

Latinisms in Contemporary English Diplomatic Discourse: Lexical and Semantic Perspectives

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Introduction

The enduring legacy of Latin on English has left a profound imprint, especially in specialized domains such as law, science, and diplomacy. In the field of diplomacy, Latinisms – words or phrases borrowed from Latin – continue to play a notable role. These terms convey formality, tradition, and precision, making them particularly suited for the high-stakes, structured nature of diplomatic language. This research explores how Latinisms, far from being archaic relics, remain active components of contemporary diplomatic discourse.[2]

Latin, as the language of an educated and sophisticated civilization, has historically served as one of the primary sources for English diplomatic terminology. The Latin influence is the earliest and greatest among all foreign influences on the English language. It was also the medium through which most Greek words entered English [1]. A pivotal moment was the spread of Christianity after 597 A.D., which promoted Latin literacy and writing. Through the Roman Catholic Church and legal systems, Latin gained a foothold in England's official and diplomatic domains. Its dominance in Western Europe lasted until the mid-18th century, and even today, many diplomatic documents retain Latin names. The ritualistic and timeless quality of Latin contributes to its enduring presence in diplomatic language.[3]

Moreover, Latin played a central role in shaping diplomatic discourse through both assimilated and non-assimilated borrowings. The former includes widely used terms like *protocol*, *convention*, *credentials*, and *nuncio*, while the latter – such as *ad hoc*, *sine qua non*, and *persona non grata* – retain Latin morphology and pronunciation, and often appear in formal, formulaic expressions. These non-assimilated terms are crucial in conveying unambiguous meanings, ensuring consistency and clarity in international communication.

This linguistic division is supported by Mattila's (2006) theory of stratified legal vocabulary, which distinguishes between common legal English terms and high-register Latin expressions, each serving different pragmatic and stylistic functions. For instance, *sanction* (assimilated) serves both as a legal penalty and a form of approval, whereas *de jure* (non-assimilated) strictly maintains its Latin-derived meaning, offering precision in legal argumentation. Such duality illustrates the coexistence of everyday clarity and ceremonial precision in diplomatic lexicon.

Research Objectives: **This study seeks to trace the origins, usage, and semantic significance of Latin-derived terms in current English diplomatic communication. It aims to classify the most prevalent Latinisms, examine their lexical and semantic behavior, and interpret their communicative function in modern diplomacy. By contextualizing these terms historically and functionally, the paper also considers their pragmatic roles, including precision, rituality, and cross-cultural stability.** [4]

The analysis demonstrates that Latinisms have not only shaped the specialized lexicon of diplomacy, but continue to influence its stylistic register, functioning as markers of formal discourse and international legitimacy. Their prevalence in treaties, communiqués, and multilateral agreements reflects the enduring rhetorical and symbolic value attributed to Latin forms in global governance.[5]

Aim of the Article: The article aims to investigate the lexical, semantic, and contextual functions of Latinisms in contemporary English diplomatic discourse, examining both assimilated and non-assimilated forms. The study seeks to trace their historical origins, analyze their semantic shifts, and explore their pragmatic roles in high-stakes international communication. By systematically classifying Latin-derived terms, the research demonstrates how these expressions enhance clarity, precision, and stylistic formality, serving as indispensable tools for diplomats and international communicators.

Theoretical Value:

- Provides a comprehensive lexicosemantic analysis of Latinisms in diplomatic English, addressing a gap in studies focused specifically on diplomatic discourse.
- Illustrates the interplay between linguistic form and meaning, polysemy, and context-dependent interpretation, contributing to theories of specialized discourse and legal-linguistic stratification.
- Offers insights into the survival and adaptation of Latin in modern high-register language, enriching the understanding of historical linguistic influence and terminological evolution.

Practical Value:

- Supports diplomats, translators, and international communication specialists in understanding and correctly using Latinisms in official documents, treaties, and negotiations.
- Enhances clarity, precision, and strategic nuance in diplomatic writing and speech.
- Provides a framework for applied linguistic research in cross-cultural communication, language policy, and the teaching of English for international relations

Novelty of the Study: **While much attention has been given to Latin's impact on English in legal and ecclesiastical contexts, comparatively fewer studies have conducted a comprehensive lexical-semantic analysis of Latinisms specifically in diplomatic discourse. This research contributes original insight by systematically classifying both assimilated and non-assimilated Latinisms in a contemporary corpus of diplomatic texts, highlighting their morphological features, semantic shifts, and pragmatic roles. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the interaction between lexical form and semantic function in diplomatic contexts. By exploring polysemy, semantic precision, and context-dependent meanings, it demonstrates how Latinisms maintain their relevance as both linguistic and rhetorical tools. The incorporation of contemporary examples from institutional diplomatic practice enhances the applied dimension of the study, bridging linguistics and international relations.**

Methodology: **This study employed a qualitative corpus-based methodology to analyze the use of Latinisms in contemporary diplomatic English. The primary data sources included official diplomatic texts such as United Nations Security Council reports, European Union communiqués, and bilateral/multilateral treaties published between 2010 and 2024. Latinisms were identified through targeted keyword searches of commonly used terms and phrases of Latin origin and classified into assimilated and non-assimilated categories.**

The analysis was guided by three levels:

- **Lexical analysis:** examined the original meaning of the terms and their adaptation into English.
- **Semantic analysis:** explored shifts in meaning from Latin to English and within diplomatic contexts.
- **Contextual analysis:** considered how Latinisms were deployed in actual diplomatic scenarios, identifying their function, frequency, and stylistic implications.

This multi-layered approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of both the linguistic form and pragmatic use of Latinisms in modern diplomatic discourse.

