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MITIGATING GEOPOLITICAL TENSION THROUGH STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF DIPLOMATIC EUPHEMISMS

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Abstract: Strategic ambiguity and euphemistic framing are resources in diplomatic communication because official statements have to deal with sensitive events but must be clear, institutionalised and leave the door open for negotiation. This article proposes a context-sensitive pragmatic framework for examining how euphemistic expressions can soften potentially confrontational descriptions; manage institutional face; and preserve interpretive flexibility. The discussion is based on research on euphemism, politeness, face-work and strategic ambiguity and four domains (security-related communication; economic restrictions; territorial disputes; post-negotiation disagreement) are discussed. Abstraction, technicalisation, understatement, semantic widening, nominalisation and passive constructions are possible mechanisms of mitigation or responsibility framing as examples. Recent work on diplomatic discourse and strategic ambiguity suggests treating them as context dependent rather than deceptive/peace-promoting (Bach et al., 2025; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Lu & Zhou, 2024; Yuan, 2026). The article is interpretative not frequency study. The supplied manuscript gives a preliminary set of 47 documents and 25 examples but does not have the document-level source register or screening log to independently check those figures or calculate exclusions so the examples are treated as analytical illustrations unless they can be traced back to their sources. Softened wording may reduce immediate rhetorical confrontation but also obscure agency, weaken accountability or allow incompatible interpretations; we therefore distinguish mitigation of language from reduction of material conflict.

Keywords: diplomatic euphemisms; strategic ambiguity; pragmatics; politeness theory; face-work; political discourse; institutional responsibility.

1.INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy depends on language because states communicate interests, warnings, commitments, objections and proposals through speeches, press conferences, official statements and negotiated texts. Communicative practices do not simply report established policy positions but also construct, justify and negotiate political meanings and identities (Lu & Zhou, 2024). In times of geopolitical tension diplomatic language can perform strategic functions: signalling resolve, reassurance and managing relationships with competing international actors (Jones, 2024; Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025). Communication between diplomats must also take into account audiences with different interpretive expectations— the same expression can support multiple reasonable interpretations depending on audience and communicative context (Yuan, 2026) so diplomatic wording may need to signal resolve

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to one audience while reassuring another and preserve flexibility in subsequent foreign policy decisions (Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025).

The communicative demands of diplomacy help explain why cautious formulaic indirect abstract language is used so often in official discourse. A government may want to condemn an action without shutting the door on talks; disagree without publicly humiliating a counterpart; describe a disputed measure without giving it a definitive legal or political label. These choices are pragmatic because not only dictionaries define them but who speaks, to whom, under what circumstances and with what anticipated consequences (Jones, 2024; Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025; Lu & Zhou, 2024).

Euphemism is one resource in this wider toolbox. Generally euphemism means replacing an expression that speakers find harsh, offensive or risky with one that is less direct, less emotionally charged or more socially acceptable. Euphemism and dysphemism are relational phenomena: a form softens a meaning in one context while sounding evasive or manipulative in another (Allan & Burridge, 1991, 2006; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023). In political communication ‘measures’, ‘operations’, ‘adjustments’ or ‘developments’ may replace more explicit descriptions. Their effect is not automatic; it depends on the relation between wording, referent, institutional setting and audience expectations.

Diplomatic euphemisms are different from many everyday euphemisms in that they often refer to public policy, state action, international law, security, territory and economic relations. Stakes are institutional as well as interpersonal: a statement can influence how a policy is framed, who is responsible for it and how a government’s position is interpreted by different audiences. Research on diplomatic speeches and international political communication shows that official language encodes political stance (Jones, 2024; Lu & Zhou, 2024; Yuan, 2026). For this reason diplomatic euphemism should not be analysed merely as a list of softened words but as pragmatic choice embedded in an institutional setting.

A related concept is strategic ambiguity. Eisenberg (1984) looked at ambiguity as a communicative strategy in organisations, while more recent work defines strategic ambiguity as a message that preserves multiple reasonable interpretations for different interpretive communities and offers some advantage to the communicator (Bach et al., 2025). In diplomacy it may be useful when two sides need to cooperate but disagree about what to do; ambiguity enables each side to agree with a common statement without agreeing on every implication but also defer disagreement or create incompatible expectations (Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025).

Euphemism and strategic ambiguity are closely related but not identical. Euphemism is how a harsh or undesirable meaning is presented less directly; strategic ambiguity is preserving multiple plausible interpretations (Bach et al., 2025; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023). A euphemistic expression may tell you what happened but soften its evaluation; vague statements can be ambiguous without being especially polite; indirect/abstract wording both weakens the force of a description and leaves scope open for interpretation of an action.

Politeness theory and face-work provide further tools for looking at these choices. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe face as central to interaction and suggest strategies for managing face

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threatening acts; Goffman (1967) views face as a socially sustained image and face-work as the actions through which participants maintain or repair that image. Recent analyses of diplomatic discourse also attend to how language choices manage relationships, stance and institutional positioning (Ghukasyan, 2024; Lu & Zhou, 2024). In diplomacy 'face' is often institutional: representatives speak on behalf of states and organisations and public wording can protect standing of speaker and interlocutor alike. This is an analytical analogy not a claim that states experience face in the same way individuals do.

