

**Ljubica Kardaleska\***

FON University, Faculty of Applied Foreign Languages  
Macedonia

**Vesna Tasevska\*\***

FON University, Faculty of Applied Foreign Languages  
Macedonia

**AMBIGUITY AS AN INSTRUMENT IN VERBAL EXPRESSION**

UDC 81'27  
Survey Paper

The instances of the use of polysemic/polysemous phrases have been analysed in this paper via usages predominantly from the political discourse.

There are divided views in terms of the resulting vague or ambiguous words or phrases. Namely, it is true that on the one hand natural languages demonstrate inclination towards use of phrases gradually becoming fixed, while on the other hand it is true that polysemy as a phenomenon has been widely used as a tool or more precisely as an instrument to convey a message, whose interpretation would be context-dependant. In addition, although context-dependant, the interpretation in the analysed instances is crucial and might lead to grave consequences if the meaning was not properly decoded.

**Key Words:** *ambiguity, polysemic phrases, ambiguous words/phrases, context-dependence, decoding meaning*

*"The question is" said Alice "whether you  
can make words mean different things."*

*"The question is" said Humpty Dumpty  
"which is to be the master—that's all."*

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

*"You should say what you mean" the March Hare went on.*

*"I do" Alice hastily replied "at least, I mean  
what I say—that's the same thing, you know."*

*"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter.*

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

This paper is concerned with the phenomenon of implicit information manifested by ambiguity. There are numerous instances when people often resort to this device, although on the other hand a parsimonious explicit information can

\* FON University, Faculty of Applied Foreign Languages, Str. Vojvodina BB, Skopje, Macedonia; email: ljubicak9@gmail.com

\*\* FON University, Faculty of Applied Foreign Languages, Str. Vojvodina BB, Skopje, Macedonia

have the same effect. In reference literature there is a series of other words referring to the same issue and used almost interchangeably. They include "incomplete information", "imperfect information", "uncertainty" etc. The functions performed by imperfect information, the causes and effects of uncertainty in political discourse in particular represent a thought-provoking topic.

In linguistic theory, the scope for semantic vagueness is an inherent part of all living languages and is caused by the influence of context (both linguistic and extra-linguistic) on meaning. An essential property of languages is considered by specialists to be that they underspecify the intended meaning of speakers. This underspecification implies inference on the part of the listener (or reader) in order to retrieve the most likely intended message, given one's knowledge of the language, the author and the context.

The duality reading is associated with syntax, as well as with homophones and homonyms, where what is called a duck-rabbit effect is achieved in that you have either one reading or the other in mind, but not some hybrid of the two. For instance,

- Syntactic ambiguity:

*Flying planes can be dangerous.* (Either you are doing the flying or someone else is.)

*The president could not ratify the treaty.* (He couldn't ratify it versus he could "not-ratify" it, as an option.)

- Lexical ambiguity

-*bank* (financial versus river).

Among the original attempts to define ambiguity was the one by the English critic Sir William Empson in his book entitled *Seven Types of Ambiguity* 1930. According to Empson (1947), the range of ambiguities includes: metaphor, two or more meanings present in one, two ideas connected through context presented with one word simultaneously, two or more meanings that do not agree but combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author, then when a statement says nothing and the readers are forced to invent a statement of their

own, most likely in conflict with that of the author, when two words that within context are opposites that expose a fundamental division in the author's mind.

It seems to be paradoxical, but words can be powerful or not. In fact, it is believed that they become powerful if used as tools, through their usage by human beings, which can be skilful or clumsy. However, since the public can over time gain an insight into the tactics they, tend to replace them with new techniques.

There are several instances of language and its power. In less scientifically advanced cultures the use of language in ceremonials is ceremonial. Words were regarded as makers of a mood. Many fairy tales center around the power of language for good or evil, including magic words like *abracadabra*, then in old Roman law - a set of words (some archaic) was used without which the contract would be null and void.

