

## DIALOGISM AND MEANS OF REFORMULATION IN PUBLIC DIPLOMATIC DISCOURSE FOLLOWING CRISIS SITUATIONS

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of the present paper is to find out the essence of the discursive moment (understood as an act or an event having a strong social echo which gives rise to a massive amount of texts in the international sphere and in the press space) which was created by the Syrian crisis from August-September 2013 in the Romanian public diplomacy. To this purpose, we will use and analyse a heterogeneous corpus of texts belonging to different genres (press releases, interviews, public discourses) and we will outline the specialized expressions referring to international conflicts (recorded by the documents of international law) and the glosses of these expressions in order to depict the rhetoric and discursive manner in which they are used in these genres. We will also focus on the linguistic markers of the speakers taking part in the three-sided communication situation: the specialized discourse of International Law – mediation text – large audience. Another aim will be the manner in which the texts of international law are used (throughout quotation, allusions and also the adherence of the discourse to the legal articles).*

**Keywords:** discourse analysis; discursive moment; mass-media; dialogism; collective memory; public diplomacy; paradigm of designation.

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### ***1. Theoretical aspects and terminological boundaries***

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This paper proposes an analysis of the discursive construction means of the Syrian crisis as found in the Romanian public diplomacy texts. In the first part of our research, we shall bring some clarifications regarding the theoretical background on which the analysis is projected, so afterwards we could turn our attention to the act of naming and qualifying, in the process of discursive construction of a social event and, last but not least, to observe the linguistic means and the positioning strategies of the speakers involved in the public diplomacy discourse.

The theoretical and methodological framework in which we place our discussion is represented by Critical Discourse Analysis. The choice to subsume the analysis to this research direction is resting on the premise that, beyond being one of the means of social description, the discourse partakes of its construction, of its

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changes. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been an appropriate methodological framework, through its interdisciplinary nature and the tools it provides for the analysis of constructing a social fact through discourse. The definition of discourse was also taken from CDA: “a type of social practice which implies a dialectical relationship between discursive events, and situations, institutions, and social structures framed by it”. (Wodak et al., 1999: 157) Accepting the interdependence discourse – social practice, CDA identifies four social macro-functions of discursive acts: they play an essential role in producing and constructing social facts, in reproducing, in perpetuating a social status, they are an important tool in changing a status, and may lead to its dissolution (Wodak et al., 2009: 33-35). Another reference point of the paper is represented by the analysis grid proposed by the French researcher Sophie Moirand, who, by correlating the dialogism and the collective memory concepts (Moirand, 2007), managed to elaborate a research pattern that allows the observation of the manner in which some specialized scientific terms are taken over and propagated by the media. In order to establish the specifics of these “discursive events” and to observe the way in which a media inter-discursive memory is constructed, beginning with a source-text (of a scientific nature), the author analyses the reformulations’ ensemble of specialized terms and the multiple voices (ministers, economists, trade unionists etc.) mentioned throughout the discourse (through innuendos, citation techniques, means of reported speech).

A prerequisite of the paper is that of the Syrian war being considered a social event that generates a discursive moment – a fact/ event with a strong social resonance which elicits a massive text production in the international media and press. Searle (1995) is the one that distinguishes between physical and social facts, the latter having either a repetitive nature (The Olympic Games, the presidential elections), or unpredictable (the terrorist attacks), a technological nature (nuclear accidents) or they can be exclusively generated by human and social actions (armed conflicts, riots, financial crises etc.). We would like to add to Moirand’s definition of the discursive moment the fact that a social event of the Syrian crisis’ scale becomes the bearer of an interdiscursive memory, serving as a landmark, through its conceptual scenario of the chaos it updates, for later produced discourses (that debate other social events).

Another premise of this research is represented by the fact that the trilogy specialized discourse – mediation speech – large public is not only present in the case of journalistic discourse, but it can also be identified in the case of public diplomacy, where the source-discourse (the international law text), a “closed” specialized text in Maingueneau’s words (2007) is retrieved and redrafted in a series of secondary diplomatic discourses. The diplomatic discourse reformulates phrases and key-words of the crisis situations, explaining, describing and commenting them, processes that allow, by using the operational concept of co-reference, the development of some designation paradigms: “the ensemble of

reformulations of a term or phrase”. (Moirand, 2006: 237) The construction of these designation paradigms will allow the observation of the relationship types that exist between the key-terms of the Syrian crisis and the means of their designation: relationships between hypo/hyperonymy, metonymy, metaphorical designations etc. and the means of commenting the facts by different speakers, who, in most cases, manifest their approval or disapproval with the previous interpretations.

