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Languaging in Social Practices: The Role of Narrative Games in Shaping Diplomatic Conventions

Original Study

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Abstract: This article examines the role of languaging in shaping social practices, drawing on Maturana's concept of consensual coordination. It posits that social practices are essentially enlanguaged activities, emerging and evolving through the conventions born from recursive interactions. Central to this argument is a reinterpretation of Maturana's typology of conversations, suggesting it as a guide to the kinds of conventions that can emerge from consensual coordination. The article introduces an analytical framework conceptualizing narrative games as languaging mechanisms. This framework is informed by an abductive process based on radical linguistics and the analysis of 128 diplomatic conversation transcripts. In its conclusion, the article offers insights into how languaging plays a crucial role in establishing conventions and rules within social practices. It also examines the capacity of languaging to drive social change, underscoring the importance of future research in this area.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the study of social practices as a distinct approach in social theory can be traced back to the mid-to-late 20th century. This development was largely a response to the then prevailing social theories that focused on either individual agency or structural determinism. Central figures like Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel de Certeau, and Michel Foucault have played pivotal roles in shaping this perspective, now commonly known as 'practice theory' (PT). Over the past two decades, PT has profoundly impacted various fields, ranging from sociology and anthropology to cultural studies and organizational studies. Its applications span diverse contexts, from everyday activities like cooking and sports to complex organizational and societal processes. As a result, the study of social practices is gaining considerable traction as a 'trading zone' for interdisciplinary endeavors (De Franco 2022).

Despite the term's singularity, PT encompasses a variety of scholarly approaches to the concept of practice.

Following Schatzki and Reckwitz, PT can be understood as a family of cultural theories envisioning social life as a nexus of practices (Schatzki 1997, 284; Reckwitz 2002) and 'united by the proposition that practical understanding and intelligibility are articulated in practices' (Schatzki 1997, 284) and not in texts or speech acts (Reckwitz 2002). In fact, one of PT's key differences with other cultural theories, such as culturalist textualism (as in the early Foucault, Luhmann, and Geertz) or culturalist intersubjectivism (as in Austin and Habermas), is that discourse and language are stripped away of 'their omnipotent status' (Reckwitz 2002, 254). This applies even to discursive practices (ibid.), which are in fact distinguished from non-discursive ones (ibid.) not to reinstate language as a constitutive element of practice, but on the contrary to marginalize it within a specific sub-class of practice, while simultaneously stressing that discursive practices are more than chains of signs, more than speech acts and more than communication (ibid.).

PT conceptualizes practice by establishing a dichotomy between practice and language, seeing language use as a symbolic, verbal, and reflective performance. This approach aligns with the central assertions of the linguistic turn and misses the opportunity to delve into an understanding of language use in practice informed by recent debates in linguistics, philosophy, and ethnography. These include discussions on language materiality and the 'enlanguaged' nature of the 'thingness' of things (Heidegger 1975; Gahrn-Andersen 2017; Shankar, Cavanaugh 2017; Gahrn-Andersen, Cowley 2021), language's physical interaction with objects and environments (Shankar, Cavanaugh 2017, 2), language's grounding in embodied processes of vocal production (Coward, Ellis 1977; Voloshinov 1986) and – most important for this discussion – language's intimate bond with our everyday practices and forms of life (Harris 1990, 1996; Wittgenstein 2010).

In this article, I aim to address this gap, while also exploring a fundamental question pertinent to any theory of practice: How do participants in a practice sustain orderly activities and relationships amongst themselves? The extant strands of PT tend to answer such a question by focusing on the 'orders of worth' resulting from agents' relational dynamics, being them shared repertoires, rules and habitus, or interessement devices (Thévenot 2001). These are concepts constituting specific understandings of order and agreement, which, paradoxically, while emphasising relationships and relational outcomes marginalise the process—language use/communication—through which relationships are mainly formed and maintained. Therefore, what emerges from these accounts is an understanding of practice that acknowledges variations of individual performances but assumes these to be almost effortlessly harmonised because of how agents acquire, learn, and embody those orders of worth.