As a linguistic discipline, pragmatics is concerned with the principles regulating people's intentions as well as hearer's understandings that are often not identical. Pragmatics also covers issues relating to functions and forms of indirectness, politeness strategies and the relation between language form and the type of discourse where it occurs.

It is possible to be direct in different ways and to various degrees. The underlying reason in the intention to communicate indirectly is in fact to express avoidance of a confrontational speech act. It is believed that the powerful have less to fear regarding directness. Politeness is among the most prominent examples of indirectness by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation.

Regarding politeness, definitions about politeness in cross-cultural and intercultural terms are different. Led by dominant modes, cultures as well as individuals have different ideas about what is likely to produce conflict.

There are several politeness strategies (Lakoff, 1990), such as: distance, deference and camaraderie. Words relating to dangerous emotions are replaced with safer ones, which suggest that no emotion is involved. For instance, "incident" for "war", "revenue enhancement" for "tax". Deferential strategies resort to euphemisms and circumlocutions and the listener is the final judgment. The distance politeness is characteristic of the middle and upper classes in most of Europe, while deference is regarded as typical in Asian societies. If the interlocutors

operate in the same system, the tendency is that they interpret an interlocutor's behavior as conventional. Openness is regarded as a sign of courtesy. This strategy is known as camaraderie. In this system nothing is too terrible to say, there is no use of euphemisms or technical terms. Being a part of one culture entails a great deal of sophisticated implicit knowledge.

In political science, phenomena relating to imperfect information have been explained in psychological terms. In elections, for instance, imperfect information plays a subtle but important role.

This paper shall illustrate ambiguity through instances predominantly from the political discourse.

### **1. Newspeak and Eurospeak**

Today, the principal function of language, its communicative function and the connection between languages and society has become most prominent. Language in general nowadays is influenced by so many processes that there is room for concern about its role as a contributor in communication.

An instance of the series of new phenomena is the so-called Eurospeak (in light of the integration processes) which is believed that has replaced Newspeak (coined in Orwell's *Ninety Eighty - Four*). In Orwellian sense Newspeak is actually a speech created and designed specifically to suit the needs of the ruling system. In order to create a submissive nation, the language has been adjusted to meet the needs of the system. That language was perfected to an extent when it was actually viewed as a tool of manipulation, used by the employees of the so-called Ministry of Truth, who in fact work in the direction of creating a reality and perception of the reality in a way they want others to see it. This book has become a motive nowadays for an insightful sociolinguistic analysis of a number of language phenomena today. The idea behind the artificially created language lies in the opinion that not only reality forms the language, but also the language can form the reality. In terms of the way of thinking, Newspeak was created for ideological purposes of totalitarian regimes, and was designed in a way that will allow articulation of thought in line with the ruling government. Reputedly, Newspeak was

not intended for interaction but just unilateral communication – one of the participants in a dialogue is in fact listener and not active participant.

Although there are debates around the authorship of the term Newspeak, since similar phenomena and warnings were mentioned in Zamyatin's book *We*, it is frequently cited as a book that provokes thoughts about language and society.

Sociolinguists argue that the change from totalitarian to democratic discourse has not produced significant change and that in political discourse it appears in contexts with underlying propaganda, i.e. contexts where persuasive role of the language is most prominent: advertising, language of administration and church. In other words, with democratization Newspeak has not disappeared (Kryzan-Stanojevic, B., 2010). Analysts of language and society claim that it has retained all the features connected with manipulation as a tool.

Eurospeak is regarded nowadays as a subtype of Newspeak. If not analysed on a lexical level, problems arise in loading the semantic level connected with phenomena known as neologism, coinage and desecration. In fact, new semantic values have been created and attached to the already known words, but although they are present in public use of the language, they have still not undergone the test and acceptance by the public. The new newspeak Eurospeak is not used only by the administration, but in the disseminated materials intended for the general public.