This article develops a pragmatic account of how euphemistic language might contribute to management of geopolitical friction. It looks at four domains: security communication, economic restrictions, territorial disputes and disagreement after negotiations. It does not assume that euphemism reduces real world conflict but asks instead how linguistic choices can reduce the immediate confrontational force of a statement, protect institutional positions or leave room for negotiation (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The problem is that diplomatic statements are often viewed either as political messages or examples of stylistic politeness but their linguistic form, institutional function and interpretive consequences are closely related. A neutral phrase at the lexical level might frame disputed action as technical administration rather than coercion. A conventional expression of 'constructive dialogue' may say we're still talking without specifying how much we agree. Recent work on diplomatic discourse and strategic ambiguity provides grounds to analyse such formulations as context sensitive choices (Bach et al., 2025; Jones, 2024; Lu & Zhou, 2024).

Pragmatic analysis is useful because it links linguistic form to communicative action. It enables the analyst to ask whether a term abstracts away from agents, broadens the scope of description, downplays severity of dispute or invokes institutional procedures. It also warns against deception: an analyst shouldn't read deceptive intent into a phrase alone. The same wording may signal genre convention, legal caution, uncertainty about facts, coordination between several parties or deliberate impression management. Context and documentary evidence are therefore necessary when analysing political discourse whose labels may be contested (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan 2023; Lu & Zhou 2024).

Research objectives and questions

The study has three goals. First, it describes linguistic mechanisms through which diplomatic wording can soften potentially confrontational meanings; second, it interprets the pragmatic functions of these mechanisms with regard to face management and strategic ambiguity; third, it discusses communicative advantages and disadvantages of euphemistic framing in high-stakes international contexts (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024). The analysis is informed by the following research questions:

RQ1: What pragmatic and structural mechanisms do euphemistic expressions exhibit in contemporary diplomatic communication?

RQ2: How can these expressions defuse face threatening acts and preserve strategic ambiguity in situations of geopolitical disagreement?

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RQ3: What communicative advantages and risks are there when diplomatic actors use softened, abstract or open-ended formulations?

Scope and contribution.

It is on public-facing diplomatic language rather than confidential negotiation transcripts; its domains are security and military communication, economic restrictions, territorial disputes and post-negotiation disagreement. This scope allows us to compare what language is used for different kinds of politically sensitive events without assuming that all domains work the same way. Contribution is an integrated analytical perspective connecting euphemistic form, face related concerns, strategic ambiguity and institutional framing. Discussion is qualitative and interpretive not quantitative (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Theoretical Framework.

The analysis combines three main perspectives: euphemism studies politeness and face threatening acts Goffman's account of face-work Strategic ambiguity provides a related concept for explaining how wording might support several interpretations at once. These perspectives are complementary but should not be collapsed into one theory. Euphemism studies show what relationship there is between a direct description and softened alternative; politeness theory explains how speakers deal with threats to face; face-work shows public/interactional maintenance of social standing; strategic ambiguity shows communicative value of interpretive openness (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Euphemism as contextual and relational phenomenon.

Allan and Burridge (1991, 2006) define euphemism as avoidance of expressions that are unpleasant taboo offensive or otherwise risky in a given social setting. The definition is necessarily contextual: no word is euphemistic everywhere and no softened term has a stable effect independent of its referent ('adjustment' may be an ordinary administrative noun in one context but euphemistically if it replaces a more explicit description of restrictive policy). So analysts need to know what is being described and why a less direct expression matters in that context.

Several structural mechanisms are relevant to diplomatic discourse. Abstraction replaces a concrete description with a broader conceptual label; technicalisation uses specialist or bureaucratic terms that may make emotional salience less salient for some audiences; circumlocution describes an event indirectly rather than naming it in compact explicit form; understatement makes an event seem less severe than another description would suggest; semantic widening narrows the term broad enough to include several actions/interpretations; nominalisation packages actions as nouns ('restructuring' or 'realignment') and may background the agent performing the action (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

These mechanisms have different effects so they should be coded separately when the data allow (abstraction does not always conceal agency; a technical term might be more precise for a specialist audience than an everyday alternative; passive voice is not evasive; nominalisation is common in formal administrative writing). A defensible analysis must therefore explain why a form functions as

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mitigation in one instance rather than treat every abstract or passive expression as euphemism (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Euphemism vs dysphemism is also important. Dysphemism uses a deliberately harsh or disparaging expression where a neutral alternative is available. Diplomatic discourse may contrast the two: one government calls an event 'security operation' and another labels the same event an 'attack' or 'aggression'. Labels like this don't just differ in tone – they encode rival claims about legality, responsibility, legitimacy and identity of actor too. The analyst should distinguish between a neutral descriptive category and the position taken by a speaker (Ghukasyan, 2024; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Politeness theory and face threatening acts.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model builds on the idea that interaction can threaten someone's face. Positive face is the desire to be approved of or treated as a legitimate participant; negative face is freedom of action and freedom from imposition. In diplomacy these concepts can be used cautiously with respect to institutional representation: an accusation in public may threaten a state's positive face (because it is irresponsible or illegitimate); a demand, sanction or condition may be represented as threatening its autonomy; a statement by a state itself may threaten the face of another party even if the speaker intends only to communicate policy position rather than insult a counterpart.

Indirectness, formal address, expressions of concern, acknowledgment of shared principles, conditional language or formulations that separate criticism of an action from condemnation of an entire state or population are all diplomatic mitigation strategies which allow a speaker to disagree without making the interlocutor's public retreat unnecessarily difficult. In negotiation preserving the other party's room for manoeuvre may be instrumentally valuable (a counterpart that can accept a proposal without looking humiliated might be more willing to continue engagement). (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

But politeness is not agreement nor benevolence: A statement can be polite while warning firm and a polite formula can co-exist with coercive policy. The analytical question is not whether it sounds pleasant but how it manages interpersonal and institutional force of the message. It is also necessary to recognise limits of applying model developed for interpersonal interaction to relations among states. States are not unitary individuals and official discourse is produced through institutional procedures, multiple authors, legal advisers and political constraints (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Goffman's face-work and institutional identity.