In contrast, I advance a conception of practice grounded on the notion of *consensual coordination* of actions, understood as the state of *doing things together* (Maturana 1988). Following Maturana, I see coordination as laborious, fragile, and very much anchored into the unfolding of 'languaging' (Maturana 1988, 2002). I therefore recast practice as a meshwork of understandings, materials, practitioners and activities that is made possible by the 'enlanguaged' consensual coordination of agents with one another as well as with the site(s), artefacts and 'history(ies)' of the practice they participate in. Also, I suggest that a focus on the recursivity of consensual coordination offers a way to grapple with a key fundamental dilemma in practice theory, that is, to account for both the emergence of conventions and the occurrence of change.

Building upon Maturana's typology of conversations, I introduce an analytical framework making sense of the emergence of conventions in the form of what I term 'narrative games.' This implies recasting narratives in antirepresentational terms as languaging mechanisms. This framework is developed both theoretically and methodologically by the empirical observation of the workings of languaging in a specific field of practice: diplomacy. This is a pertinent field of study given that diplomacy is often defined as a 'communication system' (James 1980; Constantinou 1996), but communication *in* diplomatic practice has never been studied as a process of consensual coordination. Instead, it has either been reduced to 'signaling' (Jönsson 2016; Cohen 1991) or understood performatively as a medium of political constructions (Oglesby 2016; de Orellana 2020).

This present study makes dual contributions to the field of radical linguistics. First, it introduces an antirepresentational notion of narratives, which I term 'narrative games,' to aid the interpretative analysis of languaging in conversations. Second, the study illuminates the interplay between languaging and the evolving conventions and rules of social practices, with a focus on diplomacy. It highlights critical issues and questions that merit deeper exploration in the ongoing development of radical linguistics, shedding light on the dynamic relationship between language, practice, and social change.

The structure of the article is as follows: first, I discuss how I draw on nonrepresentational understandings of language (see e.g. Maturana 1988, 2002; Harris 1996; Love 2004; Wittgenstein 2010; Cowley 2011; Imoto 2015; Kravchenko 2016; Li 2018) and I introduce the notion of *languaging* (Maturana 1988, 2002). Second, I explain how narratives can be conceived as a particular kind of languaging mechanism, illuminating their role in the development of conventions and rules within social practices. The article concludes with reflections on the dynamic nature of languaging and its continuous influence in shaping and transforming social interactions and practices.

1. LANGUAGING IN SOCIAL PRACTICES

The discourse-practice dualism underpinning PT draws on a split between language and the world, which is old and rooted firmly into the philosophy of language and linguistics (Linell 2005; Irvine 2017). This division traditionally views language as a codified system, a structured array of object-like elements with predefined form-meaning relationships (Rorty 1967; Pablé 2015). However, this *code-view* of language has faced substantial scrutiny from anti-representational theories, which challenge the pervasive '*language myth* in Western culture' (Harris 1982, 2013). These theories critique conventional views of language as associations of symbols and meanings, and communication as a mere process of message transmission (Kravchenko 2007).

Anti-representational theories advocate for a more fluid and dynamic interpretation of language. They propose a view of the linguistic sign as being fundamentally indeterminate both in form and meaning and the product of language use itself (Harris 1996, 154). This approach reimagines social activities as 'meshworks,' where it is important to distinguish between the more formalized, second-order language of dictionaries and grammar, and the embodied, first-order *languaging* that encompasses

speaking and hearing as integral aspects of human interaction (Thibault 2011, 215; Love 2004).

Humberto Maturana's theorization of *languaging* takes center stage in this discourse (Maturana 1988, 2002). On his view, languaging is what intertwines living systems within a complex network of activities, bridging the gaps between living, observing, and social action. Languaging is posited as a fundamentally relational phenomenon, not confined to individual brains or bodies, but arising from the rich tapestry of human interactions (Cowley 2019, 483). As we human beings 'live in language,' then languaging is 'a manner of living together' (Maturana 2002, 27).

Languaging goes beyond mere symbol manipulation. Words in languaging serve as relational markers within the dynamics of consensual coordination (Maturana 1988, 47). Its scope transcends conventional speech, encompassing a spectrum of bodily dynamics and gestures that contribute to the richness of interaction, challenging the notion of language as merely the realization of abstract structures (Cowley 2019, 486). Languaging involves synchronized interindividual bodily dynamics (Thibault 2011, 215) and alters 'who we become as we orient to others (who orient to us)' (Cowley 2011, 2).