## **2. Electoral competitions and public speeches**

Among the prominent domains where ambiguity is present is ambiguity in electoral platforms. It is believed that parties choose ambiguity fearing to lose if not being ambiguous in their wording. Namely, an ambiguous formulation can be interpreted in various ways and accepted as possible policy by individuals otherwise sharing similar or identical views. On the other hand, a platform that is not ambiguous is worded in a way that all individuals understand in the same way. Talking about ambiguity in political platforms in particular, there is a notion known as "probability distribution", referring to its possible connection with a series of possible policies.

From voters' point of view as recipients/receivers of a message, they dislike ambiguity, which implies that they choose which party to vote for based on what s/he understands regarding parties' policies and the degree of ambiguity in the proposed platforms. In elections, politicians know how potential voters behave and they adjust their strategies accordingly.

From the point of view of the sender of the message (the political party), if the message is clear, the voter understands it clearly. Political talk is the origin of ambiguity. Ambiguity can be intentional or unintentional. In addition, unintentional ambiguity may refer to slips of the tongue, gestures or other kinds of unconscious behaviour. Then, it is often a result of insufficient coordination within the party, when different party members speak differently about the same issue, and by the fact that political parties most often do not communicate directly with the electors i.e. an important part of political information is mediated by journalists. Since political communication is mass communication, and at the same time a politician is not able to design a different talk for each elector, the talks would be very clear.

An important feature of strategic or intentional, and not unintentional ambiguity is that there is possibility for an ambiguous platform to be understood differently, while politicians would like to send their message to different electors. It is hard to perfectly realize this idea, but that is one of the major underpinning intentions. Under incomplete information of voters themselves, parties' proposals might seem ambiguous. The objective of a party is to maximize its expected plurality (Calvert, R. L., 1986, Laslier, J., 2000, Laslier, J. 2003).

#### 1. Non-ambiguous platforms

If there is a clear and complete description of all features of a given policy proposal, the voters can make informed decisions.

#### 2. Ambiguous platforms

One political platform might be interpreted differently by two individuals for instance, since it is a combination of different positions. It is believed that a voter would choose a party which has proposed something and not a party whose messages are vague. In terms of expected votes ambiguous platforms are expected to be costly.

#### 3. Speeches for the general public

In terms of articulation of messages, analysts are also interested in the way politicians represent the external reality. In 1988 presidential campaign in the USA, for instance, there was heavy reliance on spin doctors and image consultants. Every word uttered by the candidates was subjected to in-depth analysis.

In campaigns specifically, it is realized that a snappy slogan wins over a thoughtful analysis. Research findings show that people are eager for charisma, for candidates who make them feel good, excited, part of success. The word 'charisma' in its modern use is often associated in the American politics with John Kennedy, the American first television president. In fact, what matters is not the message the candidate is sending, but the fact that the main message is a believable, so-called 'trust me' message. This leads to a conclusion that messages should be transmitted subtly, via every channel available – verbal, but nonverbal as well: facial expression, gesture, stance, dress, intonation and all other methods used in order to tacitly convey the message about who the speaker is. In addition, it is often underlined by style analysts that all channels must convey the same message, and that no mixed messages will be tolerated.

Words, especially well-chosen words, and slogans are still more potent than nonverbal messages relevant only in their immediate reception. However, it is important to find the right words, which is not simple in a pluralistic society (Lakoff, R.T., 1990). The objective in a public speech is to say what everyone wants to hear: to convey things to all people to tell each individual to "use you." On the one hand, speakers want to avoid the emptiness of "just rhetoric", while on the other hand the dilemma is how to remain both safe and persuasive. In the appendix of his *Nineteen eighty-four*, George Orwell had an idea about how it could be done. He proposed that where he described forms and the intended function. Since it is a language that gives form to a thought, he believed that it could be achieved through manipulating the language. According to him, Newspeak was in fact elimination of a great many words and the restriction of meaning of many more. In Orwell's opinion it was designed to diminish the range of thought, not to extend it.

