's role becomes central to the smooth unfolding of proceedings.

The ideal communication situation is the situation in which the speaker speaks directly to the listener. For addressing an interlocutor in his or her own language is seen as a sign of respect for the latter, which creates an environment conducive to successful diplomacy or negotiation. For example, US president John F. Kennedy understood the task of mastering French especially with a view toward negotiating with French President Charles de Gaulle (Nolan, 2012, p.2). Unfortunately such a communication situation is rather rare. Notwithstanding that, human interpreting peculiarly remains so far the best interlingual mode of conducting diplomatic meetings. The increasing "reliance on the skills of the interpreter… to facilitate communication across language boundaries" (Gerver and Sinaiko, 1978, p.1) reflects the paramount importance of language mediation in diplomatic gatherings.

II.3.2 Interpreting as Language Mediation

Interpreting can be thought of as a linguistic mediation activity. Here is how language mediation operates:

> In language mediation, [speech]… cannot reach its intended destination. The sender cannot communicate […] directly [with] the recipient without assistance, what I am calling "mediation" by a third party, [namely the interpreter]. Of course, [the sender or speaker intends] a communicative act. But there is a barrier between [him or her] and the target audience… There is a message carried [by the speaker], but no [target-language listener …] can make sense of it (Danks et al., 1997, pp.5-6),

hence the need for a mediator or interpreter. Language mediation should be interpreted not only as an indication of a gap, but also as a pressing request to bridge the gap. Therefore, resorting to interpreting is designed to bridge the divide between the speaker and the listener. The demand for interpreting is to fill the vacuum left by language. The interpreter is "called for in situations where language is 'out of joint' and the work of the language mediator is to 'set it right.' The mediator must produce a 'doubled' version of the original message" (Danks et al., 1997, pp.5-6). But is mediated communication a natural linguistic practice?

Mediated communication is somehow the reproduction of a doubled version of the speaker's meaning or message. This operation is dubbed by Danks as 'doubling'. At first sight, doubling or mediated communication takes on the appearance of a two-tier activity.

> On the surface, it looks like mediated communication has two stages. The first spans [the speaker and the interpreter]; the second links [the interpreter and the listener]. This two-stage *translatio* is what the original sender and the final recipient perceive. In fact, they may even mistake the two-stage process for a one-stage process, particularly when the source message is spoken into a microphone and is simultaneously interpreted (Danks et al., 1997, p.6).

Language mediation or doubling is an unusual tampering with language in practice. In this respect, "language mediation is a somehow abnormal activity […]. Language mediation is not normal communication between two [parties], a sender and a recipient" (Danks et al., 1997, pp.5-6). In an interpreter-mediation communication setting, the listener is given the impression of receiving the original message directly from the speaker, of listening to live and unmediated speech, although this is but mere illusion or deceptive appearance.

In a nutshell, Hans-Georg Gadamer acknowledges in *To What Extent Does Language Prescribe Thinking?* that "one of the basic assumptions of translation studies [is] that acts of communication are acts of translation" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.xi), both written and oral. This essential truth has been taken up by Gile (1995b, p.18), who has it that "l'interprétation peut

être considérée comme un cas singulier d'activité de communication à dominante linguistique" [interpreting can be considered as a unique case of a predominantly linguistic communication activity]. And the interpreter is

> a kind of linguistic torchbearer, standing close by the side of a target language [listener] holding a bright flame so that others may see what has been hidden in the darkness of another linguistic […] code. […] The [interpreter …] is a full participant in the communication process because the original sender cannot, typically, be linguistically co-present in the communication, there is no direct interference. […] The translator/interpreter rephrases the source message as if he or she were the true sender of it in the [target language], that is, as if the original author were speaking […] in the target language, composing not a translation but an original […] speech. [Interpreting] is tantamount to substitutionary rephrasing on behalf of, but without interference from, the original sender (Danks et al., 1997, p.9).

Interpreting as language mediation is critical for conducting diplomatic meetings as ambiguity often pervades diplomatic discourse. Chapter II will investigate aspects of ambiguity, with specific reference to an appraisal of ambiguity in diplomacy.

III. Ambiguity in Diplomatic Discourse

Language is a vehicle for accurately communicating thoughts, ideas and attitudes. But a certain way of using language may pervert meaning, thus causing misunderstanding. Ambiguity is one of the factors likely to blur meaning. Section II of this paper will in the first place explore the issue of ambiguity as a linguistic phenomenon. This will be followed by an investigation into the nature of the relation between ambiguity and meaning, and, finally, culminate in an appraisal of the diplomatic theory of ambiguity. Quite obviously "language cannot exist without ambiguity as ambiguity is an inherent property of natural language (*Shodhganga*@INFLIBNET Centre, n.d.). Ambiguity is a phenomenon pertaining to language.

III.1 Ambiguity as a Linguistic Phenomenon

As stated in the preceding paragraph, ambiguity is a linguistic phenomenon. Unlike ambiguity in the broader sense, diplomatic ambiguity is an intentional and strategic ambiguity in which the unsaid plays a leading role. Diplomatic ambiguity has given rise to the power-centric theory of diplomatic ambiguity. First, though, what makes ambiguity a linguistic phenomenon?

III.1.1 Linguistic Ambiguity

In communication, ambiguity arises each time various (more than one) equally plausible meanings come to mind. Ambiguity is a type of uncertainty of meaning that makes room for various understandings or interpretations.

> Ambiguity refers to the state of having or expressing more than one possible meaning or something open to more than one possible meaning. It refers to the state in which a word or a statement, any linguistic entity, can be understood in more than one way. It is the state where it is difficult to locate a precise meaning or provide an explanation since it involves many different meanings. Ambiguity is unclearness by virtue of having more than one meaning (*Shodhganga*@INFLIBNET Centre, n.d.).

Daily routine communication between human beings is riddled with ambiguity. When a speech segment or a single utterance means different things, ambiguity arises. "The expression of

ambiguity will always be a linguistic expression. […] In most instances of communication, ambiguity is an important linguistic issue" (*Shodhganga*@INFLIBNET Centre, n.d.). Linguistic ambiguity is simply a catch-all phrase for the plurality and imprecision of the meaning. What emerges from this definition is that ambiguity always carries no less than one potential signification. In addition, meaning cannot be decrypted or deciphered with absolute certainty. Ambiguity, then, counts as a case of linguistic indeterminacy. It means that an expression or a phrase can be interpreted or understood in many different ways. The next item will inquire into the nature of diplomatic ambiguity.

III.1.2 The Nature of Diplomatic Ambiguity

For Christer Jönsson (Paul and Strbiak, 1997), "[c]ommunication in international bargaining is inherently ambiguous". Effective multilateral or international relations are conducted through effective diplomacy. Diplomatic discourse often presents ambiguities resulting from imprecision and lack of clarity. Ambiguity is often deliberately induced in diplomatic discourse with the purpose of instilling uncertainty with regard to meaning. According to Pehar (2005), the main purpose of 'diplomatic ambiguity' is to create "a mediated and improved relationship between diplomatic entities", that is, the purpose of "making a positive conflict-transforming turn".

As an essential tool in diplomacy, diplomatic ambiguity plays a prominent role in diplomatic communication. Diplomatic ambiguity is altogether deliberate and strategic, and often intentionally ambiguous in order to leave room for several possible and even divergent interpretations. In deliberate or intentional ambiguity the diplomatic "entities' idiosyncratic interpretations play the role of the key motivator. Each entity, for instance, [understands the utterance] in the way which suits its perceptions and interests; ambiguity of the [discourse] makes sure that the entities can project mutually incompatible readings into [it]" (Pehar, 2011). Deliberate diplomatic ambiguity serves to blur lines in the speaker's favour. By using deliberate or intentional ambiguity, the speaker has an objective that he or she wishes to achieve. Here deliberate or intentional ambiguity becomes the means to an end. Besides its deliberate or intentional nature, diplomatic ambiguity is strategic ambiguity. The phrase 'strategic ambiguity' was coined by Eisenberg (Paul and Strbiak, 1997) to refer to "those instances where individuals use ambiguity

purposefully to accomplish their goals." Diplomatic ambiguity is a tactic, an instrument serving a diplomatic entity's strategy.

