

# Criticism in Diplomatic Letters

Maia KUTATELADZE\*

## **Abstract**

The article discusses diplomatic letters and some characteristic features. The tone of the letters is critical. However, diplomacy manages to express very critical issues in diplomatic way and always maintains future collaborative attitudes. The article provides explains the tools of criticism in letters and provides the examples from the letters written by high officials.

**Keywords:** diplomacy, correspondence, letter, writing

---

\* Assistant Professor in Teaching English Language, Georgian National University (SEU), Tbilisi Georgia. E-mail: maia.kutateladze@gmail.com

## Introduction

Communication is inevitable part of every relationship and it is the most important for international relations, as international relations is oriented on studying relationships between people, countries and the ways of managing the problems which can be vital not only for domestic policy but for the international level as well. The advancement of communications means is promoted by the development of technologies, due to the fact that difference in time, distance and even the limitation of movement because of pandemic is not the hindrance for the establishment of communication. Digitalization creates opportunities that enabled people to communicate any time, in any case, at any level without any delay. These opportunities are especially beneficial for politicians and officials of the governmental body, as timely cooperation plays great role in the proper management of problems and tackling challenges. Moreover, digitalized communication encourages the countries to collaborate without any detain and establish fruitful partnership, or express the will of assistance, or even criticize impulsive steps. The form of communication can vary, it can be verbal or non-verbal, however, digitalization promotes the use of non-verbal, written form of communication as it can be read any time when it is convenient for the receiver.

The purpose of the writing defines the choice of the forms of written communication in diplomacy. Diplomatic correspondence includes notes or notes verbales, letters, memoranda, aide-memoires, resolutions and treaties. The context of each form varies because of its aim. However, there are some characteristics which are similar for almost every kind of diplomatic correspondence. The style of correspondence is usually formal, words are selected with great caution and the tone of correspondence is more or less neutral. These characteristics are also visible in the letters which contain criticism or disagreement towards certain issues.

## Characteristics of Diplomatic Letters Expressing Disapproval

Letters written by the officials and representatives of international relations are usually carefully created as they may have a form of personal correspondence, but they are representation of the other countries attitude towards certain action. Letters can be sent privately to the addressees, but there are some cases when letters become the subject of public interest and are exposed to public via media. The function of the letters is usually *“to raise questions about or explain policy, set out positions and intended lines of action, establish intent to initiate agreement, ... or to establish a complaint or defend policy or advance a case”* (Tomalin, 2019, p. 42).

The language of communication in diplomacy is agreed between sides. Sides can use their own language in written communication if they speak the same language or they can agree on the use of the third language. The choice of the language of communication *“is based upon one of the fundamental principles of contemporary international law - the principle of sovereign equality of states”* (Nick, 2010). In modern world. English language is viewed as the global language as the majority of population speak English as their first language. Moreover, the popularity of English language has it reasons; those are development of English speaking countries and aspiration of other countries towards similar development (Crystal, 2003). Current reasons are that we have a lot of international organizations, which usually choose English as the language of communication, the countries also tight partnership with western countries that also requires the need of the common language, and as English is the most common, this language is mainly chosen as the mediator between the countries.

Letters expressing disapproval, criticism or disappointment in international relations are not very common. However, it happens and there are some

cases when this kind of necessity emerges. The reasons can vary, whereas every letter of criticism is proactive and oriented on mutual more fruitful cooperation. Examples: "I sincerely hope that... will continue to be strategic partner", "*I also hope that your government will find ways to halt aggressive ways...*" (Babin, 2020), "*we raise this concerns with the hopes of strengthening...*", "*we hope that your government will work with...to strengthen democratic institutions*" (Kizinger, Connolly, Engel, & McCaul, 2020).

The style and layout of diplomatic letters are usually formal and no deviation from formality is acceptable. If this kind of deviations emerges, that implies that letterers are either too personal, or too critical. There is one example when there was a citation used in one of the diplomatic letters. The letters say as follows:

***...United States Policy***

*It is the policy of the United States to-*

*(1) support continued development of democratic values in Georgia, including free and fair elections, public sector transparency and accountability, the rule of law, and anticorruption efforts;*"(Babin, 2020)

Introduction of citation in the letter seems to me to be very critical, as it explains the policy of other country and major traits of democracy. The letter would give the feeling to the addressee that the writer is very critical. However, if we go through the letter thoroughly, we can see that the letter is mainly written in the first person, the personal pronoun "I" is used in many cases. That gives the feeling that the letter is more personal in character. Due to that, introduction of citation may not carry very strong critical implication.