Ronald Reagan was known in the media as "The Great Communicator" (Lakoff, R.T., 1990). The phrase "great communicator" implies that the audience is given a more important role. Analysts explain Regan's reputation as a communicator by referring to his use of ambiguity. It is assumed that a politician's job is to be all things to all people, to please everyone and offend no one. On the one hand it cannot be done by offering specific programmes and explicitly describing intentions and actions, on the other hand, a politician cannot say nothing.

Ambiguous sentences are left to the hearer to interpret. In case of ambiguity, the context that disambiguates the linguistic forms must be linguistic. In one person's context, one utterance can mean one thing, in another's something else. To each one some meaning is perfectly clear and they don't feel the need to check it out or to discover the ambiguity. In addition, interpretation of a message can involve people's previous experience, attitudes, education.

Another important aspect noted in the analyses of public speeches is the element of the so-called "right to flippancy". There is one notorious case often cited. It is a case that could have made a significant trouble for a first-term president. Namely, in 1983 the Congress proposed a regulation to make the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King a national holiday, which several conservatives urged the president to veto the bill. Reagan said he would sign it because of its "symbolic" importance. The story aired in the media was that President Reagan telephoned the widow of Martin Luther King asking her not to be offended by his press conference comment "We'll know in about 35 years, won't we?" whether King was a Communist sympathizer. Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King's widow, said that he apologized to her saying that "it was a flippant remark made in response to what he considered a flippant question."

On the other hand, White House assistants denied that the president had apologized. They said that it was an explanation and that "he didn't mean the remarks the way they sounded". In fact, there remains a question of what the disclaimer meant in speech-act terms: was it an apology or an explanation. There are at least two ambiguities in the above sentence: question tags that are ambiguous and the use of 'we'.



The uncertainty about the tag question is whether it is rhetorical (meaning that he knows the answer) or sincere (where an informative response is expected).

In addition to flippancy as a form of permissible violation of conversational logic maxims is joking. Reagan's joking in his public speeches is notorious. On several occasions during his presidency Reagan joked with his audience (as a characteristic of camaraderie). President John Kennedy was noted for his wit, but it was a kind of wit that was distancing. Reagan's joking was intended to be more egalitarian, without conveying the message "admire my cleverness", but "we both feel the same way". The idea behind using jokes is that by presenting controversial ideas as jokes, the joker can have it both ways.

Both flippancy and joking provide escape. From the point of view of recipients' perception, it is assumed that the words of the powerful will be taken seriously by the general public, no matter how they are intended. The questions arising were: Did he really say that? Did he really mean that? Did he have an idea that that was what he meant? Reagan's media specialists commented that people often are not able to get or take a joke. In this and similar cases, Reagan enjoyed a dual advantage. Namely, when criticism came the comment was that it was "just a joke". But the critics' are able to perceive the hidden serious message.

In terms of analysis of speeches, efforts are directed toward putting a particular interpretation or "spin". This is in fact a new group known as spin doctors. In this context, a good way to doctor spin is to furnish the words, meaning whoever first applies a lexical item to a reality defines that reality in the public mind.

In almost all areas of public intercourse representatives have something to hide or beautify. In this respect, euphemisms have achieved the status of a science. The exercise of creating euphemisms is regarded as a kind of creative lexicology. For instance, 'revenue enhancement' is used for 'tax increase', 'nonretained' for 'fired', 'friendly fire' for 'killing allies', 'collateral damage' for 'civilian casualties', 'coercive diplomacy' for 'bombing', 'different version of the facts' for a 'lie'.

### 3. Conference Diplomacy

In conference diplomacy, a successful diplomat engaged in the negotiation of texts will often attempt to persuade his interlocutors to reach an agreement on a wording which combines precision with ambiguity. The findings indicate that these two extremes can be combined in the same paragraph or in a longer text, but rarely in the same sentence. The precision will as a rule serve its purposes when stipulating claims or limits relating to commitments, while the ambiguity will serve to alleviate potential anxieties on either aspect of interpretation or to secure a margin for later interpretation.