Goffman (1967) sees face as a socially situated image that participants claim and sustain through interaction. Face-work is practices by which participants maintain, support or repair that image. The idea is useful for studying diplomacy because official representatives speak in institutional roles — composure, procedural competence, protocol respect and consistency with government position are expected. Public wording preserves possibility of continued interaction even if the underlying relationship is broken.

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Institutional face-work is visible in the management of responsibility. A government may say that a disputed measure was the result of a legal process, technical review or collective decision; this framing may legitimize institutional authority by making it appear rule-governed rather than arbitrary but also obscure who made the decision or who bears its consequences (Ghukasyan, 2024; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face-work can be reciprocal too. A joint communiqué may use language so that both parties can frame the meeting as productive even though they still disagree on substantive issues: shared framing protects each party's public position and keeps a relationship alive in which further talks are possible. The public statement does not necessarily settle the dispute; it manages how the unresolved dispute is represented. This distinction is important when interpreting claims that diplomatic language 'mitigates tension'. It may reduce the communicative expression of tension but not the material causes of conflict. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Strategic ambiguity and interpretive flexibility.

Strategic ambiguity is the deliberate or institutionally useful maintenance of more than one plausible interpretation (Eisenberg, 1984). Ambiguity is a strategy in organisational communication where a statement can help coordinate actors whose goals or assumptions are not fully compatible. In diplomacy a shared formulation may allow different parties to endorse a text but interpret its implications in ways consistent with their priorities. Flexibility thus prevents premature breakdown but may defer rather than resolve disagreement.

Ambiguity should not be confused with vagueness and uncertainty. Vagueness concerns imprecise boundaries or categories; ambiguity allows multiple meanings; uncertainty is a lack of confidence about what is true or will happen. A phrase may be vague because it does not specify the scope of a measure, ambiguous because it can reasonably be read in two ways or uncertain because the speaker doesn't know enough. They may overlap but they are not interchangeable. Careful analysis should tell which property is relevant to the example. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Strategic ambiguity works best when there are multiple audiences involved. Domestic audiences might expect firmness while foreign counterparts need reassurance that negotiation remains possible. A carefully open formulation can communicate a minimum shared commitment without forcing the parties into public settlement of every contested implication. But interpretive flexibility may only be temporary: if the parties act later on incompatible readings then ambiguity becomes distrustful. Its value depends on whether remaining uncertainty can be managed and whether the parties have channels for clarification. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024)

An integrated analytical framework

For the purposes of this article these four perspectives are put together in a practical sequence. First identify what was said and its immediate textual setting; second, identify the more explicit or direct wording against which the expression is being read (note that proposed direct wording is an analytical

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comparison not necessarily speaker's wording); third classify mechanism (abstraction, understatement, nominalisation, passive construction, semantic widening) fourth face-related concern (reputation/legitimacy/autonomy/continue interaction ability); fifth whether wording allows multiple plausible interpretations and who might benefit from that openness; sixth costs (clarity loss/accountability loss/different interpretation risk). (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

This framework does not assume every example will have all mechanisms instantiated. An expression may be euphemistic but not strategically ambiguous, ambiguous but not mitigating face-threat. A statement may be formally polite but still escalate conflict through its underlying accusation. The framework is therefore diagnostic rather than deterministic. It allows reasoned interpretation of textual evidence but leaves room for counter-explanations. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

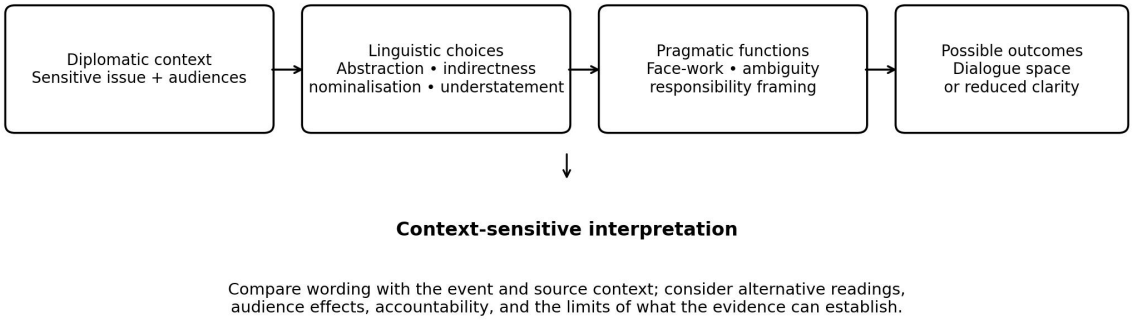


Figure 1. Context-sensitive analytical framework for diplomatic euphemisms.