In view of the above distinctive features of diplomatic ambiguity, one can rightly concur with Pehar (2011, p.14), who argues that "in order to qualify for an ambiguity, an expression must be able to generate not only 'at least two different meanings,' but also two incompatible meanings. It is only then that one would produce an expression that is truly ambiguous." The famous duck/rabbit drawing below is the picture that best captures the full meaning and depth of the concept of diplomatic ambiguity.
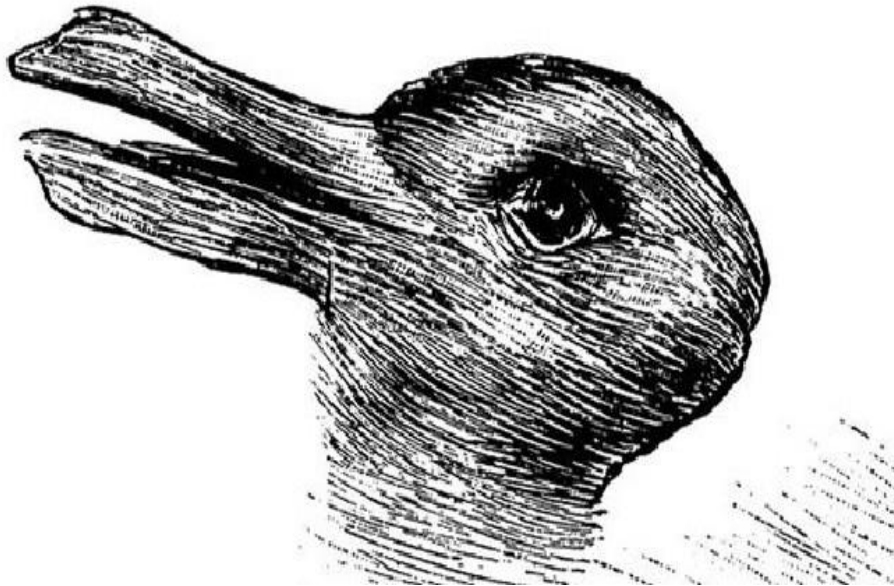
Fig. 4 This Classic optical illusion says a lot about your brain, psychologists claim (Morrow, 2016)

This picture could be interpreted both as a duck and a rabbit, at different times, but, also, with some difficulty, as a third neutral image, which stands equally far from, or close to, both rabbithood and duckhood. The same applies to ambiguities; ambiguities are the patterns of language that can be interpreted as, first, meaning A, secondly, meaning B, and, thirdly, that cannot be interpreted as A and B simultaneously, but, eventually, as a third neutral (re)source from which, given specific focuses of vision/interpretation, A and B might spring in succession and separately (Pehar 2011, p.15).

A truly ambiguous utterance or speech segment must always carry two or more separate meanings or interpretations. These meanings must over and above all be incompatible. Instances of diplomatic ambiguities only point to the potential nature of meaning of ambiguous utterances or speech segments.

Obviously, potentiality of meaning is a critical feature of diplomatic ambiguity. 'Potential meaning' is meaning that is possible, but not yet actual meaning. Diplomatic ambiguity potentially carries at least two antagonistic meanings. It opens up the possibility of different possible interpretations; and the interpreter remains torn and undecided as to which of the meanings must actually be conveyed. In addition to meaning potentiality, the unsaid is central to the concept of diplomatic ambiguity.

III.1.3 Key Functions of the Unsaid

"What is important about a work is what it does not say"
(Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.42).

It is when the smooth understanding of language poses a problem that we take an interest in it. Diplomatic discourse is not always straight; it often comes with concealed or blanket statements. Because statements are not made plainly and directly, they constitute a challenge for the interpreter. **Biljana Scott** (2013) defines the 'unsaid' as "meaning conveyed implicitly through language." The unsaid, to borrow Umberto Eco's words (1992, p.9), can be likened to esoteric language in which each peeled layer or decoded meaning turns out to be but the antechamber to a yet more cunningly concealed meaning. A common psychological element in the unsaid lies in the attitudes of suspicion or disdain towards apparent meaning, its very accessibility and seeming concordance with common sense fatally damning its status in the eyes of seasoned diplomats. The unsaid remains a form of indirect communication that leaves grasping meaning, or interpreting, to guesswork.

Indeed, indirect communication strongly impacts on the interpreter's comprehension and production, and the logical consequence of such a situation is the latter's resorting to guesswork. Pfeiffer (1998) points to the fact that

> guesswork is one of the major effects generated by indirect communication. The interpreter's decision becomes dramatically dependent on guesswork. Indirect communication forces upon [the interpreter] to make guesses about [meaning]... Such 'guessing games' further inhibit or obstruct true communication. If the interpreter is forced to guess about the meaning of an utterance, the guess may often be wrong; and the risk is that of the inaccuracy of the message.

In indirect communication meaning has to be inferred. The interpreter has no other alternative than to infer meaning. In all probability the interpreter will have to hazard a guess. The unsaid, or indirect communication, makes the interpreter's task more complex as the latter has to read the speaker's intention in order to come up with the intended meaning. But why is the unsaid or indirect communication so cherished in diplomatic discourse? To this question Scott (2013) provides five reasons. Firstly, the unsaid makes it possible for diplomats to keep options open longer through equivocation. Secondly, the unsaid allows diplomats to secure room for manoeuvre through ambiguity. Thirdly, through the unsaid diplomats can plausibly deny what has been implied but not said explicitly. Fourthly, the unsaid proves to be decisive in persuading others better by priming them with stories-in-a-capsule (such as metaphors). Fifthly, the unsaid helps show tact and save face through indirectness. In the same vein, Eco (1992, pp.140-141) insists on the fact that resorting to the unsaid is just due to the necessity to leave the conclusion floating around, to blur the prejudices of the author through the ambiguity of language and the impalpability of a final sense. Through the unsaid, a speaker can achieve his or her goals in a more sly way and prevent further debate, but will, for certain, push the interpreter into a tight corner. By communicating indirectly, the speaker strives to disguise his or her real intention. The unsaid pervades diplomatic discourse and becomes a byword for secret meanings encoded in fuzzy or ambiguous words and utterances. The unsaid, or indirect communication, proves to be the ideal means whereby ambiguity is created and entertained in diplomatic communication. Diplomatic ambiguity serves the purpose of power and this accounts for the power-centric theory of diplomatic ambiguity.

III.1.4 The Power-Centric Theory of Diplomatic Ambiguity

Discourse is one of the building blocks of post-structuralism. Discourse is, in plain words, language in use. The pervasiveness or ubiquity of ambiguity in diplomatic discourse has led to a theorization of the practice of diplomatic ambiguity. The very first piece of writing on diplomatic ambiguity dates back to the early 18th century, when De Callières devoted a few pages to the issue of diplomatic ambiguity and thereby became "the writer of the first… treatise on negotiations" (Pehar, 2011, p.40). This topic was subsequently taken up by a handful of scholars including Kissinger, who is seen as the most prominent contemporary diplomat and proponent of the theory of diplomatic ambiguity. Allusions and references to diplomatic ambiguity can be found in his work (Pehar, 2011, pp.43-44).

The theory of diplomatic ambiguity revolves around the axis of power, and its discourse is all about power relations or hegemony. As shown by Alleyne (1995, pp.58-59), hegemony "refers to the process by which [one party] not only enforces and maintains its power but, over a period of time, manages to gain endorsement from [the other party or parties] without the use of force because the power relationship is accepted. Scholars in cultural studies, most notably Stuart Hall, have identified the structure of communication as the mechanism through which hegemony is imposed." The power-centric model of diplomatic ambiguity rests on the premise that the user of ambiguity exercises his or her power over a victim through the medium of language.

Thus the concept of diplomatic ambiguity is thought to relate to the workings of a power mechanism. Pehar underlines the fact that the concept of diplomatic ambiguity implies that we have two or more possible meanings or interpretations or, rather, 'horns'; and hegemony is exercised either through both horns or through a single one. For Jervis (Pehar, 2011, p.46), "ambiguities are used when an actor needs to 'put out feelers that can be denied if the response is not appropriate.' Ambiguities, he points out, enable 'the actor to leave the other in doubt, to influence the final impact of the signals after the initial reactions to them have been observed, and thereby to gain greater control over the images others have of him.' It is thus obvious that Jervis adopts a view in which the main purpose of ambiguous signalling is to perform a sophisticated manipulation." Diplomats resort to ambiguity when they want to secure space for manoeuvring. The response of a party to negotiations is always unpredictable. Thus, for diplomats, the tactic or strategy is floating trial balloons in order to place themselves on the safer side. Regardless of the

response of the interlocutor, there must be room for deniability. Ambiguity is important in the practice of both diplomacy and statecraft, though it may pose problems with regard to grasping the meaning, which is the number one issue when it comes to communication.

III.2 Meaning as the Ultimate Goal of Communication

In communication, the concepts of 'ambiguity' and 'meaning' are interrelated. The primary goal of this section of the paper is to delineate the scope of the notion of meaning and peel off its different layers. Both meaning and ambiguity are linguistic phenomena; ambiguity, in particular, has the potential to thwart an entire communication by blurring meaning.

III.2.1 Meaning

The subject area concerned with the study of meaning is known as semantics. Semantics has to do with the meaning or interpretation of signifiers, i.e. words and utterances. "Semantics largely determines our reading comprehension, how we understand others, and even what decisions we make as a result of our interpretations. Semantics can also refer to the branch of study within linguistics that deals with language and how we understand meaning" (Wikipedia, 2017).

Any act of communication involves not only aims and intentions, but also content and package. Gile (1995a, pp.26-27) defines content as "the message [or] information [and sometimes feelings] the sender unconsciously wants to convey". On the other hand, Gile equates 'package' with "the linguistic and peri-linguistic choices made by the sender and… the physical medium through which they are instantiated". In actual communication, the speaker's message or meaning is wrapped in the words chosen by the latter; words that stand for the package.

On reflection, all linguistic performance is meaning-related. Meaning is the content carried by the words or signs. The meaning of a word "is just the thing that a word signifies or applies to in [the] current or possible world… To extract the meaning of an expression, the reader or hearer has to apply his own diverse capacities at each moment" (Shodhganga, n.d.). Meaning can be understood as the sense or significance, or rather that which is intended. Meaning has to do with message fidelity. Does the interpreter's comprehension match the speaker's intention? Does the interpreter get the same message [across] as the speaker?