Maturana's concept of 'emotioning' adds another layer to this conception of language use (Maturana 1988). Emotioning, also understood as a relational phenomenon, is crucial for understanding the genesis, evolution, and dissolution of the social systems that grow out of recursive interaction. In fact, according to Maturana, conversation participants are living systems that co-evolve through their interactions, leading to forms of consensual coordination that can emerge and endure or shift and even disintegrate only because of participants' co-dependent emotional attitudes during interaction (Maturana 2002, 16). This approach shifts the focus from universal emotions as normally discussed in the social sciences – such as anger, fear, shame, etc. (see e.g. Fattah and Fierke 2009; Mercer 2010; Fierke 2015; Solomon 2018; Åhäll 2018) – to more nuanced, socially situated emotional states that play a pivotal role in fostering mutual understanding and recognition.

In this framework, languaging and emotioning interweave in embodied encounters, offering a novel lens through which to view communication. Language is here no longer conceptualized as a tool or ability that humans employ, but as something humans do. Languaging is therefore a necessary term to use to contrast instrumentalist and functionalist understanding of language embedded in the more common terminology of 'language use.' What humans do, however, is not the same as in other theories of language performativity as elaborated by the abovementioned forms of culturalist textualism or culturalist intersubjectivism. While these theories of performativity insist on the centrality of words and assume them as vehicles of meaning, although socially situated and context dependent, languaging focuses on dynamics of coordination that are embodied, organic, and not dependent on more or less fixed word-meaning associations.

Through languaging, the spotlight is on the interconnectivity and fluidity inherent in human communication and interaction, on the unbearable lightness of meaning (Christiansen, Chater 2022), and on forms of intelligibility that are not rooted into words, but into the interweaving of languaging and emotioning. The recursivity of such processes within communities of speakers leads to both the emergence of conventions that establish order in the form of social practices as well as forms of relational change that can potentially trigger the transformation of those very practices.

2. FROM LANGUAGING TO NARRATIVE GAMES

Maturana did not explicitly outline a specific trajectory of languaging leading to the development of conventions in language use or to the emergence of social practices. However, he identified six distinct classes of conversations that can be taken as his initial foray into these issues. These conversation classes span from conversations that a) coordinate present and future actions, b) address unkept agreements, c) delve into desires and expectations, d) spotlight unfulfilled expectations, e) function through command-obedience dynamics, to those that pivot on f) characterization, attributions, and valuation (Maturana 1988, 50–54). As described by Maturana, these conversation types vary in their coordination of actions and emotioning (ibid.), but what they all have in common is to frame languaging in a specific way, that is, as a form of connecting people with their desires and expectations, with past of future actions, with the intentions of others, with objects of desires, etc.

At a glance, both Maturana's classification and the example he provides for each conversation appear to contradict his antirepresentational stance, as they seemingly focus on the 'content' of conversations. For example, when discussing conversations of complaint and apology for unkept agreements, he gives two examples where both complaints and apologies are explicitly formulated through specific wordings: 1) "Why did you say that you would come if you were not coming?/Oh! At the time I said I was coming I was sure that I could. It was only afterwards that I discovered that my mother was ill and that I would rather stay with her./I did not know that. Well, do not worry, we shall arrange another meeting;" and 2) "I am ready now. Are you ready?/I am sorry, I cannot do it now./But you promised.../Yes, but my mother is calling me. Can you wait until I come back?" (Maturana 1988, 52).

A closer examination of Maturana's work reveals how these conversational categories, rather than merely cataloging content, serve as tools to decipher the outcomes of recursive interaction histories. They reflect stable regularities that have developed over extensive communicative histories, while having no ambition to be exhaustive or objective. For instance, the examples given above show a flow of co-ordinations that "take

place under the emotions of righteousness and guilt in an interplay of demands, promises and expressions in which complaints and apologies are lived as legitimate actions even when the apologies are not accepted" (Maturana 1988, 52). Thus, I interpret these conversation types as Maturana's way of encapsulating entrenched conventions emerging from generations of languaging.

Looking again at the examples Maturana provides for the different conversation types, I notice that these bundles of conventions emerging from languaging have a clear narrative form as they connect and interrelate various elements like persons, objects, goals, and intentions in a coherent yet selective manner.[1] This aligns with interpretations of Maturana that emphasize languaging as enacting 'essentially narrative forms' (Thibault 2011, 232), which does not mean that other forms are not possible. Taking inspiration from conversation analysis, we can certainly argue that "repair initiators" such as "what" or "huh" can also be seen as languaging mechanisms (Sidnell 2016). However, it is hard to imagine conversations where participants do not use justifications, do not account for other people's reasons, do not link the present to the past (or the future), do not mention desires, etc. Very often this is done in a fragmented and messy way, which makes it difficult to an observer to catch all the different narratives deployed at the same time, but thanks to the recursivity of consensual coordination participants in a conversation manage to orient to each other nonetheless.