Working definitions for the analysis

1. Diplomatic euphemism: a context-specific expression that describes a potentially harsh, controversial or face-threatening event in less direct or less emotionally charged terms (Ghukasyan, 2024; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Brown & Levinson, 1987).
2. Strategic ambiguity: wording that sustains more than one reasonable interpretation and may allow communicative or negotiating flexibility. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024)
3. Face mitigation: linguistic or interactional work that reduces the immediate public threat to a participant's or institution's standing, autonomy or legitimacy. (Ghukasyan, 2024; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Brown & Levinson, 1987)
4. Institutional responsibility shielding: framing effect where wording backgrounds agency or responsibility, generalises it or diffuses it; this is an analytical description not proof of intentional concealment. (Xu, 2022; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Bach et al., 2025)

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5. Escalation-dampening language: wording that lowers the immediate confrontational tone or leaves room for further engagement but not necessarily material conflict reduction. (Jones, 2024; Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025; Yuan, 2026)

2.METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative interpretive in orientation (pragmatic analysis + textual discourse analysis) and aims to show how selected linguistic forms might work in context and how their possible functions relate to established pragmatic concepts. This approach allows close interpretation but does not (without a verified and sufficiently documented corpus) support claims that euphemism is generally used in diplomatic language or that a phrase caused a political outcome.

Research Design

Qualitative descriptive design allows the researcher to look at linguistic form, local context and plausible communicative function. Discourse analysis is appropriate because diplomatic statements are conditioned by institutional genre, audience expectations, political circumstances and relationships between speakers so an expression is treated as part of text rather than dictionary item; interpretive procedure also recognises that same phrase can function differently in different contexts; pragmatics orientation because not only semantic content is taken into account but also inferred meaning face management indirectness organisation of interaction etc.; Fairclough's (2003) approach to textual analysis allows attention to lexical choice grammatical structure relationship between language and social practice Creswell (2014) gives a general methodological framework for qualitative research design and the coding categories are derived from that theoretical framework above.

Corpus scope and source documentation

The draft says there is a preliminary corpus of 47 documents: 10 official press releases, 12 joint communiqués and 25 bilateral post-summit briefings. It also says that 25 linguistic instances were purposively selected for close analysis. These are two different units of analysis: 47 documents vs. 25 expressions or instances; so it would be wrong to subtract 25 from 47 and say that 22 documents were excluded. Supplied materials do not give numbers of records initially retrieved, duplicate records found, screened at each stage etc. so these counts are not reported. Hence the exact documented figures and unavailable screening counts are distinguished in Table 1. Figures remain provisional until each document and selection passage is matched to a verifiable source register.

Table 1. Reported corpus counts and documentation status

Measure	Exact figure/status in supplied draft	Interpretation
Official press releases	10	Document count reported in the draft.

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Joint communiqués	12	Document count reported in the draft.
Bilateral post-summit briefings	25	Document count reported in the draft.
Total documents reported	47	10 + 12 + 25 = 47 documents.
Selected linguistic instances	25	Expressions/instances selected for close analysis; not a document count.
Initially retrieved records	Not reported	Cannot be reconstructed from the supplied draft.
Duplicate records removed	Not reported	No deduplication log was supplied.
Documents excluded at screening	Not reported / unknown	Must not be reported as zero or estimated.
Verified study period	Unresolved	The draft inconsistently states 2026 and 2022–2026.

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For reproducibility each of the 47 reports should be listed in source register with issuing institution, exact title, publication date, document type (stable URL or archive identifier), relevant paragraph or transcript timestamp, geopolitical domain and selected expression. Where a source is available only in translation the register should identify original language and translation used. The file provided for revision does not contain this item-by-item register so the 47 documents total and the 25 selected instances cannot be independently checked yet.

The date range cannot yet be verified because the draft contains inconsistent descriptions of it (one passage mentions documents from 2026 while another says 2022–2026) — the final study period must be taken from publication dates in the source register (not assumed); it can't be resolved by assumption. Until those dates are checked the manuscript should say period unverified rather than period defined. Source register must also specify whether original English statements, translated statements or both were used; how repeated formulae were handled etc.

Sampling and Inclusion Criteria

The proposed inclusion criteria are (1) the item is an official statement by an identifiable institution or authorised representative; (2) publication date within study period verified from source register; (3) covers one of the four domains defined in this article (security-related communication, economic restrictions, territorial disputes or post-negotiation disagreement); (4) wording can be found in original statement or identified official translation; (5) enough surrounding context is available to assess possible mitigating or strategic ambiguity function. The exclusion criteria are (1) unattributed paraphrases or secondary descriptions that cannot be checked against an official source; (2) headlines which materially change the wording of underlying statement; (3) duplicate copies of the same document; (4) documents outside the verified date range; and (5) passages with not enough context for defensible pragmatic interpretation.

Records don't have screening log needed to calculate how many passed or failed each criterion so exact number excluded is not reported in supplied materials — unknown not zero. The number of initially identified records and stage-by-stage exclusions must be counted from the actual collection and screening records. No exact total exclusion can be inserted responsibly without those records. Transparent reporting means that selection process, eligibility criteria and final sample have to be described clearly.

Sampling strategy should also take counterexamples into account. Not every official statement uses euphemism and not every softened expression is meant to preserve ambiguity. Direct language, explicit responsibility or unambiguous condemnation would help define the boundaries of the phenomenon too. A study which selects only apparently euphemistic phrases runs the risk of confirmation bias because it may not show when the mechanisms are absent.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure is organised in six stages: identification and extraction; structural classification; contextual comparison; pragmatic interpretation; ambiguity assessment and functional synthesis. The stages clarify decisions required at each point and can be applied consistently to a documented corpus.

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Stage 1 — Contextual identification: read the complete statement or relevant surrounding passage before choosing an expression. Note event, speaker, intended audience, document genre and immediate communicative purpose (if any) where these are documented.

Stage 2 — Linguistic description: record the exact wording and note whether abstraction is used, nominalisation, passive voice, understatement, circumlocution, technical terminology or semantic widening etc. (multiple features may be present in one expression).