Here, two critical notions emerge, namely those of the 'final interpretant' and the 'final intendant'. For Robinson (2003, pp.167-168),

> the final interpretant is the interpreter's understanding of how to take the sign's interpretive potential (its conventional or common meaning as he or she feels it) in this particular context in order to apprehend how the *utterer* is using it. And the final intendant is the utterer's attempt to impose his or her own dynamic shape on the sign's intentional potential in order to guide the interpreter to an appropriate interpretive response. Final interpretants and intendants don't 'represent' meaning but generate it, constitute it as a connectedness. Meaning doesn't 'exist' in signs; people use signs to create meaning dynamically, and signs 'take on' or are 'invested' with meaning only in and by that process.

The context of use of a word is critical in assigning meaning to this word. In an interpreter-mediated communication setting, difficulties arise when the smooth comprehension or understanding of words or utterances used by the speaker is hampered. Meaning is not given. Instead, it is motivated and created, and this clearly brings in broad daylight the dynamic nature of meaning, which accounts for the multiple layers of meaning.

III.2.2 Layers of Meaning

The pervasiveness of ambiguity in diplomatic discourse means that the receiver, or rather the interpreter who is responsible for conveying the message to its final addressee, must rise beyond mere words and read between lines in order to capture the meaning intended by the speaker. Ambiguity increases the probability of multiple and conflicting interpretations. "Acknowledgment that no two people interpret anything in the same way implies that the same message has different meanings for different people" (Ren, 1998). On this ground, different layers of meaning can be pointed out. A broad stratification of meaning includes lexical meaning, implied meaning and created meaning.

Lexical meaning of individual words is meaning as designation. A designation can be thought of as the explanation that makes it possible for a word to be a referent for a particular denotation. The thing, person or characteristic that the denotation points to is called the referent. What a word denotes is the thing, person, characteristic, or action to which the word points or refers. Lexical meaning is a dictionary-type meaning – the definition or explanation of the word

in terms of its essential characteristics. Seleskovitch (2002) refers to it as 'primary meaning'. Primary meaning is the first layer of meaning or surface meaning.

The second layer of meaning is implied meaning. Implied is meaning as connotation or connotative meaning. "Connotation refers to the kind of meaning that is associated with a word or phrase, but that is not necessarily part of its essential nature. The connotation is where emotions, culture, societal experience, etc., give extra meaning to a word or phrase" (Seleskovitch, 2002). Implied meaning, specifically, presupposes knowing both the speaker's intention and the context of the words or utterances. The problem with implied meaning is that it is very subjective in the sense that it may differ from one individual to another. Above all, it is often difficult to capture implied meaning, especially when the speaker deliberately strives to disguise certain things, which is often the case with diplomatic ambiguity. Implied meaning looms large in diplomatic discourse. The interpreter must be sensitive to this type of meaning. And if ever he or she decides "to maintain the connotative meaning, he or she must first of all be aware of it and then decide based on his or her knowledge of the end user how best to create the connotative feeling in the end user" (Danks et al., 1997, pp.169-170). Implied meaning is the meaning behind the word or the hidden meaning.

Last but not least, the third layer of meaning is created meaning. Created meaning is generated by the speaker, the interpreter and the entire context of communication through their intercourse. This view is held by the transactional proponents of meaning, who have it that "meaning… is created collaboratively between communicators" (Ren, 1998). The transactional view of meaning is a synthesis of both the action view of meaning and the interactional view of meaning. Whereas the action view is speaker-centred and the interactional view is message-centred, the transactional view recognizes the need for "a meaning-centred theory" (Ren, 1998).

Both the action view and the interactional view stipulate that the role of the interpreter who relays the information or message sent by the speaker is to reproduce the speaker's meaning in the target language. On the other hand, the transactional view advocates a "productive rather than a reproductive approach to understanding" (Ren, 1998). The speaker and the interpreter are actively involved in the generation and negotiation of meaning. Thus, from the transactional perspective, meaning is the end product of a trade-off between the speaker, the interpreter and the 'environment' of the communication. The interpreter's "first and foremost concern, then, must be the continuous involvement in experiencing and defining the boundaries of meanings and associations surrounding each word" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.xiii). To gain interpretive

insight into what he or she hears, the interpreter must be engaged in the negotiation of meaning; this equally involves tremendously intricate mental operations. Created meaning is the fruit of collaborative and concerted efforts. All in all, there exist several layers of meaning in a diplomatic setting, including lexical meaning, implied meaning and created meaning. Just like linguistic ambiguity, meaning is a linguistic property. But ambiguity, especially, is likely to impede meaning, thus leading to a breakdown in communication.

III.2.3 Ambiguity: A Threat to Communication

Communication is all about meaning or understanding, but meaning does not occur just because words are uttered. A simple exchange of words or utterances does not necessarily mean that genuine communication has occurred. In everyday communication, different individuals may have different perceptions of the meaning of a single utterance. The meaning of a word can vary drastically in function of the language, the culture and the environment in which it is used. In an actual interpreting situation, instances of ambiguity may confuse the interpreter and disrupt the smooth flow of communication. Diplomatic ambiguity is an unfortunate case in point; indeed, diplomatic ambiguity often proves to be "a surplus of meaning, but for many this surplus could, in practical terms, generate an impression of the absence of meaning. When we say something that means too much, that is, which carries at least one meaning too many, then our interlocutor may be at a loss to respond to our saying, or to attribute something significant for him to our saying" (Pehar, 2011, p.7). Ambiguity means that a speech segment can carry several equally sound but irreconcilable meanings or interpretations.

Diplomatic ambiguity often creates "a kind of emptiness in, and through, language that is self-silenced" and this phenomenon is referred to as 'the assumption of self-annihilated meaning' (Pehar, 2011, p.7). In diplomatic communication, language is not always straight and direct; rather, it is often twisted to serve hidden vested interests. It has already been pointed out that "if the primary aim of language consists in transmitting information, in conveying a piece of knowledge from human being A to human being B, then ambiguities seem to run contrary to that aim as they leave a message recipient with a less transparent and less usable kind of data" (Pehar, 2011, p.13). Obviously, language as an information transmission device does not perform its function in instances of ambiguity. Ambiguity empties language of its substance. By sending out mixed

messages verbally, the speaker prevents language from performing its primary function; and, for Pehar (2011, p.7), "where language ceases to play an important role… some other factors that most notably include power will increasingly fill the vacuum created by the self-withdrawn, ambiguous language. It thus seems natural to think of diplomatic ambiguity as embodying and reflecting, first and foremost, the power relations."

In diplomatic ambiguity, language is overpowered by power drives and turned into the means to an end by the user of ambiguity. The full potential of language is diverted to serve power considerations. The function of ambiguity is to blur lines and put the receiver into a position of undecidedness with regard to the meaning or interpretation of a speech segment. "One frequently finds a view of diplomatic ambiguity in which its primary purpose is to… transform a language-mediated relationship into a power-mediated one" (Pehar, 2011, p.28). Within the power-centric view of diplomatic ambiguity, language not only serves as a mere instrument to achieve a goal of strategic advantage, but also to affects the power relations to one's advantage. The user of ambiguity considers it an important tool taking him or her towards his or her destination.

In an interpreter-mediated communication setting, the complex nature of interpretation becomes glaringly evident once interpreters experience comprehension problems and therefore hesitate between different translations (Danks et al., 1997, p.82). Ambiguity undermines communication by causing confusion. Diplomatic ambiguity is at times aimed at deliberately stalling communication and skilfully taking advantage of the situation of ambiguousness. In light of the preceding, harsh and trenchant criticism has been launched against the diplomatic theory of ambiguity.

III.3 Diplomatic Ambiguity: An Appraisal

The underlying objective behind diplomatic ambiguity is power. There is an insidious connection between diplomatic ambiguity and power. The relations between diplomatic communication and power are manifest in the power-centric practice of diplomatic ambiguity. This connection amply accounts for the vitriolic attacks on that theory of ambiguity. So let us look into the nature of the relationship between diplomatic language and power.

III.3.1 Diplomatic Ambiguity and Power Relations

Diplomatic discourse is crafted in a way to achieve persuasive and expressive purposes. A careful survey of the literature on language shows that language is often associated with action. That is why ever since the famous lectures of J. L. Austin on "How to do things with words" in 1962 (Kussmaul, 1995, p.61), "linguists have become more and more aware of the fact that saying something means performing actions. Austin coined the term *speech act* for this level of linguistic description. And for the speaker's intention when saying something the term *illocution* is now in common use, both for spoken and written language." In diplomatic discourse the illocution power of language is critical.

By and through language a speaker can cause an action to occur or be performed, as well as determine the course of this action. By determining what may or may not be said, it is possible for a speaker to control what may be thought and done (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.234). Language is a defining, manipulative and persuasive force. A close scrutiny of diplomatic discourse reveals power at play. Diplomatic communication often translates into power relations. Language and power are related; language becomes a strategic tool in the hands of diplomats in the line of duty. Venuti (Robinson, 2003, p.139) sees language "as a collective force, an assemblage of forms that constitute a semiotic regime… Any language use is thus a site of power relations." Words are carefully and consciously chosen and sentences constructed in a specific way for a specific purpose. Pehar (2011, p.7) does not beat about the bush with regard to the connection between diplomatic ambiguous language and power: for him, "all diplomatic ambiguities serve one and only one purpose - to affect, establish, maintain, or change power relations between some parties."