Regarding his persistent emphasis on the beauty of ambiguity, according to Bernstein (1976) ambiguity may serve as a useful tool in diplomacy, as it is in art, while on the other hand it can become catastrophic when diplomacy turns into hard fact, although it can be glorious in an actual work of art. Aesthetics si, politics, no."

#### 3.1. Culture specific background

It is possible that different languages, emerging from and reflecting distinct cultures, offer a varying scope for ambiguity (intended or unintended). For example, the Chinese are predisposed to underspecification and ambiguity as an attitude that is culture-conditioned in interpersonal communications, while the opposite is connected with American citizens. Based on this assumption, differences in the language used in negotiations could possibly imply a distinct advantage on diplomats attempting to introduce ambiguities in negotiated texts in order to serve their own purposes. Then, the use of Latin in drafting diplomatic documents until replaced by French in the eighteenth century would have avoided the advantages enjoyed by native French speakers, and, since the early twentieth century, by the diplomats and negotiators whose mother tongue was English.

It is a fact that precision was often avoided with recourse to ambiguity. The Treaty of Breda was signed in 1667 between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands after prolonged negotiations. It was written in Latin, with no explicit reference to the central cession - that of the island of Manhattan from the latter country to the former in exchange for a group of spice islands in the East Indies.

Precision is regarded as potentially risky. Contemporary examples of avoidance of potentially risky precision are the advice given by the legal department of the World Bank to its president, Mr. Wolferson, to avoid any explicit reference to the term "corruption". Here, precision could give offence.

In drafting legal documents, such as contracts, strong efforts are usually made to avoid ambiguity. Conference diplomacy implies almost constant exposure to legal texts, either those containing the mandates or precedents governing the conference or those which have to be drafted including the conference results in form of recommendations with no legal force or with binding commitments). The interpretation and negotiation of such documents is a key part of conference diplomacy.

The work of drafting committees occupies what is often a central role in which the conciliation of the views of those delegations seeking precision in definitions and commitments with those who prefer ambiguity is the most important. It is easier to reach an agreement to a specific commitment than to a vague one.

The Uruguay Round (UR) for instance is known for eleven years of multilateral trade negotiations. It resulted in the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1994. These negotiations are known for numerous examples of conflicting interests primarily between developed and developing countries, but sometimes between the developed countries (between the United States and the European Union). One example of this conflict of interests regarding precision versus ambiguity occurred when the UR negotiations ran into a stalemate in November 1999, and were on the verge of collapse, because of the failure to agree on the drafting of new multilateral rules for conducting of international trade. Thirty countries, representing those countries most actively engaged in the Round, issued a statement expressing their "deep preoccupation about the state of the UR negotiations on rules" and insisted on "clearer and more precise rules". Their appeal was accepted, but still it took another two and a half years before the negotiation resulted in the Final Act for signature in Marrakesh. One of the constant bases of dispute between developing and developed countries during the negotiations was the question of concessions, which developing countries could secure from the

developed ones. This was called "special and differential treatment", and was known in the terminology of WTO under the acronym "SPD". This new term was introduced to describe the constant preoccupation of a number of countries. It is regarded as too vague to represent any firm commitment, but is used as a constant reminder from the developing members to the developed members that they should not expect full reciprocity of commercial policy concessions.

Another example is agricultural protectionism - an issue where developing and developed countries that protect domestic producers and are providing a basis for the gradual liberalisation of the sector (Japan, the EU, Norway, Switzerland). They have joined forces to defend these policies on the grounds of the "multi-functionality" of agriculture. The term is vague, and therefore ambiguous, and signifies that farming is a part of a national life-style, at the same time serving as a vehicle for traditional and social values excluding it from merely commercial considerations. In the food-exporting countries of the Cairns Group, this term has become a part in the terminology of multilateral commercial diplomacy.