Stage 3 — Contextual comparison: write down a more explicit description of the apparent referent for analytical comparison. Label this as analyst's paraphrase unless there is direct alternative in source itself.

Stage 4 — Pragmatic interpretation: look at possible effects on positive face, negative face, institutional legitimacy, responsibility attribution and ability to continue negotiation. Come up with at least one plausible alternative interpretation.

Stage 5 — Ambiguity assessment: Does the expression permit multiple reasonable readings based on text; which audiences might plausibly favour different readings?

Stage 6 — Synthesis: compare examples within and across the four domains; identify recurring patterns, exceptions and limitations rather than treating all examples as equivalent.

Reliability, Reflexivity, and Ethical Reporting

Qualitative interpretation is judgement so transparency is important. Coding guide defines each category and gives inclusion/exclusion examples. If a second coder is available, they can code a subset of the material independently (compare disagreements), refine definitions. If no second coder is involved then article should state that limitation and describe any steps taken to make interpretations auditable (e.g., decision log; revisit ambiguous cases).

Reflexivity is particularly important in political discourse research because the analyst knows about or has strong views about events being discussed. The analysis should not be used to say one government's terminology is objective neutral (or another government's terminology necessarily deceptive). The analyst should distinguish documented facts from official claims and interpretive conclusions. Where legality or factual status of an event is contested the article should describe that contestation rather than resolve it with word choice alone.

The study is about public institutional texts and does not (on the information supplied) involve human-subject interviews or private personal data. But quotation accuracy, contextual fairness and traceability remain ethical responsibilities of the author — all quotations and citations should be checked before submission; any examples added during revision must be marked as illustrative analytical examples unless they can be traced back to a documented source.

Methodological limitations

The main methodological limitation is incomplete documentation of the empirical material: the current draft reports 47 documents (10 press releases, 12 joint communiqués and 25 bilateral post-summit briefings) and 25 selected analytical instances but does not provide a source register or screening log

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so we cannot determine how many records were initially retrieved, duplicate records screened at each stage etc., nor which documents were excluded from the evidence. Study period is also unverified because the draft gives inconsistent date descriptions. So the article avoids presenting an invented exclusion count; frequency claims are avoided; examples are treated as illustrative until wording and context can be verified against primary sources. Before the article is submitted as completed empirical study the author should complete the source register and calculate the screening totals from the original research records.

A second limitation is translation and institutional genre. Diplomatic statements may be written in one language and translated for international audiences; words that sound euphemistic in English may be so because of translation practices or lack of direct equivalent in source language; press releases, joint communiqués and live briefings are produced under different conditions too. These differences should be taken into account when comparing expressions across sources.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The analysis is organised around three pragmatic strategies (institutional responsibility framing, strategic ambiguity and rhetorical mitigation of escalation) and four domains where it might occur (security related communication, economic restrictions, territorial disputes and post-negotiation disagreement). As the supplied file does not have a traceable source list for each reported instance discussed below, discussion below is a theoretically informed interpretation of examples rather than a frequency count of a complete diplomatic corpus verified by source lists. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Overview of the analytical categories Institutional responsibility shielding: language that makes agency, decision-making or responsibility less visible. Nominalisation, passive constructions, broad institutional nouns or descriptions that present policy as a process instead of an action performed by identifiable actors can be realised through this category. In formal communication institutions need to speak together so they do not assign early responsibility when facts are disputed but at the same time make it harder for audiences to work out who made a decision and who is accountable for its consequences. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The second category is strategic ambiguity creation: expressions whose scope or implication are open. General terms allow different parties to endorse a statement without agreeing on what exactly that commitment means (this can be especially important in joint communiqués where consensus depends on leaving some disagreement unresolved). Ambiguity is not always a defect: in negotiation carefully bounded openness can preserve options. Risk comes when later parties interpret the same wording as establishing different obligations (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The third category is normative escalation dampening: wording that reduces the immediate force of accusation or confrontation. Formal language, understatement and references to process make disagreement communicable without using the most emotionally charged label available. But softening tone does not remove the underlying policy consequences. Analysts must distinguish between reduction of verbal hostility and reduction in coercion harm or material risk. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024)

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Table 2. Illustrative domains, wording mechanisms, and possible pragmatic functions.

Domain	**Illustrative wording from the manuscript**	**Possible mechanism**	**Potential pragmatic function**
Security operations	"kinetic intervention"; "stabilization measure"	Abstraction; technicalisation	Frames action as operational or procedural; may reduce immediate accusatory force
Economic restrictions	"targeted restrictive measures"; "tariff alignment"	Legalistic framing; understatement	Presents restrictions as policy instruments or regulatory action
Territorial friction	"boundary realignment"; "security buffer"	Spatial abstraction; semantic widening	Emphasises administrative or defensive rationale while leaving agency or legal status contested
Post-negotiation disagreement	"constructive exchange"; "alignment gaps"	Conventional formula; understatement	Signals continued engagement without publicly declaring talks a failure

Table 2 is not a frequency table. The expressions are just illustrative formulations carried over from the draft; they must not be treated as verbatim quotations from a named government or official document unless the original source can be located and checked. The table therefore does not support conceptual explanation only but only whether any expression is common (or not) and if so how that affects a diplomatic outcome (Lu & Zhou, 2024; Xu, 2022).