This process requires a distinction between the *reference corpus* notion – 7 public diplomacy texts (the Foreign Ministry «MAE» press releases and interviews of the Romanian diplomatic representatives) and the *work corpus* – the inventory of key-words, specialized terms, of their rephrases and the minimal context of their enunciation, excerpted from the *reference corpus*.

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## 2. Excerpts from the work corpus

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- a. Elements taken from the specialized discourse (the international law text): *heavy weaponry, rockets containing a sarin agent, armed conflict, resolution, multilateral negotiations, exclusive competence, shared competence.*
- b. Representative notions for the “family” of the event: *precaution, peace, balanced stance, accord, conflict.*
- c. The actions that were the basis of the diplomatic and discursive event: *military intervention, popular riots, utilizing chemical weaponry.*
- d. Means of designating the event:
  - Metaphorical formulations: *chaos, massacre* (key-word with a powerful emotional impact, invoking tormenting visual imagery and generating analogies with similar events – *wars, explosions* etc.), *a zero-sum game, the Syrian hell, a cloud of darkness.*
  - Subjective, qualifying formulations: *abominable things, a severely altered state of security, tremendous dangers, outraged population, major deterioration, the political landscape in the Arab world, extreme violence.*
  - Ambiguous formulations, following the rules of diplomatic protocol which also require a process of decoding the information: actions on the Syrian territory (*military intervention*), facts that lead to taking a stand (to military interventions).
- e. Social actors or speakers (explicitly presented or invoked): The MAE/ UN Representatives, state leaders, the G20 leaders, specialists, diplomats, laws.
- f. The words of the mentioned actors (quoted, mentioned, anticipated, evoked etc.):
  - The sequences in quotations or mentioning of the foreign standpoint

(1) *The Senate President, Crin Antonescu, declared on Tuesday that Romania “will be from a parliamentary support standpoint in the forefront of such forms of*

intervention” (in directly connected speech, through the phrase constituted of a “dicendi verb” + the subord conj. “that”).

(2) “According to the Constitution (voice2), the responsibility of declaring war belongs to the Congress (voice3). We are content (voice0) that the president (voice4) has requested the authorization (of an E5) for a military intervention in Syria, as a response to the serious and substantial issues this raises”, John Boehner, the President of the Chamber (voice1), and the other republican leaders declared in a press release. (The argumentative process presents a variety of meanings: voice0 – the journalist – voice1: the President of the Chamber – voice2 (an authority argument which implies an voice3) – voice4 (President Obama, whose actions were subsequently dependent on an voice5).

(3) Assad stressed that the country “wishes to negotiate with the leader, not with the servants”. (Com1)

(4) In a discourse held last summer, the American President, Barack Obama, declared that the USA will pass on “the right side of history” (through free indirect speech, with a phrase from the source reply, between quotations).

(5) According to the EU Council’s decision in July 2012 regarding the transition of the “Syrian Airlines” state company to the EU list of sanctions, the only evacuation routes of the Romanian citizens from Syria are the terrestrial ones, to neighbouring countries, to Lebanon, in the first place, and then to Jordan and Turkey. (summary of the legislative position).

g. Structures and verbs that present the speaker’s attitude towards the opponent’s (8, 9) or the allied’s (10) actions or discourse:

(6) In Yemen, Washington **seems overwhelmed** by the task of influencing the situation, given that al-Qaeda and other anti-American elements are trying to fill the void left by the President Ali Abdullah Saleh. (I2)

(7) Bahrain **exposed** the American double **standard in the most dramatic way possible**. (I1)

(8) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs **welcomes** the UN Mission Report regarding the investigation of chemical weapons usage in the incidents that took place on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2013, in the Ghouta region of Damascus. (Com2)

(9) Taking into consideration the clear conclusions drawn by the UN Mission Report, MAE express their dismay and the deep regret regarding the usage of chemical weaponry, on a relatively large scale. (Com1)

Within the structures that invoke and qualify the adverse approach, we can find references to the international law text, as an authority argument in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of the direct conviction of the opponent's actions. The means of qualifying the other's actions follow the directions specific to the diplomatic expression: qualifying adjective: serious, unacceptable or a superlative qualifying adjective – the strongest terms, in a construction that has the tendency to euphemize the discourse: it reiterates the condemnation in the strongest terms = it radically condemns).