Ambiguity plays a crucial role at all the stages of diplomatic life. Diplomatic ambiguous language is the driving force of international relations; and diplomacy is all about negotiating power that "involves the ability to exercise control, to get others to do what they otherwise might not do were it not for your presence" (Alleyne, 1995, p.4). The ability to use language effectively is decisive for the outcome of diplomatic negotiations. The way language is used can influence and even change the course of negotiations for good or for bad. "How well language is used translates directly into how well one's needs are met, into success or failure, climbing to the top of the hierarchy or settling around the bottom, into good or bad relationships, intimate and distant. Language allocates power…, defines and determines it, decides its efficacy" (Holloway, Byrne

and Titlestad, 2001, pp.12-13). Effective diplomatic communication is not just about the transmission of messages from one party to another. Rather, diplomatic communication effectiveness must ultimately elicit the desired response in order to make a positive conflict-transforming turn. To achieve this end, a good command of diplomatic ambiguity is more than necessary. Ambiguous language is a powerful tool, a change-creating force, a game changer. Diplomats are particularly dependent on ambiguous language. Their success or failure often depends on how well they are able to use language to persuade other people to adopt their views. They need to have or appear to have charisma, energy, drive, and the ability to outwit their opponents. For Michel Foucault, discourse is controlled and distributed in society along particular lines of power (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.47). Because it is centred on power relations, the dynamics of diplomatic ambiguity has been severely criticized.

III.3.2 Critique of the Theory of Diplomatic Ambiguity

A logical full-frontal attack has been launched on the 'power-centric' model of diplomatic ambiguity. Some opponents have it that the user of ambiguous language leaves the listener in total disarray without any clue to rely on for understanding. Ambiguity serves as a guise for the speaker to conceal his or her true intentions or meaning and control the conversation; that is why Pehar (2011, p.46) maintains that diplomatic ambiguity is indeed "a cosmetic 'defensive/protective shield' which an agent (representative of a state) needs to protect important part of her powers. Ambiguity protects and enhances our ability to control the images the other states have of our own state." To cap it all, ambiguity brings discredit upon diplomacy.

By "sacrificing everything for the sake of appearance [diplomatic ambiguity] contributes to debasing the currency of professional diplomacy. Palliating is not the same as conciliating" (Pehar, 2011, p. 98). Critics and theorists of the power-centric theory of diplomatic ambiguity include Iklé, who maintains that ambiguities are exploited to cover up a deliberate violation. In the same vein, De Callières sees diplomatic ambiguity as a double-edged sword: he, in particular, equates diplomatic ambiguity with an extremely lethal weapon likely to turn against its user, to hinder the interests of the diplomat (Pehar, 2011, pp.40-41).

"Although arguably good for success-driven political leaders, diplomatic trouble-shooters, firefighters and crisis managers, since peace-making in the fullest sense of the term posits sincere,

as opposed to affected understanding, ambiguity is simply misplaced and wrong for true peacemakers" (Pehar, 2011, p.98). The person ('victim') on the receiving end of the diplomatic ambiguity will eventually (and inevitably) realize that he or she is being fooled with. This realization will disrupt the power-centric mechanism and nullify its effect on the victim. As a result, the power-centric practice of diplomatic ambiguity leads to nihilism. By raising suspicion about ambiguity, "the 'power-centric' view is likely to create a world without diplomatic ambiguities" (Pehar, 2011). The power-centric view of diplomatic ambiguity paves the way to destruction of its very object and, paradoxically, carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Diplomatic ambiguity (or lack of clarity) inhibits comprehension and therefore undermines the interpreter's self-confidence and certainty as regards the accuracy of the intended meaning.

However, despite all its shortcomings there are still valid reasons for embracing the power-centric view of diplomatic ambiguity. Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, is an advocate of diplomatic ambiguity, believing that "states should cultivate ambiguous 'no friend-no enemy' relationships; the clear-cut ones all too frequently lead to disappointments, or narrow one's space of maneuvering" (Pehar, 2011, pp.43-44). Kissinger's view on diplomatic ambiguity is a pragmatic one with *realpolitik* at its heart. Realpolitik represents "realism in politics, politics based on practical objectives rather than on ideals. In other words, a system of politics based on a country's situation and its needs, rather than on ideas about what is morally right and wrong" (Quora, 2017). Diplomatic ambiguity is just a matter of realpolitik. Statesmen, political philosophers and diplomats like Kissinger, Hobbes, Mao, and Machiavelli (and others) will go down in history as stalwarts of the theory and practice of diplomatic ambiguity. They are testaments to its power. Given their effective use of diplomatic ambiguity and in view of their achievements, one can acknowledge that ambiguity is an essential tool of diplomacy.

We now arrive at the crux of the topic, which is interpreting diplomatic ambiguity. For Pehar (2011, pp.6-7), diplomatic ambiguity almost automatically translates into talk about interpretability and thus into talk about an 'open space' of interpretation. Unfortunately, the possibility of multiple and even incompatible interpretations may end up preventing the interpreter from determining the actual meaning intended by the speaker.

IV. Interpreting Diplomatic Ambiguity

The interpreter's first instinct is to resolve the comprehension and (re)production difficulties caused by ambiguity in the best possible manner. Accuracy in the processing and interpreting of ambiguity accurately cannot be taken for granted and the search for solutions raises numerous concerns. The eyewitness who carefully observes the interpreter in his or her booth would like to know how the latter manages to process diplomatic ambiguity given the practically instantaneous and virtually correction-free comprehension and (re)production process of interpreting. How does the ambiguous word activate both the appropriate intended meaning as well as the inappropriate ones? Should the interpreter, in cases of deliberate or intentional diplomatic ambiguity, retain the ambiguity in his or her interpretation or choose the meaning he or she deems to be the intended or appropriate one? All of these questions touch upon the acute problem of the interpretation or resolution of diplomatic ambiguity and, therefore, the pressing need for problem-solving techniques.

Far from being static, interpreter-mediated communication is in a constant state of flux; it is indeed a dynamic language-mediation activity. In this regard, Bagarié and Djigunivié (2007, p.96) insist on the imperative need for the interpreter to adjust to "the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic" of the speaker in order to be able to convey meaning. Such an adjustment is made possible by coping tactics and strategies. Gerver and Sinaiko (1978, p.1) point out that not only have such techniques been in existence for a long time, but they will continue to exist owing to an ever increasing reliance on interpreters and translators to facilitate communication at an array of international conferences and international meetings of professional and scientific bodies.

Ambiguity causes more than one interpretation or meaning to come to the interpreter's mind, thereby creating doubts and confusion for the latter. Conspicuously, ambiguity is a bottleneck for smooth interpreting. The good news, however, is that the misunderstanding caused by ambiguity is not insurmountable. This section charts a path towards a rational resolution of diplomatic ambiguity.

A proper response to diplomatic ambiguity presumes problem-solving techniques or strategies that create firm ground on which the interpreter can rely to squeeze out or construct meaning. "Interpreting strategies involving both coping strategies and coping tactics are employed as overt means to manage the ongoing assignment of meaning during the

interpreting process" (Verhoef and Du Plessis, 2008, p.118). Coping strategies and coping tactics, including disambiguation, make it possible to handle different instances of diplomatic ambiguity. Disambiguation, the very first act in the process of interpreting ambiguity, requires both communicative competence and interpreting skills. In addition, context is critical to ambiguity resolution. Last but not least, a holistic rendering of meaning proves to be an ingenious way for the interpreter to palliate ambiguity. These interpreting strategies are "potentially conscious, goal-oriented procedures for solving problems. Strategies represent well-tried, standard-types of solutions to a lack of fit between goal and means; they are used when the means that first appear to be at hand seem to be inadequate to allow the [interpreter] to reach a given goal" (Schäffer and Adab, 2000, p.82). First, though, let us focus on communicative language ability as one of the necessary competencies that interpreting diplomatic ambiguity requires.

IV.1 Communicative Language Ability

The interpreter is actively involved in the communication process. For communication efficacy and effectiveness, he or she must have full knowledge and understanding of the entire communicative situation. "Bachman defined communicative language ability as a concept comprised of knowledge or competence and capacity for appropriate use of knowledge in a contextual communicative language use. In elaborating on this definition, Bachman devoted special attention to the aspect of language use – that is, the way how language is used for the purpose of achieving a particular communicative goal in specific situational context of communication" (Bagarié and Djigunivié, 2007, pp.96-97). This section will successively focus on issues such as subject field knowledge, knowing the conventions of language and prosodic features as integral components of communicative language ability.

IV.1.1 Subject-field Knowledge

Interpreting is not just about language proficiency or ability. Many factors, including knowledge, are involved. Drucker (Wilss, 1996, p.57) defines knowledge as "information effective in action, information focused on results... To accomplish anything, this knowledge has to be highly specialized". Mastery of subject-field knowledge or domain-specific knowledge is likely to

facilitate the interpretation of diplomatic ambiguity. For the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters in Australia (NAATI, 2016),

> subject-matter specific knowledge refers to specific areas of knowledge in the professional fields in which interpreters work. Moreover, interpreting assignments often occur in specific institutional settings. Interpreters are required to have institution-specific knowledge to deal with the particular structures, personnel and practices of those institutions. This includes knowledge of specific institutional protocols, terminology and communication dynamics. Institutional settings may vary widely, and include international diplomatic conferences, dialogue situations between individuals or groups in government…, and a variety of formal situations.