I therefore propose characterizing languaging as unfolding through Wittgensteinian language games with a clear narrative form, which I term *narrative games* henceforth. Redefining narrative as languaging mechanisms taking place in evolving conversations means moving away from standard conceptualizations of narratives as representations that mediate between the speaker and the world around her (see e.g. White 1980, 1984; White 1987; Ricoeur 1990; Bruner 1991, 2004; Czarniawska 2004; Mayer 2014). Rather than acting as mediators symbolizing specific abstract or material entities, or functioning performatively as in poststructuralist frameworks, or even as speech acts as posited in speech act theory, narrative games serve a different purpose. They establish intelligibility by creating relational anchorages – points of connection that maintain the momentum of the conversation. They are not owned by any brain, nor transferred from one brain to another or 'shared.' But they instigate a direction in the conversation, which helps the participants to orient to each other. Also, they are not just a verbal construct. Instead, they arise in patchy ways from and through conversation turns, silences, vocal tones, accents, and gestures and they wave together consensual coordination and emotioning. Also, they do not belong to specific practices. We learn them by 'living in language' through a manifold of social situations and as such they are 'transpractical'. However, their more or less frequent occurrence in specific practical domains can tell us something of that practice's rules and conventions and can help us understand where those rules and conventions come from in the first place, as we shall see in the next section.

This understanding of narratives is akin to Hutto's Narrative Practice Hypothesis (NPH), according to which direct encounters with narratives about persons who act for reasons that are delivered in interactive contexts by responsive caregivers "is the normal route through which children become familiar with both (1) the basic structure of folk psychology and (2) the norm-governed possibilities for wielding it in practice, thus learning both how and when to use it" (Hutto 2008, x). In a similar fashion, I argue that the different types of conversation identified by Maturana are a scholarly attempt at grasping how exposure to different types of narrative games both in childhood and adulthood and in different practical domains, make a speaker learn when to recur to conversations of coordination of actions, unkept agreements, desires and expectations, unfulfilled expectations, command-obedience, or characterization, attributions, and valuation.

In the same way, the speaker will also learn how to shape those conversations through specific narrative games. Hutto's folk psychological narratives are just one type of game, but a much longer list could be developed starting from Maturana's classes of conversations and taking his examples as a starting point. For example, conversations of complaint for unfulfilled expectations or broken agreements can be seen as given by a pathway potentially starting with the narrative of complaints and developing through narratives of righteousness of expectations, narratives of righteous justification and narratives of guilt. This pathway is of course just potential and the order in which narrative games follow upon each can be different and include narrative games that I have not listed above.

This perspective presupposes a *narrative competence* of sorts, which should also be understood as trans-practical and cultivated by human beings throughout their lives.[2] Such a competence diverges in substantial ways from how practical competence is normally conceived in practice theory (PT). For instance, Bourdieu conceptualizes the ´feel for the game' as an individual experience or attribute, tied to a person's proficiency in intuitively grasping and adeptly responding to the requirements of a particular practical domain (Bourdieu 1990). The kind of competence underpinning the use of narrative games should instead be seen as a 'feel for playing *together*' and keep the game going within specific iterative interactions. Also diverging from Bourdieusian theorizations of competence, narrative competence should not be understood as mastery: from my analysis enlanguaged consensual coordination appears to be more an exercise in muddling through than a playground for virtuosos. On this account, the 'feel for playing together' is indeed a *feeling*. This is

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1 Here I build on parsimonious definitions of narratives as in Turner (1996), Ricoeur (1990) and Hutto (2010, 1).
2 For a thorough discussion of how narrative competence can be conceived see Hutto (2010).

not just in the sense that it is an imperfect hunch about what narrative games a conversation 'demands' to keep the game alive, but also very much grounded in the interweaving of languaging and emotioning.[3]