*(10) MAE reiterates the condemnation in the strongest terms of the usage of chemical weapons, which is considered, in any circumstances, as being unacceptable, thus representing a serious violation of the international law.*

In other cases, the explicit references to the legislation are correlated with a (subjectively concealed) vision of the opponent's actions. The ontic anticipatory verb "to hope" in the context of invoking the legal restraint (The International Convention) represents a euphemized form of saying "by law, Syria must renounce their chemical weapons" and an anticipation of the other's reaction. The binary structure entirely and without delay is another "diplomatic" way of saying immediately:

*(11) MAE also hopes that through Syria's adherence on September 15<sup>th</sup> 2013 to The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which prohibits the development, production, stocking and usage of chemical weaponry and their destruction, all of the Convention's stipulations, including the ones regarding the identification, verifying and destruction of the owned chemical weapons, will be implemented entirely and without delay in Syria's case.*

h. Verbal commissive acts, by which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will support international peace restoring actions:

*(12) MAE restates its support for the UN Mission's investigatory activity, highlighting the importance of ensuring the necessary framework for this to safely continue to investigate all the incidents under the suspicion of using chemical weapons.*

i. Verbal directive acts, by which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requests, based on the international legislation, the prosecution of acts of violence:

*(13) According to the legislation and the international traditions, the indiscriminate bombardments of the non-combatants must be avoided.*

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### ***3. The analysis of the means of the Syrian crisis' discursive construction applied on the work corpus***

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Taking into consideration the categories highlighted in the *work corpus* and attempting to accurately capture their specificity, we have adapted the analysis categories proposed for describing the representation of the social actors by Van Leeuwen (1996) in an attempt to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the social actors/ social facts called and what are the linguistic labels specific to the indexation of their identity?
- b. What qualities or traits are attributed to them?
- c. Through which argumentative schemes does an actor or a social group try to legitimize the formation of a group or the exclusion of others?
- d. Are the qualifications openly textualized, mitigated, euphemized or emphasized?
- e. From what perspective or point of view are the naming, the description and the argumentation made?

These interrogations establish an analysis scheme constituted of five strategies that contribute to the presentation of social events: designation or naming strategies, “predicational” or qualifying strategies, argumentative strategies, mitigation strategies and strategies of assigning the perspective or positioning strategies.

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#### ***3.1 Naming strategies***

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The first strategy, the naming one, has the purpose of creating and representing the social actor. We will relate to the group designation sub-strategies, either through inclusion/ assimilation or through exclusion/dissimilation (using deictic elements such as we/you/they, metaphors, metonymies, synecdoche, defined descriptions), and to linking to a group, through association/ dissociation (through relational lexemes such as ally, enemies, friends, foes) or the designation of a region (toponyms – “Syria” or metaphorical – “the Muslim family”).

In the diplomatic discourse, the lexemes that represent pacts, peace conferences, great wars, such as Paris, Lodi, Lisbon, Maastricht etc. mostly lose their toponymic value, gaining a new one, that of an “occurrent” nature. In the bi-segmental structure: “Geneva: a step towards democracy towards Syria”, the first part is comparable with what is referred to as theme, in syntax, while the second one functions similarly to the rheme, the informational content being progressively revealed. The Geneva toponym (the result of the lexical-semantic compression of the phrase “The Geneva Conference”) gains, in Sophie Moirand’s (2007) words, the value of an “event-word”, which, unlike the incomplete expressions/ phrases (that cannot be used outside the discursive moment from which they originated), surpass the discursive moment, establishing a privileged link with the assimilated event.

Regarding the social actors involved in triggering the Syrian crisis, there can be identified several designation paradigms, defined according to the semantic dimension that the speaker wishes to highlight: an inner dimension – young, a valorisation dimension: attacker, terrorist or an outer one (closely linked to the acting dimension: which provokes chaos, which kills).

A special case is that of the term involvement (with reference to the involvement of the USA), a specialized term in the RI field, but which, through its polysemantic meaning, allows its euphoric use: the US help or dysphoric use: the US interference (violating the Syrian state's sovereignty).

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### *3.2 Qualifying strategies*

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The qualifying strategies, closely linked to the naming ones, imply the qualification and characterization of the social actors, of the spaces and the communities through linguistic means such as: qualifying adjectives, comparisons, associations, metaphors etc. In the analysed texts it is noticeable a wide range of qualification trademarks that reconstruct:

- i. Conceptual scenarios of destruction, with a high emotional impact: abominable, extreme, tragic, chaotic:

*(14) There are extreme acts of violence, of a greater magnitude than those that occurred in Homs, Hama and Alep. (Com2)*

*(15) Tanks at each corner, automatic shootings, hundreds of civilians, and children killed. These are the images of the civil war that took hold of the Syrian city and transformed the lives of the inhabitants in a living hell. (I1)*

- ii. Social-collective values shared by the international community members: united, fighters, democratic:

*(16) We express our commitment to finding a political solution that will lead to a united, inclusive, and democratic Syria. (Com5)*

- iii. Highly motivational affects:

*(17) We make an appeal to a strong international response to this serious violation of the laws that rule the world and to the abuse of the world consciousness that should send the clear message this type of atrocity cannot occur ever again. (I2)*

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### *3.3 Argumentative strategies*

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The three aforementioned categories function as pathemization seen as a process where descriptive staging triggers strong emotions) trademarks, essential to the argumentative strategies, whose main analytical category is the *topos*, in each of its forms: the object of agreement (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2012), the element

that ensures the argumentative chain (Anscombre, 1995), the argumentative scheme (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004). The present analysis focuses on three representative topoi:

- *Locus terribilis*, illustrated by lexemes and metaphors that belong to the semantic field of the war, murder and fighting:

(18) *The country in which the Government kill their own people. (II)*

(19) *Many of them being children, many of them very young, many of them treacherously killed, I would dare to say. Torture, executions, missing persons, violent lawless acts against the population, a population that wants to overthrow the regime but it is in no way allowed. (II)*

- The implication *topos*, which relies on the ideas of effort and debt, correlated with another pre-constructed argumentative scheme, that of mobilization, illustrated by the desiderate, sociative verbs, by the directive speech acts and the deontic modalizers:

(20) *Bucharest supports a political solution to the Syrian problem, respecting the territorial integrity of this country. (Com5)*

(21) *The combatants must fully cooperate with the UN expert mission, currently situated in Damascus. (Com4)*

“Must” and “we have to” are the most frequently used modalizers that, combined with the we pronouns, create the impression of a subjectivity undertaken by the group:

(22) *We must learn to think as a worldwide spread nation. (II)*

- The *topos* of the saviour, that, in the Greimas and Courtés (1982) narrative semiotics, can be transposed in the following acting scheme’s terms:

- The Subject = the Syrian population
- The Object = Freedom
- The Opponent = terrorists, the Government
- The Saviour/ The Help = USA, UN, illustrated by the following linguistic labels:

- Alliance verbs, which express solidarity:

(23) *We support the steps taken by the United States and other countries for reinstating the ban on chemical weapons. (Com5)*

- Verbal acts of commission:

(24) *We pledge to support longer term international initiatives, including the UN, to treat the long term security challenges represented by Syria’s chemical weapons reserves. (Com5)*



- Action verbs with positive value: *to strengthen, to help, to take action, to better:*

(25) *We will learn to be united, to understand that the state – in whichever way possible and by all its means of expression – has the obligation of taking attitude, it has to care. (I1)*

- Through the assertive speech acts, the speaker presents itself as a human rights, righteousness and justice fighter and promoter:

(26) *I had a broad contribution to the most recent appeals of the United Nations (UN) and of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (Com5)*

### *3.4 Mitigation strategies*

In some cases, the diplomat, subjected to the institutional protocol rules, resorts to mitigation strategies, through various modalizers or through the selection of some types of speech acts. Within this strategy, the epistemic modalization indicates the careful reservation towards the assertions, the self-preservation through the mask of mitigating expression by way of:

- modal epistemic verbs (to think, to consider, to assume):

(27) *I think all the freedom that Romania had after 1990 should change our mentality. (I1)*

- adverbs of uncertainty (maybe, probably):

(28) *Admitting that maybe this conflict in Syria does not have a military solution, we are reclaiming our commitment to seek a peaceful political settlement. (I2)*

- using the conjunctive:

(29) *It is an extremely complicated mission and that is why we are trying, while maintaining appropriate caution, to transmit as much as possible the danger advice. (I1)*

### *3.5 Positioning strategies*

To give a name, to qualify something does not only mean to describe reality but it also means to take a stand. To give a name implies, as Paul Siblot (1997) claimed, to establish a triple relationship with reality: the world reality (the categorised one), the subject reality (which is subjectively implied, depending on its perceptions) and the reality of the interaction with other subjects, an observation that can be related to the three poles of the positioning triangle (objective, subjective and inter-subjective) realized by Du Bois (2007).

- The instances of objectivity outline a referential universe, by mentioning the events, the institutions, the legal, economic, administrative aspects, to which the diplomat-speaker relates to. The noun phrases or the objective adjectives have a conventional value and play an important role in delimiting the thematic nature of the diplomatic discourse, which manifests an interest in the legal, security, politic and geostrategic fields.