Diplomatically, the interpreter must be in possession of the issues under discussion, master diplomatic parlance and be, in a nutshell, knowledgeable about diplomacy. With respect to the difficulties encountered by diplomats in the course of duty, Aldo Matteucci, former deputy secretary-general of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), recognizes that interpreting in diplomatic setting requires a surgeon's touch, precision or skill. As diplomatic language "yields an incomplete sense of the speaker's meaning as well as of his intent… [and] comes with hidden baggage… [T]he interpreter must himself have a working knowledge not only of standard diplomacy but also the specifics of each meeting or general situation" (Eco, 1992).

The interpreter and the speaker must definitely be on the same wavelength and share knowledge. Wilss (1996, p.58) is of the view that subject-field knowledge is a prerequisite for interpreting or resolving diplomatic ambiguity. This knowledge often takes the form of tacit knowledge, intuitively activated and inferable from the communication context. Wilss (1996, p.58) is also adamant that

> the more sophisticated and the more stratified in terms of breadth and depth knowledge is, the less likely are complications in getting [the speaker's] meaning adequately across to the [listener]… [An interpreter] cannot properly comprehend and reproduce a (source text) belonging to a domain which is completely or partially alien (to him or her)… Whether the interpreter understands the speaker depends, apart from familiarity with the respective terminology, upon their knowledge of the respective domain. This may be a simple truth, but simple truths may imply consequences which are far from being simple or trivial.

Interpreting or resolving diplomatic ambiguity is a transaction between the interpreter's knowledge of the subject field – diplomacy in this instance, and his or her knowledge of language conventions.

IV.1.2 Knowing the Conventions of Language

Interpreting diplomatic ambiguity is successful if the meaning assigned by the interpreter matches the intention that was intended by the speaker. The paramount importance of knowing the conventions of language needs to be acknowledged in this regard. Eco (1992) indicates that "a speaker's utterances will be interpreted according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involves the interpreter, along with his or her competence in language as a social treasury. I mean by social treasury not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole encyclopaedia that the performances of that language have implemented". Also Iseminger (1992, pp.154-5) insists on the fact that "almost any word sequence can, under the conventions of language, legitimately represent more than one complex meaning". A string of words or a single utterance can potentially carry a variety of conflicting meanings or interpretations. To complete the interpretative process in such circumstances, the interpreter must share with the speaker the same conventions of the language. Eco (1992) underlines the necessity for the interpreter of "understand[ing] and convey[ing] the subtleties of [the] language, hav[ing] a working knowledge of idioms and other linguistic factors that make literal translation insufficient, keep[ing] up to date with new language rules and additions". The interpreter must show tact and be well aware of the twists and turns of language as well as the often-sensitive nature of the issues debated on the diplomatic stage. Knowing the conventions of language is likely to help sharpen the interpreter's awareness and provide crucial insight into the detection and resolution of ambiguities.

More specifically, knowledge of diplomatic jargon is a decisive factor in interpreting diplomatic ambiguity. Jargon is a "specialized language that is developed and used by professionals within a given discipline to communicate more precisely among themselves. It includes the current phrases, slang, and idiosyncrasies of the personal vocabularies of such professionals… The words we use are symbols for what we see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and do. We use these symbols to structure thought; they serve as building blocks for the personal models we create [as we construct meaning]" (Ren, 1998). Yet, jargon is a double-edged sword. It is unintelligible to the uninitiated interpreter who can be easily bewildered by ambiguity and end up

stuck in uncertainty and confusion. On the other hand, when it is well understood, jargon becomes a precious resource in the interpreter's hands in his or her quest of meaning. Obviously, diplomatic jargon provides the interpreters

> with an essential communication-facilitating resource without which they would have to operate on an economically and conceptually unacceptable level of explicitness… Special problems are 'terminological ambiguities' which 'are often a barrier to understanding and translating… properly… Jargon, in the sense of 'technical terminology,' is not our fault, but our greatest need" (Wilss, 1996, p.22).

Good command of jargon turns out to be an effective problem-solving technique. Mastery of jargon makes the interpreter more professional, establishes credibility and enhances interpretation quality. In the words of Iseminger (1992, pp.154-155), "Whenever meaning is connected to words, a person is making the connection, and the particular meanings he lends to them are never the only legitimate ones under the norms and conventions of his language". Just as knowledge of the conventions of language, prosodic features constitute a critical component of communicative language ability and can help resolve diplomatic ambiguity.

IV.1.3 Understanding Prosodic Features

Meta-communication is a form of speech that conveys information about the ongoing conversation, exchange, or interaction. "Meta-communication is a secondary communication (including indirect cues) about how a piece of information is meant to be interpreted. It is based on the idea that the same message accompanied by different meta-communication can mean something entirely different, including its opposite, as in irony. The term was brought to prominence by Gregory Bateson to refer to communication about communication" (Wikipedia, 2017). Meta-communication calls for body language, which includes among other things, as main constituents, diction, intonation, stress, body positions, eye movements, gestures, speed or rhythm of the speech, figure of style or language patterns. These prosodic features must be given sustained attention, especially while interpreting in a diplomatic setting.

Prosodic features are a pointer to meaning. They support, modify, amplify and add meaning. With appropriate grasp or comprehension of prosodic features, diplomatic ambiguities can be disambiguated. "Disambiguation becomes less problematic because those prosodic features or elements when properly (understood) can easily make the intended meaning known… In speech communication for example, (an) ambiguous string (of words) can be resolved or disambiguated by (understanding) the appropriate tone group to depict the intended meaning" (Wikipedia, 2017). Prosodic features have the potential to tell the interpreter how to interpret the speaker's words; they can show the way towards understanding the speaker's utterances, by making it possible for the interpreter to read the latter's intention. Prosodic features are of great use to the interpreter in his or her search for meaning. They may enable the interpreter "to undertake disambiguation easily and naturally" (Shodhganga, n.d.). Prosodic features are cues or stimuli that also carry meaning; that meaning may be congruent with the meaning intended by the speaker.

While ambiguity poses something of a puzzle, communicative language ability, which is comprised of elements such as subject field knowledge, knowledge of the conventions of language, and prosodic features, "suggests a touch of virtuosity, an element of performance… with emphasis… on some inventive use of the materials present, on the added contribution of the interpreter" (Iseminger, 1992, p.70). Communicative language ability is necessary but not sufficient for resolving ambiguity. Communicative language ability needs to be combined with interpreting skills, another critical competence in interpreting diplomatic ambiguity.

IV.2 Interpreting Skills

Difficulties all arise in actual interpreter-mediated communication situation. The interpreter then needs specific skills during live spoken communication to cope with these difficulties. Besides language proficiency, the interpreter needs to develop interpreting skills. These two (communicative language ability and interpreting skills) form an organic whole. One may have communicative language ability, but in the absence of interpreting skills, one may swiftly end up in a stalemate. *Indeed,* interpreters are in dire need of interpreting skills. Interpreting skills are used to closely analyse ambiguous utterances or speech segments. With respect to diplomatic ambiguity in interpreter-mediated communication, interpreting skills serve to determine the

precise or intended meaning of ambiguous expressions. Interpreting skills include, *inter alia*, intentionalist interpreting ability, active listening aptitude, interpreting creativity and interpreting competence.

IV.2.1 Interpreting Competence

Conveying meaning is both the key task of the interpreter, and the main objective of the craft of interpreting. Technically, interpreting demands a certain degree of know-how, of expertise and for *Tamayo (2016)* "competent interpreting … involves several mental tasks executed simultaneously; one of them being rendering the message as if it had been originally created in the target language. Although competent interpreters can truly make it 'look easy', it takes a great deal of conscious practice and self-monitoring to interpret well*". Here, transfer capacity and message fidelity are posited to be critical determinants of faithful and accurate interpreting; also these critical determinants are qualities the interpreter cannot do without as they reflect* interpreting competence which "is a specialized form of communicative competence. [Interpreting competence] both knows about translation and about knowing how to do translation. It is about producing translations that are well formed, referentially accurate with respect to source texts, and socially appropriate in their cultural contexts" (Danks et al., 1997, pp.120-121). Interpreting competence combines theory and practice; it draws upon both *a priori* knowledge, i.e. knowledge independent of the interpreter's personal experiences or purely abstract knowledge, and *a posteriori* knowledge, which is knowledge deriving from practice or experience. Thus for Wilss (1996, p.52), interpreting competence "is some trait that can be expected of an (interpreter) who has accumulated a wide range of translation knowledge and can now apply this knowledge appropriately and judiciously in (interpreting) circumstances". *In fine,* "summarises interpreting competence as (i) the capability to process texts, taking into consideration the complexities of a discourse situation aimed at facilitating communication, and (ii) the demonstrable ability to act and perform in a situation characterised by externally determined constraints" (Verhoef and Du Plessis, 2008, p.116). In handling diplomatic ambiguity the interpreter needs to know how to juggle various skills and secure the right balance between them.

