



The Language Diplomats Speak: A Discourse-Theoretical Approach to the Negotiations in the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly

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Abstract

Despite the widely accepted notion that international negotiation analysis needs to be a multi-disciplinary enterprise, the field's state of the art does not reflect this necessary diversity. Strategic and game-theoretical analyses make up the lion's share of the research. Add to this studies conducted with an approach inspired by socio-psychological paradigms, and nearly all literature on diplomatic negotiations has been covered. Yet whereas communication and interaction between negotiators can perhaps be seen as the most elementary particle negotiations consist of, not much scientific attention has been paid to them. This thesis intends to bring the language of negotiations into the limelight again, and wants to demonstrate the validity of analysing negotiations by studying the interaction between negotiators through discourse analysis. The objective is thus to demonstrate that discourse-analytical techniques can be a refreshing, critical and innovative tool to uproot some of the ossified traditions in the analysis of diplomatic negotiations.

By addressing some of the reasons why discourse analysis has not yet gained traction in negotiation analysis, the main theoretical obstacles blocking such a *modus operandi* can be recognized. Based on the identification of differences in the level of analysis, the unit of analysis, and the ontological and epistemological morphology as the main discrepancies between negotiation analysis and discourse analysis, it will be argued that discourse theory, a discourse-analytical approach derived from the work of Laclau and Mouffe, is the best-suited method to conquer these obstacles. After a short introduction to discourse theory's basic principles and analytical apparatus, I will develop a discourse-theoretical approach that is appropriate for the study of diplomatic negotiations, keeping in mind the obstacles identified as impeding such a procedure. To illustrate the viability of discourse theory as a paradigm in diplomatic negotiation analysis, I will then apply this approach to a case study drawn from the context of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly, an inter-institutional forum part of the Eastern Partnership. A discourse-theoretical method will be operationalized to look at how discourse is used to conceptualize institutional relations; bureaucratic infrastructure; socialization efforts and cooperation efforts. From this, practical and scientific lessons will be drawn about how the way negotiators talk and speak affects the negotiation process.