Additional examples can be found in the domain of peace-keeping as the relevant concepts and terminology have evolved over the past decade. However, there is a significant difference that the ambiguity is not thought, because of the serious operational consequences. For example, the term "rules of engagement" might indicate different meanings with different national contingents in multinational peace-keeping forces. It is realized that it has happened but by accident not by design. Possible ambiguities are attributed to problems of translation.

In terms of different culture-determined approaches to ambiguity, basic texts governing Sino-American relations had been characterised by their inherent ambiguities, and in particular by what came to be termed the "strategic ambiguity" regarding how far the United States would defend Taiwan in case it was attacked. President George W. Bush provided his clarification regarding the US policy towards the security of Taiwan by affirming that the US "would do what it takes" in such an eventuality, thereby focusing on precision rather than ambiguity.

As an illustration, examples that attracted much diplomatic attention were noted in the early months of George W. Bush's presidency. It refers to the interpretation of ambiguities in English and Chinese. For instance, at the beginning of April 2001 an American "surveillance" aircraft collided with a Chinese military jet off China's southern coast in the vicinity of Hainan Island. After that China demanded an apology from the United States as a condition for discussing the release of the crew of the aircraft. The view of the United States was that they had nothing to apologise for, arguing that the collision had occurred in international airspace. These opposing views caused a linguistic and diplomatic challenge to both "sides to come up with sentences in English and Chinese that were close enough to be considered a single statement... yet distant enough to allow subtly different interpretations in each country" (*International Herald Tribune*, 10 April 2001, 5). It also adds that "the two sides have drawn their semantic lines in the sand, leaving a gap that diplomatic wordsmiths are now trying to bridge. But just as nuances in translation can create misunderstandings, they can create opportunities, too, allowing diplomats to leave a fuzzy middle between words that is palatable to both sides."

#### **4. Peace agreements**

It is questionable why ambiguous wording would be used in a peace agreement. Those drafting such texts, including mediators, reason that if two parties have strong and contradictory interests, and if it seems that neither side is willing to concede a part of its maximum demand, and if the negotiations are constrained in terms of time and the parties cannot discuss such concessions in detail, the issue of conflicting interests is usually resolved, simulating a compromise in a very rudimentary form. In such cases mediators may propose a formulation which is open to at least two different interpretations, implying at least two meanings, one gratifying the interests of the one party and another gratifying the interests of the other party, in harmony with the interests, or preferences, of both parties. Ambiguities make sure that, on the one hand, the parties retain their individual perceptions as to the way things should proceed and while on the other hand, one common language is adopted, which both parties may later equally use.

Ambiguities are a kind of Machiavellian manipulative device that brings only temporary satisfaction to the parties as it does not meet their demands in full. Such satisfaction is regarded as deceptive because both parties have the right to interpret ambiguities in their own way (although they are irreconcilable) and that is a right they will certainly start exploiting. It is one of the reasons why ambiguous agreements may quickly lead to arguments. Ambiguity is also considered as "intellectual weaponry", likely to be employed by both parties as soon as the first step in implementation is taken. A critic of the use of ambiguities in peace agreements would also add that ambiguous agreements are doomed to failure. The parties' inclination to interpret some of the key expressions of their political relationship in a radically different manner is one of the main causes of interruption of communication.

Ambiguous "peace" agreements unleash a psychological war of words and perceptions. In the sixth century B.C. the Greek poet and statesman Solon wrote a constitution for Athens that at that time was considered as revolutionary in terms of organization of Athenian social and political environment. Aristotle explained in his book "Athenian Constitution" that Solon provided a framework for the resolution of inter-group conflicts inherent in the sixth-century Athenian society, leaving an important part of his constitution deliberately open to free interpretation. Today it is very difficult to reconstruct the precise differences in interpretation of the ambiguous parts of the constitution by different strata of Athenian society of that time. However, there is no doubt that there was a conflict of interests and that Solon intended to provide a balance between those interests by including provisions in his constitution that were open to several equally valid interpretations.