Other trademarks of objectivity are reflected in the preferential use of:

- passive and reflexive-impersonal constructions:

(30) *The Romanian citizens are warned there is still a risk that important highways (Tartous-Latakia, Latakia-Alep, Homs-Alep and Damascus-Jordan) to be temporarily closed. (Com1)*

(31) *There will be continued the investigative activities concerning other alleged uses of chemical weapons in Syria, followed by the presentation of a final report as soon as possible. (Com2)*

- nouns of a verbal origin, originating from nominalisations:

(32) *MAE express their hope that a resolution of the UN Security Council will be adopted as soon as possible, in order to implement the agreement that the USA and the Russian Federation reached on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2013 regarding the framework for the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria and which stipulates the constraining measures necessary for its implementation in the agenda established in Geneva. (Com3)*

- the unbiased presentation of legislation, using the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular:

(33) *The international norm against using chemical weapons is long term and universal. The usage of chemical weapons, wherever it might occur, reduces the safety of people worldwide. (I2)*

- The interpretation, evaluation, internalization of the objective elements implies the occurrence, at speech level, of the speaker's subjectivity. Depending on the degree of emotional involvement, the public diplomacy discourse presents, on one hand, trademarks of the static subjectivity (deictic elements, regarded as a primary manifestation of the self in language) – (37) and, on the other hand, lexemes and structures that imply affective evaluations. (38).

(34) *Currently I am strictly and immediately interested in the relationship between institutions, the state and its citizens. (I1)*

(35) *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs took notice with a deep concern of the attacks caused in the metropolitan area of Damascus. (Com4)*

➤ The analysis of the inter-subjective positioning and that of the discourse's polyphony imply the delimitation of the speakers (the nations' representatives, diplomats, specialists in security studies) involved in commenting the events. The speaker (a diplomat, a journalist or an international relations expert) is no longer a sole mediator between the international law text/ the authorities' opinion on the subject and the general public, but a key-instance of this circular process, which resumes, explains and varies a heterogeneous speech, produced by several scientific communities, in a variety of forms:

- summarizing the provisions imposed by the public international law:

(36) *The convention regarding the prohibition of developing, producing, stockpiling, using and destroying chemical weapons became effective in 1997. The convention prohibits the State parties to utilize, develop, produce, acquire and stockpile chemical weapons. (Com4)*

- connected direct speech, through the phrase *dicendi* verb + the subordinate conjunction "that":

(37) *Titus Corlățean declared: "As a representative of a state that, after 1990, underwent a complex process of political, economic and democratic transition, we consider that all the states which go through democratization processes need the international community's support." (Com 4)*

- free indirect speech, with a phrase from the source-text, between quotations:

(38) *Assad condemned his rivals, calling the "enemies of people and enemies of God", but also "puppets of the West" or "a group of murderers", who will undoubtedly "go to hell", according to CNN. (Com6)*

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#### **4. Final remarks**

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The Syrian war can be seen as a social event that has generated a discursive moment – an event with a strong social resonance that creates a massive production of texts in the international environment and in the press space. To create the discursive moment, the conceptual scenarios of disaster and crisis are updated, in the tripartite model of the components of persuasion, the predominant one being the dimension of *pathos* (not by chance, affects with high motivational heat are reconstructed and social-cognitive values shared by members of the international community are invoked). The common places identified are: topos of involvement, *locus terribilis* and that of the savior.

The dominant modals identified are the deontic ones, mainly used to emphasize the *collective commitment*; the sender minimizes his individual identity, resorting to verbal forms such as *we must* or *we have the duty* or mobilization formulas expressed through subjunctive verbs, which, with the pronoun *we*, creates the impression of a subjectivity assumed by the group. Beyond a predetermined ceremonial and a stereotyping of discursive formulas, the analysis of the diplomatic text requires an avoidance of the explicit condemnation of the opponent and reveals a constant presence of ambiguous forms of expression, mainly reflected in the presence of a large number of euphemisms, by vague terms and epistemic modalities of probability.

The present article proposed a pioneering approach in adapting the concepts of “discursive moment” and “designation paradigm” in the analysis of the diplomatic discourse specific to crisis situations. The conceptual apparatus and the analysis grid can be further improved and applied to other important events in the sphere of international relations.

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*I2 - Titus Corlăţean, regarding the situation in Syria.*

b. Press releases

*Com1 - Press release regarding the situation in Syria;*

*Com2 - Press release regarding the condemnation of the attacks in Syria;*

*Com3 - Press release regarding the crisis unit on a MAE level concerning the situation in Syria;*

*Com4 - Press release regarding Titus Corlăţean's speech during the UN General Assembly;*

*Com5 - Press release regarding the investigation of the alleged usage of chemical weapons in Syria.*

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