3. NARRATIVE GAMES IN DIPLOMACY

In the so-called 'practice turn' in diplomatic studies, where PT has been employed to generate a new sensitivity to the modes and mores of diplomats, language use has been ignored altogether (Adler-Nissen, Pouliot 2014; Cornut 2018). Scholars employing PT in diplomatic studies have mainly focused on characterizing diplomats' 'feel for the game' and understanding what kind of behavior enjoys recognition as competent performance in diplomatic practice. In this context, language often only mirrors symbolic resource distribution. This is exemplified by Kuus' study of how claims by new and old members of the European Union have different weights in the negotiations taking place in Brussels. Here language use marks the difference between well- informed and confident old members from ill-informed and ill-at-ease new members of the Union (Kuus 2013). Similarly, Cornut (2018) sees language usage as an indicator of mastery and virtuosity and Adler-Nissen and Pouliot (2014) look at 'mastering language' and being able to develop 'agreed language' as key expressions of diplomats' feel for the game (see e.g. Adler-Nissen, Pouliot 2014, 896, 901). In other studies what is underlined is instead how the language of diplomacy is a marker of the state's traditional monopoly over organised diplomacy (see e.g. Adler-Nissen 2014). Thus, language matters to these scholars as a system of signs of wealth and authority that are meant to be understood, believed, and obeyed (Bourdieu 1991, 66; Pouliot 2008, 271). As such, language use is assigned an instrumental function in diplomatic practice, but it is seen as neither constitutive of it nor essential to coordination. In fact, coordination is conceived as the result of agents' feel for the game and shared understanding of the rules of the game: orders of worth first, language second.

In the following, I develop an anti-representational take on diplomatic practice and focus on one specific element of diplomacy, that is, diplomatic conversations, which can take place face-to-face, over the phone, and nowadays also through video-conference platforms such as Zoom or Teams. I center the analysis on the concept of narrative games defined as languaging mechanisms in evolving conversations. Following an abductive process, I translate Maturana's abstract theorizing of languaging into tools for grasping the working of languaging in actual conversations. Since, to the best of my knowledge, this has not been tried before, I proceeded with caution.

First, I constructed an analytical corpus of diplomatic conversations that could be big enough to allow

for a serious exploration of narrative games, even if I do not have any ambition to generalize the results of my analysis beyond the texts under examination. This was a challenging endeavor due to the confidential nature of diplomatic conversations, often classified and inaccessible for research. Nevertheless, I compiled a collection of 128 transcripts from the Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), representing the evolving diplomatic interactions between the 'Western Allies' (mainly the US) and the USSR, starting from 1973, the year when the then US President Nixon and USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Shevardnadze commenced their meetings leading to an important change of direction in the history of the Cold War, up to the latest available documents in the DNSA.[4] This collection does not include brief texts, which limits the scope for a comprehensive exploration of languaging.[5] I also excluded conversations solely involving US practitioners as I was interested in the languaging dynamics playing out in the encounters of diplomats representing different states, that is, the ideal type of diplomatic encounter.

While these transcripts prove valuable for the grasping of languaging, they also have limitations. They lack details about the physical settings of meetings and only rarely include annotations for non-verbal cues such as pauses, intonations, interruptions, facial expressions, and bodily gestures. Translators are often involved in these meetings and while their presence is often noted in the summary of attendees, their contribution to the evolving conversation is erased from the transcripts. Also, relying solely on these transcripts doesn't allow to trace the potential evolution of conventions (or rules) stemming from interactions. A more extensive historical analysis of interactions would be needed. Moreover, the textual nature of the data might reintroduce a written language bias and suggest that this study merely involves standard interpretative textual analysis. Nevertheless, these transcripts offer some clear clues of how coordination unfolds in this specific practical domain.

Second, I tried to identify recurrent narrative games that could be seen as functioning as languaging mechanisms. The outcome of this approach is not intended to rigidly define or categorize languaging. Instead, I recognize the partial and fragmentary nature of narratives within conversations, and I acknowledge that we often can only observe fragments of more complex coordination dynamics. Even within the highly structured realm of diplomatic dialogues, a certain level of disorderliness is evident, complicating the task of reconstructing coordination for any external observer. Despite my familiarity with diplomatic relations during the Cold War, fully comprehending the nuances of those conversations proved unattainable. Consequently, achieving a complete understanding of coordination was impractical, and attempting to compile an exhaustive list of narrative games was

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3 Following Mercer (2010), I treat feeling and emotion as synonyms.
4 These texts have been selected by searching for 'conversations' and 'USSR' in the general DNSA database.
5 I excluded texts that were one page or shorter.

not only unfeasible but also largely superfluous. The aim here is not to portray languaging as a tidy process, but rather to explore how it intricately intertwines with and contributes to the formation of social practices.