#### **4.1. Rambouillet**

The Rambouillet mediators started with the premise that interests of Serb and Kosovar-Albanian delegations to the Rambouillet negotiations contradicted one another. The Serb delegation wanted to maintain the status of Kosovo as a province with very little, or no competence in foreign relations. The Kosovar-Albanian delegation had different interests, to turn Kosovo into a fully-fledged republic on equal footing with the other two republics of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:

Serbia and Montenegro. This status entails the capacity to run certain aspects of foreign relations independently from the central authority.

Secondly, the Serb delegation wanted the Rambouillet draft agreement to remain binding in the foreseeable future. The Kosovar delegation had an opposing interest which was not envisaged by the Rambouillet draft: to turn Kosovo into an independent entity. They therefore wanted to see a revision of the agreement as well as to organize a referendum to check the will of the people of Kosovo regarding the status of Kosovo.

Mediators of the Rambouillet process decided to use an ambiguous wording to bridge the gap between the above interests. The constitution, as the key part of the Rambouillet Draft agreement, stipulated that "Kosovo shall have authority to conduct foreign relations within its areas of responsibility equivalent to the power provided to Republics under Article 7 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." Based on this text, mediators used the referentially ambiguous adjective "equivalent", which is not the same in meaning as 'equal', but it could be.

Regarding the interim character of the agreement, the mediators used the identified referential and cross-textual ambiguities in order to meet the demands of both delegations. The draft agreement was called "the Interim Agreement", as the Albanian delegation preferred. However, a binding commitment was that any amendment proposed should be adopted by agreement of all parties. Consequently, without Serb consent the interim agreement could not be changed and thereby it would turn into a permanent arrangement. However, in one of the Articles, mediators underlined that "three years after the entry into force of this Agreement, an international meeting shall be convened to determine a mechanism for a final settlement for Kosovo..." which as interpreted is trying to offer the balance of the wording again in favor of the Albanian demands. The Austrian Ambassador at the time, one of the mediators, revealed the fact that this paragraph was intentionally left open to two seemingly contradictory interpretations (for further details on Rambouillet accord see <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/ramb.htm>).

## 4.2. Shanghai Communiqué

During Nixon's visit to China in 1972, President Nixon and Chairman Mao adopted the Shanghai Communiqué, two thirds of which consisted of unilateral expressions of each country's specific views of international relations, and the remaining one third contained a set of jointly accepted provisions.

Within the joint declarations, the part implicitly addressing the issue of the Soviet Union was ambiguously worded. The Communiqué says: "each (referring to the US and the PRC) is opposed to efforts by any other country ... to establish such hegemony (meaning 'a hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region')." It also says "neither is prepared ... to enter into agreements or understandings with the other directed at other states."

Here we have a piece of cross-textual ambiguity as the first sentence says that both China and the US agree to resist possible Soviet attempts to establish a hegemony in the region. The word "each" however expresses this in an ambiguous way, as China and the US have their own individual views that accidentally coincided. The second sentence says that neither the US nor China are willing to agree on an action directed at other states, including certainly the Soviet Union, which implies that they did not agree on any concrete preventive measure to counter possible Soviet attempts at establishing hegemony.

In other words, the first sentence conveys a soft kind of threat to the Soviet Union, while the second sentence weakens the threat by dismissing the possibility of joint US-China action directed at other states. In this way, the Shanghai Communiqué delivered an ambiguous threat to the Soviet Union, a threat in a sort of embryonic form. Both China and the US are likely to have adopted this kind of language to leave enough diplomatic room for their own unilateral build-up or improvement of relations with the Soviet Union (for further details see Kissinger, 1979).