Most prominent among these various skills are transfer skills; transfer skills dominate "over all the other competences, i.e. transfer skills integrate language, text, subject and culture knowledge with the sole aim of satisfying transfer needs" (Schäffer and Adab, 2000, p.6). For

"meaning transfer can be regarded as the actualisation and coming together of all of the competencies an interpreter must have. In the process of transferring the meaning from the source language into the target language, the interpreter must use appropriate terminology, grammatical features, style and register, and pay attention to the flow and quality of language in achieving complete transfer" (NAATI, 2016). Transfer competence is the quality most expected of an interpreter in order to be able to interpret. This means that the interpreter's "all-around communicative skills as well as their in-depth knowledge hence their overall comprehension have to be sufficiently well-developed to achieve the transfer of the content and form to be communicated" (Schäffer and Adab, 2000, p.4). Interpreting competence also means interpreting creativity.

IV.2.2 Interpreting Creativity

In striving to construe meaning, the interpreter must show a spirit of creativity. Creativity equates with original solutions to and innovative ways of understanding and interpreting ambiguous utterances. It is a novel interpretation of ambiguous speech segments. Creativity means coming up with something imaginative, ingenious, delightfully well put and inspiring. "Creativity is the ability to fashion an unfamiliar and yet worthy product within a particular realm or domain" (Wilss, 1996, p.43) − in this instance interpreting. Interpreting is by nature a creative activity as evidenced in "Das Wesen des Übersetzens ist Kreativ", which translates into 'The Essence of Translation Is Creative', published in the FIT Journal *Babel* in 1995 (Niska, 1998). In *Kognition und Übersetzen: Zu Theorie und Praxis der menschlichen und der maschinellen Übersetzung*, Wilss devotes a whole chapter to creativity and subsequently maintains that "the most competent [interpreters] possess a malleable and creative mind", which is part of the [interpreters'] '[interpreting] intelligence' and that [interpreting] is a 're-creative' linguistic activity (Niska, 1998). Wilss (1996, p.52) further asserts that "creativity manifests itself as a combination of original transfer strategies in one or more translation-relevant textual domains, coupled with a seasoned feeling for contextually determined 'dynamic equivalence' in Nida's sense (1964) or 'equivalence in difference' in Jacobson's sense".

There is a popular Burundi saying that "il n'y a pas de chemin tout tracé, un chemin se trace en marchant," which means there is no ready-made path, a path is charted by walking. In

other words, there is no ready-made recipe in interpreting. Solutions or remedies are found while interpreting. This brings us to the unpredictable and rule-ungovernable nature of interpreting. Interpreting creativity

> has to do with unpredictable non-institutionalized use of language […] or the selection of a translation variant which is not rule-governed […]. This is in line with the way creativity researchers define creativity by referring to the creative product. A creative product must be novel and must contain an element of surprise, it must be singular or at least unusual, must at the same time, of course, fulfil certain needs and fit in with reality (Kussmaul, 1995, p.39).

Creative and innovative interpreting becomes possible if communicative language ability and interpreting skills are well internalized through practice.

Creative and innovative interpreting is accompanied by fluency. Both creative and innovative interpreting and fluency go hand in hand. Fluency (Kussmaul, 1995, p.41-42), in fact, "helps to produce a large number of thoughts, associations or ideas for a given problem in a short space of time… and plays an important role during the incubation phase… When thinking has become fluent, semantic considerations seem to set in, which then lead to the semantically and formally adequate solution" to interpreting diplomatic ambiguity. All in all, instances of diplomatic ambiguities in interpreter-mediated communication can be resolved based on fluency, subject-field knowledge, knowledge of the conventions of language, prosodic features, and interpreting competence that can help the interpreter "sense where a genuine innovation will be imperative and how best to achieve it" (Wilss, 1996, pp.51-52). Active listening is an automatic corollary to interpreting creativity as an interpreting skill.

IV.2.3 Active Listening Aptitude

Gile (1995a, pp.159-189) has established the existence of three operations in his effort model of simultaneous interpreting, including the listening and analysis effort that involves the comprehension-oriented operations. He subsequently makes it clear that in interpreting "les contraintes d'écoute auxquelles est soumis l'interprète sont bien plus lourdes puisque, ne pouvant se concentrer sur les seuls points du discours qui l'intéressent, il est obligé de tout comprendre dans une mesure suffisante pour pouvoir restituer le message en langue d'arrivée" [the listening

constraints the interpreter is subjected to are far severer; as he or she cannot just focus on parts of the speech he or she is interested in, he or she must understand everything to a sufficient degree in order to be able to render the message in the target language] (Gile, 1995b, p.199). Active listening is indeed another critical interpreting skill. Active listening is an effective strategy or tactic likely to help the interpreter cope with cases of ambiguity. Gordon (Pfeiffer, 1998) "defines active listening as a communication skill that helps [the interpreter] solve… problems". Active listening demands intense sustained mental effort as well as a clear and strong focus from the interpreter. In active listening, the interpreter "is involved with the sender's need to communicate. To be effective, [the interpreter] must take an 'active' responsibility for understanding the content and feeling of what is being said" (Pfeiffer, 1998). The ultimate goal of active listening is for the interpreter to have a firm and tight grip on the intention of the speaker and take hold of the intended meaning.

The interpreter must in this move show the ability to project himself or herself into the speaker's mind and become familiarised with the latter's thinking. Pfeiffer (1998) uses the term 'kenepathy' to refer to the interpreter's ability to penetrate the speaker's mind as he thinks that

> individuals trained to listen to others must 'kenepathize', that is, hear the verbal message, see the nonverbal behaviour, and grasp what the speaker's thoughts and perceptions are as well as what that person is feeling and experiencing at the moment. The term 'kenepathy' supplements the term 'empathy'. We have come to associate empathy almost exclusively with 'catching feelings' or understanding affect, so the term kenepathy has been coined to convey a more all-inclusive understanding. The prefix *ken*, borrowed from the archaic Scottish word meaning to know or to understand, has been joined to the root *pathy* from the Greek 'pathos' or feelings. Kenepathy, as defined here, means to understand cognitive as well as affective data – to grasp another's thoughts, perceptions, and feelings.

Interpreting diplomatic ambiguity necessitates mind reading, and kenepathy appears to be an appropriate systematic response or suitable solution. This means that the interpreter must put himself or herself into the shoes, or rather inside the psychological framework, of the speaker. By shifting focus onto the speaker and taking account of the entire communicative situation from the latter's perspective, the interpreter gives himself or herself more room for manoeuvre and is likely to come up with a quality translation product. As an interpreting skill, active listening can ease

diplomatic ambiguity resolution in a synergetic manner. "However, one pitfall of active listening is that it is not appropriate when there is no time to deal with the situation" (Pfeiffer, 1998) as is the case with interpreting. By kenepathizing the interpreter extends his or her realm of possibilities as regards interpreting or resolving diplomatic ambiguity. The amazing possibilities active listening opens up include an intentionalist interpreting ability.

IV.2. 4 Intentionalist Interpreting Ability

In interpreting diplomatic ambiguity inference about the intended meaning is at times absolutely indispensable. The speaker's intention can be neither brushed aside nor dismissed out of hand. One can hardly conceive of a single case of intentionless meaning. For Iseminger (1992, p.13) "once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of text's meaning, it gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation". Iseminger (1992, p.56) goes on to raise the issue of "the inescapability of intention" of the speaker. Also John Searle (Iseminger, 1992, p.54) strongly defends the idea that "there is no getting away from intentionality". Paul Ricoeur (Iseminger, 1992, p.57) follows suit and maintains that "in live speech, the subjective intention of the speaker and the discourse's meaning overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means". More radically, H.E. Hirsch (Iseminger, 1992, p.52) is adamant that a text "is, and can be, nothing other than the author's meaning" and "is determined once and for all by the character of the speaker's intention". The intention of the sender is of paramount importance in the resolution of diplomatic ambiguity; hence the idea of intentionalist interpreting.

In light of the above, one can concede that there is some truth in "the claim that to refer to the determinate meaning of a set of words is just to refer to an intention embodied and made manifest in them" (Iseminger, 1992, p.148). Intentionalist interpreting simply means "a way of finding out what the author could have meant, given his or her socio-historical circumstances, and given the conventions of the language" (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.28). But how the clear intent of the speaker can be determined or discerned amidst ambiguities, that is another matter.

Actually, inference about the speaker's intention becomes problematic especially when ambiguity comes into play and makes literal interpretation impossible. The interpreter may not

always be able to access the intention of the speaker and unpack the accurate or intended meaning; therein lies a crucial weakness in the intentionalist approach. Diplomatic ambiguity has been illustrated above by the famous duck-rabbit drawing. The situation depicted clearly shows that the interpreter is left with no clue on which to rely. An interpreter compelled to infer meaning, in a diplomatic setting, can hardly be sure of accurately grasping the speaker's intention.

Despite its loopholes, the intentionalist approach still remains an effective and efficient technique for ambiguity resolution. Ability to infer the author's intention is an interpreting skill that interpreters need to acquire. "With philosophy of language's growing recognition that a sentence and utterance meaning cannot be fully explained in purely extensional terms, that language is in some (but not necessarily mentalistic) sense intrinsically and irreducibly intentional, it is hard not to sympathize with the rehabilitation of intentions as an inescapably relevant factor" (Iseminger, 1992, p.66) in interpreting diplomatic ambiguity. It is only when communicative and interpreting skills as required competencies are in place that the interpreter can hope to be in position to disambiguate or rather resolve ambiguity.