In the following, I use a couple of extracts from two different conversations to illustrate how languaging can be understood as unfolding through narrative games. I clarify how we can interpretatively identify bundles of conventions emerging from these conversations and in what sense they have a narrative orientation, which legitimizes my claim that these are "narrative games." I start from occurrences of what I call "need games" to then explore other types of games that are nested together. "Need games" takes place within conversations that Maturana would call "of actual coordination," when agents want to establish that very need for coordinating their doings. In analyzing the 128 conversations in my corpus, I observed that "conversations of actual coordination" are particularly prevalent in diplomatic contexts. This is in stark contrast to "conversations of command," which are almost non-existent – I identified only one instance in my corpus.

Typically, "need games" are employed at the outset of conversations of actual coordination, almost as if the participants need to mutually reinforce the significance of their interaction. These games are somehow associated with the use of lexicogrammatical expressions such as "we should," or "I need you to." Take for example, Conversation 1. Here, the then USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev meets the US president Bush Sr and immediately clarifies his needs:

Conversation 1 (The White House 1991)

Gorbachev: Let's spend a couple of minutes on how to organise these talks. I have two or three days myself.

Bush: As do I.

Gorbachev: I suggest a couple of areas. First on the Middle East Conference. I have a couple of problems. We need to talk in detail on our internal situation. Not only on the economic situation, but what we are doing now.

Bush: This is fine. We can't cover everything, but why don't you start?

Gorbachev: On the Conference, I will be brief. It proves again the kind of cooperation we have been able to achieve over the past couple of years. Some ask whether it is worth it now to cooperate with the Soviet Union and what Gorbachev represents? I must note here your balanced attitudes on this question.

I think we still have much work to do together. The assets we have deployed together over the past period make us see that cooperation is preferable. Through our efforts, especially Baker's, we now have a beginning for this unprecedented

Conference. My impression is that we must be cautious and that the participants will doubt a need from time to time to continue.

However, the need for coordination is notably also established though its association with past or future events. The need to coordinate is established through games eliciting the achievements of the previous years (the Conference (…) proves again the kind of cooperation we have been able to achieve over the past couple of years), the need to do more in the future (I think we still have much work to do together), the specific efforts of one individual, Secretary of State James Baker, and possible challenges coming from other partners (Some ask whether it is worth it now to cooperate with the Soviet Union and what Gorbachev represents; the participants will doubt a need from time to time to continue).

This is very similar to what we can notice in the second conversation below, between Gorbachev and the then French President Francois Mitterrand:

Conversation 2 (DNSA 1990)

Mitterrand: We once again return to discussing the question of maintaining the presence of Soviet troops in the East Germany and Western troops in West Germany. This is the essence of the problem, but its form is also important. I believe that movement in this sphere should not be too fast. Already, the mood of the German public is not what it was, let's say, on the eve of the parliamentary elections. We cannot say what it will be towards the end of this year. Kohl was disappointed with the election results in two districts: Lower Saxony and Rhineland-Palatinate. Therefore, he would like to speed up the unification process in order to use the influx of votes from the GDR in the elections.

Gorbachev. I think that our friend Kohl, with whom I have a good relationship, is in a big hurry and is trying to pull us into the ongoing process. But he can make a mess of things. I agree with your thesis that we should act without haste, we should coordinate our steps. (…)

Mitterrand: Kohl, with the support of the United States, intends to complete German unification by the end of this year. This is a real problem.

Here, Gorbachev and Mitterrand establish a need for actual coordination in a rather explicit way and through lexicogrammatical structures such as "we should," here accompanied by an even more explicit reference to "coordinate our steps." However, once again, the need to coordinate is established mainly by referring to previous (We once again return to discussing) and future (movement in this sphere should not be too fast) events and the acts of other – and absent – people (Kohl was disappointed; our friend Kohl (…) is in a big hurry; he can make a mess of things; Kohl, with

the support of the United States, intends to complete German unification).