## 4.3. Dayton Peace Accords

The Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) are associated with the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, redrawing and decentralising its internal structure. The Dayton Constitution of BiH is an annex of the DPA containing the most interesting examples



of ambiguities. For instance, the Constitution defines responsibilities of Bosnian institutions (including foreign policy, foreign trade policy, customs policy, monetary policy, finances of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, immigration, refugee and asylum policy and regulation, international and inter-entity criminal law enforcement, establishment and operation of common and international communication facilities). All responsibilities not precisely assigned to central institutions were placed on the entity level. But there is also a cross-textual ambiguity in this annex (Hayden, 1999). Namely, one of the provisions seems to reduce the powers of central authorities, while there is another provision often referred to, that seems to open room for an opposite procedure, that is for the extension of powers in a less determinate way.

## 5. Law

Thomas Franck, one of leading theoreticians of international law is against the use of ambiguities in peace agreements. In his books *Power of Legitimacy among Nations* and *Fairness in International Law and Institutions* Franck proposes a critique of ambiguities (Franck 1990). Franck stands for the idea of transparent, clear, and determinate meaning of the key norms, rules and provisions in any kind of written, legally binding agreement. He writes: "Textual determinacy is the ability of a text to convey a clear message, to appear transparent in the sense that one can see through the language of a law to its essential meaning."

## 6. Conclusion

The core phenomenon in the above examples and the central reason for the issues relating to vagueness of meaning is actually Polysemy.

The instances of the use of polysemic/polysemous phrases have been analysed in this paper via usages predominantly from the political discourse.

There are divided views in terms of the resulting vague or ambiguous words or phrases. Namely, it is true that on the one hand natural languages demonstrate inclination towards use of phrases gradually becoming fixed, while on the other hand it is true that polysemy as a phenomenon has been widely used as a tool or more precisely as an instrument to convey a message, whose interpretation would

be context-dependant. In addition, although context-dependant, the interpretation in the analysed instances is crucial and might lead to grave consequences if the meaning was not properly decoded.

Some authors of a particular message in a written or spoken text can use an ambiguous can enter into the trap of the lexical or structural ambiguity out of negligence, while others might use these types of ambiguity as a useful device to hide the actual message, whose precise interpretation will be revealed at some later stage when all other options have been exhausted.

As for the political public speeches and electoral contests ambiguity might serve as a helpful device, since there is an abundance of strategies and methods being perfected by experts in charge of public relations. In diplomacy-related documents, which are usually more direct and generally regarded as more polite and dissonant, which is required as suitable for the style of diplomatic texts. Regarding the so called Europeak as a kind of New Speak according to some sociologists of languages, its words are coined intentionally in a way that makes them sound familiar (judging by their frequency) but in fact they are polysemous and consequently ambiguous.

## References

- Bernstein, L. (1976) *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard*, Harvard University Press.
- Calvert, R.L. (1986). *Models of Imperfect Information in Politics*. New York: Harwood Academic Publishers
- Empson, W. (1947), *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, New Directions
- Franck, T. M. (1997). *Fairness in International Law and Institutions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 30-34.
- Franck, T. M. (1990). *Power of Legitimacy among Nations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hayden, R.M. (1999), *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of the Yugoslav Conflicts*, Ann Arbor:University of Michigan Press, 123-139.

Kissinger, H. (1979) *White House Years*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 783-784.

Kryzan-Stanojević, B. (2010). Eurogovor – Novogovor današnjice. In *Zbornik radova 8 (Riječki filološki dani)*, Rijeka:Filozofski fakultet, 741-753

Lakoff, R. T. (1990). *Talking Power - The Politics of Language*. New. York: Basic Books.

Laslier, J. (2000). Interpretation of electoral mixed strategies. In *Social Choice and Welfare*, 17: 283-292.

Laslier, J. (2003) "Ambiguity in electoral competition", in HAL: HAL-00242944, version 1

**Retracted**

**Web pages:**

<http://www.ohr.int>

<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/ramb.htm>

Paper submitted: November 7, 2011

Paper revised: November 21, 2011

Paper accepted: December 3, 2011