IV.3 Disambiguation

The primary focus or the core issue of this mini-dissertation is undoubtedly *meaning*. Diplomatic ambiguity impacts on communication and hinders the grasp of meaning. This is even further compounded especially when interpreting comes into play. This serious constraint adds to the complexity of the interpreter's task "inasmuch as comprehension operations are closely linked to the goal or *skopos* of [interpreting, that is], producing a [speech] in another language expressing the meaning of the original" (Danks et al., 1997). Ambiguity implies that meaning is not fully clear, certain, or given. Yet, "effective communication is accomplished when the amount of clarity or accuracy achieved is sufficient for handling [the situation of ambiguity] adequately" (Chartier, 1981), and conveying meaning to the intended addressee.

Clearly, effective communication in an interpreter-mediated communication setting is largely a function of the interpreter's understanding of the speaker's words or utterances. Unfortunately, the inherent ambiguity of the diplomatic discourse often prevents comprehension.

> The fact that ambiguity is open to different interpretations or able to carry different meanings (plays) an important role. [The interpreter] takes ambiguity … as something that confuses him, or makes him uncertain. It is from such (confusion and uncertainty) (De Callières), or 'inhibition…' (Iklé), or 'inward uncertainty' (Kissinger), or inability to see through, or anticipate, 'the vagaries of interpretation' (Pehar, 2005),

that the demand for ambiguity resolution arises. Ambiguity impairs comprehension, and hinders message reception, and therefore causes trouble and disturbance in communication.

Interpreting diplomatic ambiguity means there is a puzzle to solve or an issue to sort out. The craft of interpreting is an operation so sensitive that some practitioners liken it to "crisis management" (Gile, 1995a) in light of the interpreters' sustained efforts to construe meaning. Indeed,

> when we observe [interpreters] tackle comprehension difficulties, we witness the delicate maneuvering between the interpretation of specific linguistic signs (for example, syntactic decoding) and global, intuitive capturing of the gist of a message, that is, a swing between analytic and synthetic operations or bottom-up and top-down operations. Also, in [interpreting], there are specific trade-offs between what is considered by the [interpreter] as a sufficient degree of understanding and a sufficient degree of accuracy in the choice of interlinguistic equivalents (Danks et al., 1997).

Interpreting is "called for in situations where language is 'out of joint', that is, when the different parties or interlocutors cannot speak directly to one another, nor understand one another without the help of an intermediary; and the work of the language mediator is to 'set it right'" (Danks et al., 1997, pp.5-6). The process of fixing language and restoring meaning, making it transparent again, is referred to as disambiguation.

In instances of ambiguity the interpreter or the language mediator can only disambiguate. In actual fact,

> the term technically used to describe the resolution of ambiguity in human communication is disambiguation. However, to resolve an ambiguity or to disambiguate an utterance or expression is also subject to dual interpretations. Basically, it can mean the process of determining the correct and appropriate sense of a lexically or structurally ambiguous grammatical constituent… It can also mean the use of various linguistic devices to remove the ambiguities of given expressions. Disambiguation with regard to the first interpretation is essentially required in (discourse)

comprehension because detecting or deciphering the appropriate meaning of any given ambiguous expression in such a situation can prevent misunderstanding and thereby aid proper comprehension of communicated ideas (Oluga, 2017).

Disambiguation aims at recovering the actual meaning of an utterance or speech segment. To restore meaning requires a resolution of the conflict between the potential meanings and the actual meaning intended by the speaker. To successfully disambiguate an ambiguous utterance or speech segment the very act of interpreting ambiguity must be immersed in the respective context.

IV.4 Considering the Context when dealing with Ambiguity

Iseminger (1992, p.81) has it that "interpreters, routinely and usually must correctly pick their way through mine fields of ambiguities" whereby insinuating that diplomatic ambiguity is an intentional and strategic ambiguity. It is an ambiguity consciously and purposely foregrounded. According to Kussmaul (1995, p.61), in ambiguous diplomatic communication, "the speaker gives no more than clues to what is meant, and in the comprehension process the interpreter needs the historical, cultural and sociological background… to find out what these clues stand for or hint at". In his or her efforts to construe meaning, the interpreter is accordingly bound to adopt a contextualist approach as he or she can be "typically led by the context to resolve ambiguities one way rather than another" (Iseminger, 1992, p.81). The primary focus of this section is to show how the interpreter can dwell on the context of communication as a whole to process ambiguity and meaning.

IV.4.1 The Hermeneutical Method of Interpreting

Kess and Hoppe (1981, p.10) indicate in *Ambiguity in psycholinguistics* that "some recent research has been directed at the role of context in resolving ambiguity without the possibility of entertaining a second reading for an ambiguous structure. These experimental results have been suggestive of the fact that linguistic context, both semantic and pragmatic, plays a part in processing tasks". Both context and meaning correlate insofar as meaning can be derived from context. This derivativeness or "interrelatedness is at the centre of recent psycholinguistic

approaches to the problem of meaning and comprehension" (Kussmaul, 1995, p.85). In reviewing the layers of meaning, we have pointed out the transactional view of meaning that has it that meaning is collaboratively generated by the speaker, the interpreter and the context of communication through their interaction. Psycholinguistic research also shares the view that meaning is created by the context or situation in which words or utterances are used and which determines the extent to which the actual meaning is activated in the interpreter's mind. The standard position in linguistics is that "context is called on to complement the literal meaning of a statement. In line with the position outlined here, it would seem more appropriate to think of context as being part of the interpretation of a statement… In other words… interpretation is never context-free. Meaning is not an invariant; it is context-dependent" (Danks et al., 1997, pp.82-83). The hermeneutical method is hailed as an example of the contribution of context to the resolution of ambiguity.

The hermeneutical method of interpretation lays emphasis on language and searches for the best explanation or meaning for the pattern of language that is to be interpreted. Its horizon, that is, the time and milieu in which the hermeneutical method of interpretation is used, is "the larger realm of the context of the [utterance] and its placement within a cultural and historical frame" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.xi). The circumstances of time and place of the communication are likely to provide clues and lead to determining of meaning. Kess and Hoppe (1981, p.89) also concur with Biguenet and Schulte when they acknowledge that "contextual considerations such as the pragmatic conditions under which the input is processed and the linguistic surroundings that the given utterance is embedded within are to be taken into account by the interpreter as he or she processes incoming information". Thus it goes without saying that due attention must be given to the relevance of context while interpreting diplomatic ambiguity. In so doing, "an awareness of contextual and stylistic matters will sharpen [the interpreter's] insights" (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.97). Obviously, context plays a primordial role in addressing diplomatic ambiguity.

IV.4.2 Context-inspired Interpreting

In diplomatic communication, every single word uttered by the speaker holds or takes on a particular significance derived from the context. This means that the interpreter can rely on the contextual usage of an ambiguous expression or speech segment to determine the appropriate

intended meaning of the said ambiguous utterance. Moulton and Robinson (Oluga, 2017) fully concur that "the disambiguation of semantically ambiguous lexemes or expressions can rely on the context-dependent pragmatic information that may be given either linguistically or non-linguistically". To crack the somehow encrypted meaning intended by the speaker, the interpreter finds himself or herself obliged to place his or her hopes in information provided by the unfolding situation. An informed understanding of the specific communicative situation is critical. "So [the resolution of ambiguity] depends on the overall situation, which we refer to as the context. This shows that the meaning of a[n]… utterance is rooted in a particular communicative context, the particular situation in which the communication occurs" (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.4).

In relying on context, the interpreter searches for additional evidence that could conclusively defeat the competitor's meanings, or tilt the balance of entire evidence in favour of his or her interpretation. The context of utterance often determines the correct interpretation or meaning. The final act by the interpreter would then be to "test the meaning which [he or she] inferred against the context. If the meaning found fits the context, then it can be used to stimulate other translation equivalent" (Kussmaul, 1995, p.124). Still, context alone is not a magic wand for successful interpreting. This is why the option remains fully open for the semantic holistic approach as an alternative for rendering meaning.

IV.5 A Holistic Approach to Rendering Meaning

The notion of semantic holism in philosophy of language is premised on the claim that the meaning of an utterance or speech segment can only be understood in terms of its relations to the whole discourse. This is what Biguenet and Schulte (1989, pp.xi-xii) mean when they argue that "the interpreter cannot approach a speech from a linear point of view; rather, he or she must be present simultaneously at various points of the speech. Through constantly balancing the dynamics of words in one place with other moments, the interpreter strives to figure out meaning. The act of reconstruction, that probing of what reality is behind the surface of the words used, is the act of interpretation". In the process of interpreting, the interpreter must cast the net far and wide as "a sense of the whole means a grasp of the various possible meanings which a text can plausibly

represent" (Iseminger, 1992, p.23). Having a complete picture of the situation allows a better understanding of the speech or discourse as an organic whole. Semantic holistic interpreting makes it possible to render a full and inclusive account of meanings.

Giving an exhaustive account of all potential meanings is another way of addressing ambiguity in interpreter-mediated communication. The claim that the most inclusive interpretation or rendering of meaning is the best, simply means that

> no single interpretation can exhaust the rich system of meaning potentialities represented in a text [or speech]. Hence, every plausible reading which remains within public linguistic norms is a correct reading so far as it goes, but each reading is inevitably partial since it cannot realize all the potentialities of the text [or speech]. The guiding principle…, therefore, is that of the inclusive interpretation. The most 'adequate' [interpretation] is the one which gives the fullest coherent account of … potential meanings (Iseminger, 1992, p.19).