To me this means that in both conversations "need games" intersect with at least three other types of games, I have identified in my analysis. These are what I call "time games," "concern games," and "folk-psychological games." The latter, as I mentioned above, builds on Hutto's idea that a key narrative practice – or game to stick with my terminology and framework – in human interactions is to talk about persons who act for reasons. The conversations above illustrate how such a narrative game is often the basis for "need games" as they constitute the reason for coordinating. In conversation 1, Gorbachev refers to people that "ask whether it is worth it now to cooperate with the Soviet Union and what Gorbachev represents." In conversation 2, the intentions of Kohl and the Americans are a key reason for Mitterrand and Gorbachev to work together. "Concern games" have a similar function in both conversations and in fact intersect with both "need games" and "folk-psychological games" in the sense that they seem to constitute the reason for coordinating and sometimes this is done by referring to third parties' intentionality. However, a distinct trait of these games is that they seem to clutch onto a negative emotional state and alert the participants there might be high stakes. In Conversation 1 Gorbachev has "a couple of problems." Similarly, in Conversation 2, Mitterrand sees a "real problem" in the speed the reunification process is taking. "Time games," instead function to activate both present and future scenarios that participants see as both logically and chronologically linked to their need to coordinate.

In both conversations, "need games" are nested also with what I call "I games." These are games where participants in diplomatic practices intertwine their official doings, based on their representing a specific State, with a more personal dimension. In Conversation 1, both Gorbachev and Bush refer to time they have available to attend the Conference. In Conversation 2, while sharing concerns about Kohl's goals, Gorbachev also underlines that he has a good relationship with the then German Chancellor.

In sum, the two conversations above illustrate how narrative games like "need games," "concern games," and "folk-psychological games" emerge as nested games that shape the dynamics of conversations of "actual coordination." These games frequently initiate with references to past or future events or the actions of absent third parties, illustrating the narrative basis for establishing the need for coordination. In the following, I will explain how we can move from these observations to assert that languaging is co-constitutive of diplomatic practice.

4. LANGUAGING AND CONVENTIONS: A DIFFICULT PUZZLE

The narrative games discussed above can be perceived as nested bundles of linguistic conventions, born from recursive coordination and continually evolving, as they are utilized across various practices. At the same time, these games are intimately tied to the development of rules and conventions within specific practices. This raises pivotal questions about the complex interplay between languaging and social practices, particularly in how narrative games both conform to and influence the conventions of specific practices, such as, for example diplomacy.

At a glance, diplomatic conversations can appear distinctly framed by social rules, setting them apart from discussions in other settings. Elements such as the host, location, and attendees' number and identity are typically pre-given, precluding the possibility of casual participation. Additionally, these dialogues are often structured around specific agendas, focusing on particular topics and documents requiring discussion, agreement, or signature. However, it's limiting to view languaging in diplomacy as merely confined by pre-existing rules. From a languaging perspective, language development wasn't merely a result of our co-dependence in collaborative practices, rather, languaging was a co-evolving, integral part of our cultural evolution (Raimondi 2019). Similarly, it's not just pre-existing social practices that dictate language use, rather, languaging co-creates these social practices and rules. Moreover, if we accept the idea of narrative games as languaging mechanisms, their "transpractical" nature suggests that participants in social practices have a broad spectrum of communicative options, potentially altering conventional interaction flows. In the context of diplomacy, for instance, some narrative games might be employed to maneuver through formalities and protocols. The "I games" discussed above, for example, potentially allow diplomats to play with the overlap of their personal and official involvement in an issue.

This perspective emphasizes the emergent and dynamic nature of social interactions over the more static habits and conventions that they produce. It offers a nuanced understanding of practice that accommodates both order and creativity. In fact, by conceiving languaging as operating through transpractical mechanisms (narrative games), I focus on recursive social interactions where agents are immersed in language and through language use can always both reproduce and transform social practices. I therefore construe social practices as constituted through enlanguaged activities, where recursive communicative interaction is fundamental to understand how conventions arise, but also to what extent they can reproduce established order or become sources of creativity and potential disorder.

Take the abovementioned "need games," for example. Their frequent occurrence in diplomatic conversations indicates that diplomatic practice heavily revolves around establishing agreement and collaboration, aligning with conventional perceptions of diplomacy. However, these games also reveal a deeper aspect: the necessity to actively establish cooperation and coordination in every interaction, underscoring that such collaboration cannot be presumed as a given. Essentially, these narrative games

highlight a practice where agents are constantly working to safeguard the system born from recursive interaction against potential disintegration, implying that the threat of breakdown is an ever-present possibility.