Shielding institutional face in security contexts

Security communication is a particularly difficult pragmatic problem because governments may want to signal control competence resolve while avoiding language which intensifies public outrage or closes diplomatic options. 'Operation', 'intervention', 'stabilisation' or 'kinetic activity' terms shift

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attention away from concrete consequences of an action to operational or administrative character of it. This shift matters because lexical labels set what questions audiences will ask: an attack foregrounds an agent and target whereas an operation may foreground planning objectives or institutional procedure (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

From a euphemism perspective such wording is abstraction and technicalisation. Kinetic intervention turns a physical act into an abstract operational category. It sounds specialised and relatively impersonal (especially to people not familiar with military language). The phrase does not tell you whether it was legal, proportionate, defensive or offensive — those questions require evidence beyond the lexical form. Pragmatically its importance lies in the way it can set the initial frame through which action is understood (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Face-related dimension is two-way. A government describing its own action may want to keep face by presenting the action as controlled, necessary or professionally managed. A government describing another actor's conduct might choose a less categorical expression so as to leave room for de-escalation or avoid public commitment to a legal conclusion before evidence has been properly assessed; conversely an explicit term such as 'invasion' or 'attack' might be chosen precisely because speaker wants to reject softened account and make responsibility salient. The analysis must therefore take the speaker's position and communicative goal into account not that indirect language is always better (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Strategic ambiguity can arise when a term does not specify exactly what an operation is or under what conditions it will end. That may allow officials to be flexible while negotiations continue but also make the statement hard to evaluate because audiences don't know what actions are included, what limits apply or what outcome would count as completion. In security that lack of clarity has serious consequences. Robust analysis asks whether wording preserves a useful negotiating space or obscures information affected audiences reasonably need (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The escalation-dampening effect of security euphemisms should also be framed carefully too. Less confrontational wording reduces immediate rhetorical pressure and allows officials to communicate without exchanging the most hostile labels but it doesn't follow that it reduces violence or prevents escalation. Material developments, military choices, alliances, domestic politics and threat perceptions may be more important than the language used to describe them. The article therefore treats verbal mitigation as one aspect of diplomatic communication not a substitute for political or legal analysis (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan 2023; Crespo-Fernández 2014).

Economic restrictions framed as regulatory action

Economic restrictions present another pragmatic configuration. Measures affecting trade, finance, investment or access to markets are often justified by references to rules, compliance, security or targeted policy objectives. The issuing government wants to call its action a regulatory instrument while the affected government calls it coercion or unlawful restriction. Competing descriptions make clear that label is part of the dispute rather than neutral wrapper around an agreed fact (Jones 2024; Khan & Sullivan de Estrada 2025; Yuan 2026).

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'Targeted restrictive measures' sounds technicaler than sanctions or economic coercion. Targeted suggests selectivity and maybe also that the measure is limited rather than indiscriminate. 'Restrictive measures' highlights the regulatory form of the instrument but leaves unspecified how severe its consequences are. Depending on what follows it may be a conventional legal description or softening strategy (or both). The analyst needs to decide what the measure actually covers and how the text justifies it before deciding which interpretation is most plausible (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Face-work has to do with sovereignty and autonomy. The government imposing restrictions may say its policy is lawful authority or collective responsibility. The targeted state might experience or describe the same action as an imposition on its economic independence. Politeness theory helps identify negative-face threat associated with constraining another party's choices but does not decide whether policy is justified— that belongs to legal, economic and political analysis and cannot be settled by pragmatic interpretation alone (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Strategic ambiguity can arise when official language does not specify conditions for lifting restrictions or criteria for compliance or full set of activities affected. Such openness may preserve bargaining flexibility but also create uncertainty for governments, businesses and citizens. Communicative gain from leaving options open has to be balanced against practical cost of unclear expectations. A phrase can soften public presentation of a policy but leave its effects severe (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

An analytical distinction is needed between legal precision and euphemistic softening. Technical terminology need not be euphemistic just because it sounds bureaucratic: where a term has a defined legal meaning and describes the measure accurately it may be more precise; where a broad term replaces a more direct description without clarifying what criteria are relevant it may function as mitigation or framing (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Crespo-Fernández, 2014).

Framing economic restrictions as regulatory action

Economic restrictions are different. Measures affecting trade, finance, investment or access to markets are often justified by references to rules, compliance, security or targeted policy objectives (Jones, 2024; Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025; Yuan, 2026). The issuing government may want to describe its action as a regulatory instrument and the affected government coercion or unlawful restriction. Competing descriptions make it clear that label is part of dispute not neutral wrapper around agreed fact (Jones, 2024; Khan & Sullivan de Estrada, 2025; Yuan, 2026).

'Targeted restrictive measures' may sound more technical than 'sanctions' or 'economic coercion'. Targeted means selective and may imply limited rather than indiscriminate measure. Restrictive measures foregrounds regulatory form of instrument while leaving severity unspecified. Depending on context this may be conventional legal description or softening strategy or both (analyst should check actual scope of measure and way text justifies it before deciding which interpretation most plausible) (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The face-work dimension is sovereignty and autonomy. The government imposing restrictions may say that its policy is legitimate authority or collective responsibility. The targeted state might experience or describe the same action as an imposition on its economic independence. Politeness

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theory tells us what negative-face threat there is from constraining another party's choices but does not decide whether the policy is justified — that's legal, economic and political analysis not pragmatics interpretation alone (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Strategic ambiguity can arise when official language doesn't specify conditions for lifting restrictions, criteria for compliance or full set of activities affected by restrictions. Openness preserves bargaining flexibility but uncertainty for governments, businesses and citizens too so communicative gain must be balanced against practical cost of unclear expectations. A phrase softens the public presentation of a policy but leaves it with severe effects. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

An analytical distinction is legal precision vs euphemistic softening. Technical terminology is not necessarily euphemistic just because it sounds bureaucratic. Where a term has a defined legal meaning and describes the measure accurately it may increase precision; where a broad term replaces a more direct description without clarifying what criteria are relevant it may be mitigation or framing. This can only be assessed with reference to document, legal framework and policy in question (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Crespo-Fernández, 2014).