Selection of the words used in diplomatic languages is a very delicate process. When a letter is tried to express complaint, or reject something or give some other negative message, words and phrases should be selected very carefully. The dimension of the meaning of the words limits the choice as the meaning conveyed by the letter should be refined. Tone, which is the main tool which exposes the writer's attitude,

should usually be neutral in diplomatic correspondence. However, "*one of the typical characteristics of "diplomatic" language is a certain subdued tone, some kind of understatement. It is correct to say that the real weight of words and terms in diplomatic professional jargon is much stronger than those same words in "normal" everyday speech*" (Nick, 2010). That is especially true for the letters expressing criticism. Criticism in diplomatic languages is verbalized with great caution, although we have some examples when the message is delivered by very strong words. That leads us to conclude that in that cases the attitude towards the addressees is very harsh and needs improvement or urgent steps are needed to be taken in order to maintain the partnership of smooth cooperation. Some examples are: "we are troubled...", "an increasingly unfavorable business environment and could deter future", "spreading anti-democratic, anti-Western sentiments is simply unacceptable"(Kizinger, Connolly, Engel, & McCaul, 2020)

Letters of criticism do not exclude goodwill and positive attitude towards the addressers. The letters are usually written in a "sandwich" way. The letters begin with positive remarks, when it is followed by criticism and finally it finishes with optimistic note. International relations always ties to attract towards the problems very carefully and maintain positive relationship and prospect for the future.

It is observable that in diplomatic letters the active voice is used more often than passive voice. However, "*passive verbs tend to be far more frequent in treaties and resolutions*" (Topala, 2014, p. 311). Use of active voice has its reasons. Firstly, it gives feeling that a letter seems to have more personal attitude. Furthermore, active voice avoids ambiguity. Sentences can be understood as they are given in the letter. There is less space for unclear references. Moreover, active voice gives the letter a direct attitude. That is especially important in the letter of criticism as clarity and directness is necessary to expose grounded and purposeful reasons of criticism that intends to indicate

on certain undesirable issues. Some examples are as follows: "we regret to hear that", "we condemn the disproportionate use of...", "we commend the ongoing..." (Gregorova, 2020).

Personal pronouns are very important and crucial component in the diplomatic letters expressing criticism. Every kind of personal pronouns can be found in the letters, but the most frequent is "we". "We" usually starts a sentence and reminds the addressee that the writer is not the only person who talks about someone responsibility; rather it implies that the addresser of the letter is the country, a team or any governmental body. There are some letters where "I" is also widely used. These letters are written from the prospects of the individual: "I sincerely hope..." "I have described..." "I have joined..."(Babin, 2020). However, that does not mean that the addresser is in a very friendly relationship with the addressee, that indicates that partnership between countries is very tight and officials feel as if they are co-workers. So, the letters may mention some disapproval, criticism or disappointment but they still have warmth in tone and positive expectation.

The context of diplomatic letters which contain criticism and disapproval is the most important thing. Beside the fact that the letters usually speak about the problems, they usually mention past events, past and present degree of relationship and future prospects. Letters outline that disapproval is grounded and it has its own reasons. They also state that

criticism is based on certain events and relationship between parties, gives the addresser right to express its disappointment towards the action of the addressee. Every letter speaks about the future prospects and future fruitful cooperation. They even provide the solution and outcomes that can strengthen the relationship of two parties. That means that besides criticism and disapproval of certain actions, parties stay in mutual cooperation and are ready to help in case of need.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that criticism in diplomatic correspondence exists. The degree of criticism may vary, as it depends on the style of the correspondence. If a letter is written by one person to one person, this kind of letter are a bit informal in use of words. However, they are similar to all kind of the correspondence in form and register. The biggest importance of expressing criticism is conveyed by the words, and they meaning. Despite the fact that the tone of the letters should be mild and indirect, not culture-bound and along with the demand of the international law, it is observable, that in some cases very strong verbs are used to express criticism. Chaise of morphological characteristics, such as personal pronouns and voice also strengthens or wakens the degree of criticism. However, diplomatic letter always finishes on the positive note as they are oriented towards future prospects and the future cooperation.

## References

- Babin, B. (2020, January 23). A letter. *A letter*. Washington: Washington, De 20515.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Gregorova, M. (2020, March 5). A letter. *A letter*. European Parliament.
- Kizinger, A., Connolly, G., Engel, E., & McCaul, M. (2020, January 21). A letter. *A letter*. washington: Washington, De 20515.
- Nick, S. (2010). USE OF LANGUAGE IN DIPLOMACY. In J. Kurbalija, & H. Slavik (Eds.), *LANGUAGE AND DIPLOMACY* (pp. 17-21). Academic Training Institute.

Pattison, J. (2015). The ethics of diplomatic criticism: The Responsibility to Protect, Just War Theory and Presumptive Last Resort. *European Journal of International Relations*, 1-23.

Tomalin, B. (2019). Writing diplomatically: Managing potential conflict. *Training, Language and Culture*, 3(2), 40-54.

Topala, R. (2014). Morphological Characteristics of the Diplomatic Language. *Cultural Intertexts*, 308-319.