The most inclusive interpretation makes it possible to keep ambiguity for the sake of diplomatic communication, to secure margins for manoeuvre whenever necessary. Finally, the most inclusive interpretation places the interpreter on the safer side in the event of doubt or contestation with regard to interpretation, each party having its own interpretation or understanding of the speaker's words, thus leaving the interpretation open and free-floating.

V. Conclusion

This mini-dissertation focused on the topic of diplomatic ambiguity and, more specifically, how an interpreter can find ways of resolving instances of ambiguity when interpreting in a diplomatic setting that requires *immediate* disambiguation. The researcher adopted the purpose of providing the interpreter with a clear sense of strategies in dealing with ambiguity in diplomatic discourse whilst interpreting. Following a literature-based approach, the researcher investigated firstly the nature of communication; secondly the nature of diplomatic ambiguity, the reasons why it is employed in diplomacy and the problems it presents to the interpreter; and thirdly views on, and strategies for disambiguation as reflected in the work of various scholars. In conclusion, this final chapter serves as a brief and conclusive summary of the research undertaken and the resultant findings. The value of this research lies, *inter alia*, in the comprehensive overview of scholarly thought and observations on this topic in a reflective and almost philosophical manner.

Diplomatic ambiguity interferes with (or rather intrudes into) communication, making room for multiple potential and even incompatible interpretations or meanings, and thereby places the interpreter in a situation of hesitation, indecisiveness or irresolution. "With respect to interpretation, ambiguity is doubtfulness or uncertainty. It refers to something of doubtful meaning. A word, a phrase, a sentence, or other linguistic objects are called ambiguous if they can be reasonably interpreted in more than one way… Ambiguity… results in the… hearer's confusion and culminates in wrong communication" (Shodhganga, n.d.).

Diplomatic ambiguity resolution is then tantamount to the ascertainment or restoration of the meaning of the ambiguous utterance or speech segment. This amounts to rendering the intended meaning or interpretation. In the process, "the close dialogical interaction of final interpretant (the interpreter's grasp of meaning) and final intendant (the speaker's intended meaning) always make it possible (though never inevitable) to move past misunderstanding to a pragmatically 'true' or working understanding" (Robinson, 2003, pp.168-169).

The first building block of this paper consisted of an attempt to show the connection between interpreting and communication. Interpreting is an act of communication, a communication service performed by professionals. A communicative act arises out of the speaker's desire to establish communication with a listener in a given situation through the mediation of an interpreter. "In any communication… we are involved in a process of establishing the meaning of what is said, and this is the process of interpretation" (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.5). Philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer goes further in his work *To what extent does language prescribe thinking?*, confirming "one of the basic assumptions of translation studies, that acts of communication are acts of translation" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.ix), written or oral. This first move that has to do with interpreting as an act of communication has led to an investigation into ambiguity in diplomatic discourse.

Ambiguity, in general, is a linguistic phenomenon. Diplomatic ambiguity, in particular, "should be taken as an ambiguity which primarily serves the purpose of bringing about a mediated and improved relationship between diplomatic entities" (Pehar, 2005). Diplomatic ambiguity is strategic, deliberate or intentional. The unsaid or implicit meaning is essential to diplomatic discourse. The power-centric practice of diplomatic ambiguity has given rise to a theory of diplomatic ambiguity. The theory of diplomatic ambiguity revolves around the axis of power and

its discourse is all about power relations. Diplomatic ambiguity is an interesting issue to analyse, given that ambiguity affects meaning.

As a matter of fact, both ambiguity and meaning are linguistic property. Meaning is nothing but the message or information that the speaker strives to get across to the listener through the intermediary of the interpreter, and the axis around which communication revolves. The dynamic aspect of meaning accounts for the multiple layers of meaning that include lexical meaning, implied meaning and created meaning. Ambiguity and meaning are essential aspects of language. They have a communicative function and are both linguistic and semantic properties. Yet, ambiguity is likely to give rise to partial or entire abortion of communication. Ambiguity proves, therefore, to be a threat to communication. Diplomatic communication often translates into power relations. Language and power are related; language becomes a strategic tool in the hands of diplomats in the line of duty. That is why the power-centric theory of diplomatic ambiguity has been the subject of frontal attacks. Now, the question arose: How to handle diplomatic ambiguity in an interpreter-mediated communication setting?

Last but not least, the third part of this research paper charted a path towards a rational resolution of diplomatic ambiguity. A proper response to diplomatic ambiguity presumes problem-solving techniques serving as firm ground on which one can rely to squeeze out or construe meaning. "Interpreting strategies involving both coping strategies and coping tactics are employed as overt means to manage the ongoing assignment of meaning during the interpreting process" (Verhoef and Du Plessis, 2008, p.118). Resolving or interpreting diplomatic ambiguity means there is a riddle to solve or an issue to sort out. The term technically used to describe the resolution of ambiguity in human communication is 'disambiguation'.

It was stated that disambiguation requires to communicative language ability, interpreting skills, context, and semantic holism. "Bachman defined communicative language ability as a concept comprised of knowledge or competence and capacity for appropriate use of knowledge in a contextual communicative language use. In elaborating this definition, Bachman devoted special attention to the aspect of language use − that is, the way how language is used for the purpose of achieving a particular communicative goal in specific situational context of communication" (Bagarié and Djigunivié, 2007, pp.96-97).

Communicative language ability encompasses subject-field knowledge, knowing the conventions of language as well as prosodic features. "Subject-matter specific knowledge refers

to specific areas of knowledge in the professional fields in which interpreters work" (NAATI, 2016). On the other hand, "almost any word sequence can, under the conventions of language, legitimately represent more than one complex meaning" (Iseminger, 1992, pp.154-155). Tone, intonation, non-verbal communication, that is, gestures, body positions, eye movements (in case the speaker can be seen) pertain to prosodic features.

As for interpreting skills, they are used to closely analyse ambiguous utterances or speech segments in order to determine the precise intended meaning. Interpreting skills include interpreting competence, interpreting creativity, aptitude for active listening, and intentionalist interpreting ability. Interpreting competence has to do with both knowing about interpreting and knowing how to interpret; it reconciles theory and practice. Interpreting creativity equates with original solutions to and innovative ways of understanding and interpreting ambiguous utterances. Aptitude for active listening is defined by Gordon "as a communication skill that helps (the interpreter) solve… problems" (Pfeiffer, 1998). Aptitude for active listening demands from the interpreter intense mental application, complete attention, and focus. The last interpreting skill by which ambiguity might be resolved is intentionalist interpreting ability; intentionalist interpreting ability is "a way of finding out what the author could have meant, given his or her socio-historical circumstances, and given the conventions of the language" (Holloway, Byrne and Titlestad, 2001, p.28).

In their efforts to figure out and construe meaning, interpreters often have to adopt a contextualist approach as they can be "typically led by the context to resolve ambiguities one way rather than another" (Iseminger, 1992, p.81). Contextualist interpreting subsumes both the hermeneutical method of interpretation and context-inspired interpreting. The hermeneutical method of interpretation focuses on language and searches for the best explanation or meaning for the pattern of language that is to be interpreted, zeroing in on "the larger realm of the context of the work and its placement within a cultural and historical frame" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.xi). The hermeneutical method of interpretation intersects with context-inspired interpreting. In fact, "every element of speech acquires its special secondary meaning derived from the context or the social environment within which it is used and, in addition, gets a special tinge from the actual occasion in which it is employed" (Wilss, 1996, p.82).

Close to contextualist interpreting is semantic holistic interpreting, premised on the assumption that the meaning of an utterance or speech segment can be understood only in terms

of its relations to the whole discourse. In the holistic approach to interpreting, "a sense of the whole means a grasp of the various possible meanings which a text can plausibly represent" (Iseminger, 1992, p.23). Semantic holistic interpreting is the most inclusive meaning account.

In Wilss' view (1996, p.94), "it is almost trivial to state that [interpreter] skills are not best shown in run-of-the-mill situations that are encountered in everyday routine practice, but in extraordinary situations that challenge the ability to cope with new textual environments to which [an interpreter] must adapt in order to achieve a qualitatively acceptable result in the notoriously short period of time allowed to cope with usually intricate and demanding translation job". Wilss goes further to assert that ability to combine strategies for handling novelty with the ability to automatize information processing constitutes an experimental continuum.

In the line of duty, interpreters have to internalize and accept "the fact that the essence of (interpreting) is relativization and compromise" (Wilss, 1996, p.38), as underlined earlier by Savory (1968, p.25): "All translation is a compromise - the effort to be literal and the effort to be idiomatic." In interpreting "there are no definitive answers, only attempts at solutions in response to states of uncertainty" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.x) generated by ambiguity. Also, William Weaver urges interpreters to show philosophical humility, for "the worst mistake [an interpreter] can commit is to reassure himself by saying 'that's what it says in the original', and renouncing to the struggle to do his best. The words of the original are only the starting point; (the interpreter) must do more than convey information" (Biguenet and Schulte, 1989, p.117).

The closing conclusions that can be drawn from this study include that, despite criticism of the practice of diplomatic ambiguity, it is likely – because of its usefulness in diplomatic communication – that this strategy will remain a thorn in the flesh of interpreters. For this reason, it is advisable that, in training prospective interpreters, pertinent attention be given to ambiguity as a phenomenon and to disambiguation strategies that would assist them in coping with ambiguity in the course of their duties, acknowledging the importance of both knowledge and experience as coping 'strategies' in this regard.

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