Strategic ambiguity in territorial disputes.

Territorial disputes are especially sensitive because language implies recognition/denial/ownership/sovereignty/legitimacy of control: 'boundary adjustment' foregrounds technical or administrative process; annexation foregrounds contested change of control and carries strong legal and political implication; security buffer frames territorial arrangement as protective while leaving open duration, jurisdiction and rights of people living there. These expressions should not be treated as synonyms: they tell different stories of what has happened and why (Ghukasyan, 2024; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Abstraction hides who is involved. A phrase like realignment presents change as a spatial arrangement rather than naming who initiated it or who is affected. This can protect institutional face (by not accusing anyone directly or by making the issue technical); it can also obscure human and legal consequences of territorial change. The analyst then asks what the formulation makes salient and what it backgrounds (not whether it is polite or impolite) (Ghukasyan, 2024; Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Territorial language also shows why context matters. A phrase used in a negotiated border agreement may refer to a technically agreed demarcation point between states. The same phrase used to describe a unilateral change in control may be contested as euphemistic. The wording alone cannot determine status. Analysts should look at the surrounding document and (where relevant) legal and historical context. The point is not to replace source description with analyst's preferred label but to make the relationship between terminology and competing interpretations explicit (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Strategic ambiguity can help parties continue discussions when they disagree over status of territory or interpretation of commitment: a carefully worded statement may allow both sides to acknowledge progress without implying recognition of the other side's position but also deferring a dispute that later resurfaces. It can be productive when it creates workable basis for practical cooperation but risky

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when the parties rely on incompatible interpretations and have no mechanism for clarification (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Diplomatic disagreement and language of progress.

After summit or negotiation official statements need to communicate not only fact of engagement but limits of what has been achieved as well. A direct statement that talks failed can damage the public reputation of participants, put pressure on them to take a harder line or make future meetings harder to arrange. Standard formulae like 'constructive exchange of views' can be used to describe the meeting as having continued communication but not claiming all disagreements were resolved (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

These are pragmatic formulae: constructive means positive evaluation of interaction while exchange of views means process without specifying extent of agreement. So the expression is compatible with serious disagreement. It may protect both sides' public face and preserve possibility of another meeting but also criticised as uninformative if it gives audiences no indication of what was discussed, what was agreed or what obstacles remain (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The phrase 'alignment gaps', used here only as an example formulation, softens direct descriptions ('serious disagreement' or 'stalled negotiations'). The metaphor of a gap shows the parties' positions as separated but alignable. It doesn't imply convergence will follow. Depending on context it might encourage expectation of future work or hide an underlying incompatibility. A responsible analysis should be able to separate the positive tone of wording from evidence about the actual negotiating outcome (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

This domain shows what conventional diplomatic language can do. Formulas can keep meetings going between meetings, give each party face-saving account of events and prevent temporary setback being framed as permanent rupture; but they also reduce public transparency. Pragmatic achievement is therefore limited: the wording may manage presentation of disagreement but cannot establish that disagreement has been solved (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Cross domain comparison

Three patterns are analytically useful across the four domains. First abstraction and semantic widening shift attention away from specific actions and agents to general processes or institutional categories. Second conventions can maintain continuity between meetings, give each party face-saving account of events and prevent temporary setback being framed as permanent rupture but also reduce public transparency. Third the same conventions can reduce public transparency. The pragmatic achievement is therefore limited: wording may manage presentation of disagreement but cannot establish that disagreement has been solved. Second, formal and conventional wording can diffuse interpersonal force of disagreement so that parties can continue to talk. Third, ambiguity can distribute interpretive flexibility across audiences so that a statement can serve different immediate purposes. These patterns are related but not identical; they should be shown for each example rather than assumed from the domain (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

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The domains also differ in the risks associated with softened language. In post-negotiation statements a formula that says little about what happened in a meeting may be genre convention. In security or territorial contexts a vague description changes how audiences understand agency, legality or harm. Economic restrictions ask who is affected and under what conditions a policy may change. A single coding scheme can organise comparison but it shouldn't erase these domain specific consequences (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).\

The findings are best seen as a set of interpretive propositions not universal laws. Euphemistic language preserves face in one interaction and undermines trust in another. Strategic ambiguity may postpone an unresolvable disagreement but also create incompatible expectations. Formality may signal respect or institutional distance or bureaucratic routine. The analyst's job is to show which interpretation is supported by text and context and where the evidence does not allow a firm conclusion (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Implications for diplomatic communication

For diplomats the analysis suggests that wording should be chosen with both immediate and downstream effects in mind — softened expression can avoid unnecessary public humiliation but keep channel open too; excessive abstraction makes commitments hard to verify; where ambiguity is needed it may help to distinguish between matters left open intentionally and procedural commitments that should remain explicit (parties disagree about final political status of issue but still specify date follow up meeting or mechanism technical consultation etc.). (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

For journalists and public audiences framework suggests careful reading of official statements. A positive adjective like 'constructive' does not by itself mean progress; technical noun does not by itself mean legal legitimacy; passive construction does not automatically mean an attempt to conceal responsibility. Interpretation should be supported by the whole document, other official records and evidence about the policy or event in question (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

For researchers the analysis shows why linguistic description needs source documentation: a list of phrases may illustrate a topic but a reproducible study must show where each phrase appeared, what preceded and followed it and why that classification is justified. Future studies could compare official statements with media coverage, how the same event is labelled by different governments or how translations affect perceived directness of a diplomatic expression (Lu & Zhou, 2024; Xu, 2022).