Also, if we focus on "I games" some aspects of diplomacy that are often disregarded in diplomatic studies emerge as fundamental traits of this practical domain. In diplomatic conversations, coordination happens through the flesh and sound of specific individuals, encompassing more than just professional diplomats with rightful claims to represent given states. While PT scholars in diplomatic studies have emphasised the importance of those rightful claims and stressed that diplomacy is political precisely because diplomats do not represent themselves but a group (Constantinou et al. 2021, 567) , my research highlights how within diplomatic conversations different agents, including heads of state, political advisors, etc, play a complex coordination game where they always coordinate for the political entity they (more or less rightfully) represent but also for their own private selves: the two are actually quite undistinguishable. This is especially – but not uniquely – the case in the context of those conversations that take place as networks of frequent interaction. Here, the inter-personal relations allow for a wide range of mechanisms for "going on" – to such an extent that one could claim diplomatic practice produces the international through the interpersonal.

Finally, as noted above, in my corpus I could identify only one meeting that could be interpreted as a command-oriented conversation. Within the current Bourdieusian framework prevalent among scholars employing Practice Theory (PT) in diplomatic studies, this observation would lead to the hypothesis that command-oriented conversations are taboo in diplomatic practice. This would be read as a consequence of the sovereignty norm, which implies treating states and their representatives as equals, irrespective of their "soft" or "hard" power (Nye 1999), because they are all equally sovereign over a given territory. However, when examining diplomacy as an enlanguaged activity, a different perspective emerges. The sovereignty norm is not merely a product of legal treaties and linguistic compliance. Rather, it is co-created through linguistic conventions that naturally develop in interactions, particularly those that limit command-style conversations. In this light, this enlanguaged form of tactfulness (Plessner 1999) that restricts games of command is not simply a manifestation of sovereignty but an active contributor to its construction. It embodies a form of consensual, embodied, and recursive coordination that, together with the "coordination of coordination" found in treaties, helps to shape and define the sovereignty norm. Diplomatic agents, through this process, progressively establish the rules of diplomatic engagement. Viewing diplomacy through the prism of languaging, therefore, offers a more nuanced understanding of how foundational principles like sovereignty are collaboratively and continually crafted and redefined.

The intersection between the structured nature of diplomatic practice and the adaptive potential of narrative games underscores a rich area for further research. Future studies could explore how narrative games operate within the confines of diplomatic protocols and how they might serve as catalysts for change within these practices. Investigating these dynamics can provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of diplomacy and the role of language in shaping diplomatic conventions and rules. Such research is essential for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between convention and innovation in social practices.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the intricate relationship between languaging and social practices, particularly focusing on the field of diplomacy. By adopting Maturana's perspective on consensual coordination and the concept of narrative games, the study has illuminated how languaging shapes and is shaped by the conventions and rules of social practices. This exploration underscores the idea that language is not merely a tool used within established social practices, but a dynamic and co-constitutive element that plays a crucial role in the formation, maintenance, and evolution of these practices.

The analysis of diplomatic practices, underpinned by the examination of conversation transcripts, reveals that understanding diplomacy as a playground for rule-bound performance would be misleading. Instead, the fluid and adaptive nature of narrative games within the diplomatic context suggests a more complex interplay of structure and agency. These games, as forms of enlanguaged activity, highlight the potential for creativity and transformation within the seemingly rigid bounds of diplomatic protocols and formalities.

Furthermore, the study's focus on the transpractical nature of narrative games in diplomacy opens up new avenues for research. It invites further investigation into how these games function within the established frameworks of different social practices and how they might act as catalysts for change. This is particularly pertinent in understanding how conventions and rules in practices like diplomacy are not just passively received and reproduced but are actively and continuously co-created and renegotiated through the process of languaging.

Future research in this area could delve deeper into the specific mechanisms by which narrative games contribute to the evolution of social practices. Such studies could explore the role of languaging in other contexts, compare its functions across different practices, and examine its potential in facilitating change and innovation. This research is vital for enhancing our understanding of the dynamic nature of social practices and the pivotal role of language in shaping the fabric of social life.

In sum, the insights garnered from this exploration of languaging in social practices, particularly diplomacy, enrich our understanding of the complex dynamics of human interaction. They also underscore the transformative power of languaging in shaping the social world, offering a fertile ground for future scholarly inquiry.

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