Summary of discussion

The discussion leads us to a cautious conclusion: diplomatic euphemisms can serve as resources for managing institutional face, interpretive flexibility and reducing the immediate confrontational force of public communication. Their tools are abstraction, widening of meaning, understatement, nominalisation, passivity constructions and technical or legal framing. Their possible gains are preservation of negotiation channels and unnecessary public humiliation; their risks are reduced transparency, unclear responsibility, incompatible interpretations and a gap between softened language and material consequences. The pragmatic effect of any particular expression has to be established contextually.(Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024)

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4.CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This article has provided a context-sensitive pragmatic account of diplomatic euphemism as practice at the interface between linguistic form, institutional identity and strategic communication: by bringing euphemism studies together with politeness theory (Goffman's face-work), and strategic ambiguity (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024) it provides a framework for studying how official language softens controversial descriptions while leaving room for negotiation in four domains (security communication, economic restrictions, territorial disputes and post-negotiation disagreement). Because the source register was not provided in the supplied file the analysis should be read as interpretive and illustrative rather than fully verified empirical survey (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

The first research question was what structural and pragmatic mechanisms might characterise diplomatic euphemisms? Mechanisms identified include abstraction, technicalisation, circumlocution, understatement, semantic widening, nominalisation and passive constructions: they can redirect attention away from explicit agents or consequences, present an action as a procedure or reduce emotional force of description. Their classification has to remain context-dependent because technical language and indirect grammar are not euphemistic by definition (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Crespo-Fernández, 2014).

The second research question was about face threatening acts and strategic ambiguity. The framework implies that official wording can preserve institutional standing (acknowledge a counterpart without endorsing it), keep a public channel open after disagreement or even after disagreement (keep procedural continuity) if they agree on something while maintaining different interpretations (Bach et al., 2025); strategic ambiguity may allow parties to endorse a common statement but retain different interpretations. Ambiguity can also lead to confusion and incompatible expectations (these are theoretically grounded possibilities: the current version does not prove any formulation caused a measurable diplomatic outcome).

The third research question was about advantages and risks of softened language. The main advantage is that mitigation can make disagreement communicable without an immediate public confrontation; it preserves procedural continuity and face saving way to continue negotiations. Main risks are reduced transparency, obscuring responsibility and audiences mistaking rhetorical calm for substantive agreement or less harm. Euphemism can shape how policy is presented to the public but euphemism does not settle legal questions or change material conditions (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Theoretical implication

The theoretical implication of the article is that euphemism, face-work and strategic ambiguity should be analysed as related but distinct processes. Euphemism is about framing a potentially harsh referent; face-work is about maintaining public standing within an interaction; strategic ambiguity is about preserving multiple plausible readings. Their intersection explains why one expression can soften a description, protect an institution's public position and leave scope open for a commitment. This integrated perspective allows more precise comparisons across diplomatic genres and issue areas (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

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Practical implication

The practical implication is not that diplomats should always prefer indirectness: rather, the choice between directness and mitigation should reflect communicative purpose, sensitivity of issue, need for public accountability and consequences of misunderstanding. Where the aim is dialogue, then finely tuned wording may be appropriate. Where public understanding of responsibility, legal obligations or effects of policy needs to be achieved excessive abstraction might be counter-productive. Diplomatic communication is flexible but clear (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan 2023; Crespo-Fernández 2014).

Limitations and future research

The main limitation of this article is that the corpus documentation is incomplete in the version supplied for revision: there are a total of 47 documents (10 official press releases, 12 joint communiqués and 25 bilateral post-summit briefings) and 25 selected linguistic instances reported. How many were excluded cannot be stated exactly because the initial retrieval count and screening log were not supplied. The study period has to be verified against original publication dates too. These gaps prevent independent auditing of the sample and preclude claims that the examples represent diplomatic communication generally. We therefore treat the examples as analytical illustrations pending verification against primary sources. A final empirical version would have item-by-item source register and exact screening counts calculated from the records rather than estimated. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

A second limitation is that qualitative interpretation cannot prove the causal effect of wording on diplomatic outcomes. The article can say plausible pragmatic functions but not prove that a phrase stopped escalation or changed another government's behaviour. A third limitation is translation, genre conventions and the analyst's interpretation possible influence too. Future work could overcome these limitations by building a publicly documented corpus (original language texts compared with official translations), using multiple coders, close reading mixed with frequency analysis from corpus (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

Further research could also compare how different actors describe the same event (whether a term treated as euphemistic by one audience is taken as technical description by another); reception studies how diplomats, journalists and members of the public interpret ambiguous formulations; cross-cultural research how politeness conventions and expectations of directness shape reception of diplomatic language in different linguistic communities. Such work would take the present framework beyond wording to study interpretation and communicative consequences. (Bach et al., 2025; Ghukasyan, 2024).

In sum diplomatic euphemisms should not be seen as harmless stylistic ornament nor as evidence of deception in itself. They are resources through which institutions present sensitive events (manage relationships), communicate (show up); clarify (flexibility) and make clear (clarity). Their value depends on communicative setting, evidence available and consequences for accountability and mutual understanding. A rigorous analysis must therefore look at what softened language makes possible as well as what it may leave unsaid. (Knyazyan & Ghukasyan, 2023; Crespo-Fernández, 2014)

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