Lexical, Semantic, and Contextual Peculiarities

This section examines the lexical, semantic, and contextual peculiarities of key Latinisms in contemporary English diplomatic discourse, highlighting how these terms function as precise semantic markers, high-register stylistic devices, and tools for pragmatic positioning in diplomatic communication.

Sanction – Fully integrated into English; demonstrates semantic polysemy. Context determines whether the term signifies approval or punitive action:

The UN imposed sanctions on the regime for violating international law. (punitive)

The president gave his sanction to the agreement. (approval)

Contextual analysis: The interpretation of *sanction* relies on situational cues and the surrounding discourse. In diplomatic texts, punitive *sanctions* often align with formal statements of condemnation, signaling enforceable international norms, whereas approval-related *sanctions* convey endorsement, legitimizing decisions. This duality exemplifies how context mediates meaning and maintains pragmatic clarity.

Pacta sunt servanda – Non-assimilated; preserves strict legal meaning (“treaties must be honored”), reflecting the ceremonial and binding dimension of diplomatic language:

All signatories must abide by the principle of pacta sunt servanda.

Contextual analysis: The term reinforces legal authority and formality, often appearing in treaty texts, official communiqués, or speeches, where adherence to international law is emphasized. Its presence signals legalistic rigor and the non-negotiable nature of obligations.

De facto / De jure – Contrasting terms denoting actual versus legal states:

The territory operated as a de facto independent state.

They were de jure citizens, although deprived of basic rights.

Contextual analysis: These terms operate contrastively to distinguish between practical and formal realities. Their use in diplomatic discourse allows speakers to signal nuanced positions, balancing legal recognition with political realities, and subtly highlighting discrepancies without overt confrontation.

Ad hoc – Flexible, provisional arrangements within institutional contexts:

An ad hoc committee was formed to address the crisis.

Contextual analysis: The phrase communicates temporariness and purpose-driven action, framing diplomatic initiatives as responsive rather than permanent. It indicates pragmatic problem-solving in high-stakes negotiations.

Modus vivendi – Temporary agreements during conflict, signaling transitional diplomatic stages:

The nations reached a modus vivendi until a formal agreement could be signed.

Contextual analysis: This term signals compromise and interim stability. Its usage often serves to manage tensions and maintain dialogue, reflecting a cautious, incremental approach in international relations.

Persona non grata – Individual unacceptable to a host nation; expresses extreme diplomatic disapproval without military action:

The ambassador was declared persona non grata and expelled.

Contextual analysis: Beyond denoting expulsion, the term communicates formal censure and preserves face in international relations. It functions as a controlled mechanism to express disapproval while avoiding escalation.

Sine qua non – Non-negotiable condition, abstract and logically precise:

Mutual respect is a sine qua non for successful negotiations.

Contextual analysis: In diplomatic rhetoric, this term emphasizes essential prerequisites. Its use underscores the logical and ethical foundation of agreements, signaling that certain principles are indispensable.

Casus belli – Provocations justifying war, often in legal framing of military responses:

The invasion was cited as a casus belli.

Contextual analysis: The term serves as both a legal justification and a rhetorical device, framing aggressive action within an ostensibly legitimate discourse and mitigating perceived arbitrariness.

Inter alia – Introduces multiple elements without exhaustive listing, favored for brevity:

The agreement includes, inter alia, humanitarian provisions.

Contextual analysis: Its inclusion reflects the diplomatic preference for concise enumeration while leaving room for flexibility. It allows the speaker to signal breadth of obligations without committing to detailed exposition.

Motu proprio – Self-initiated authoritative decisions, historically ecclesiastical, now secularized:

The Pope issued the decree motu proprio.

Contextual analysis: Beyond indicating personal initiative, this term conveys autonomy and authority. In diplomatic discourse, it emphasizes decisional independence and underscores legitimacy derived from hierarchical or institutional position.

Status quo – Existing conditions to be maintained; reflects conservatism in geopolitical agreements:

The treaty aimed to preserve the status quo.

Contextual analysis: Its frequent use signals restraint and caution. By prioritizing stability, *status quo* serves as a discursive strategy to avoid provocative change and reassure parties invested in continuity.

Table of Lexical, Semantic, and Contextual Functions of Latinisms in Diplomatic Discourse

<i>Latinism</i>	<i>Lexical/Semantic Feature</i>	<i>Contextual/Pragmatic Function</i>
Sanction	Polysemous: approval vs. Punitive	Context determines meaning; signals endorsement or enforcement of norms
Pacta sunt servanda	Non-assimilated; legal precision	Emphasizes binding obligations; formal/legal authority
De facto / De jure	Contrast: practical vs. legal state	Highlights discrepancies; balances recognition with political reality
Ad hoc	Temporary, flexible	Frames provisional, responsive measures
Modus vivendi	Interim agreement	Signals compromise, transitional stability
Persona non grata	Expresses disapproval without military action	Diplomatic censure; controlled sanctioning of individuals
Sine qua non	Essential, non-negotiable	Emphasizes prerequisite principles; underlines logical/ethical foundation
Casus belli	Provocation justifying war	Legal/rhetorical justification for military action
Inter alia	Inclusive, non-exhaustive listing	Concise enumeration; allows flexibility
Motu proprio	Self-initiated authoritative action	Signals decisional independence; institutional legitimacy
Status quo	Maintenance of existing conditions	Conservative strategy; signals stability and risk-avoidance

1. **Lexically**, they range from fully assimilated (*sanction*) to strictly non-assimilated (*pacta sunt servanda*).
2. **Semantically**, they provide precision, contrast, or abstraction, often capturing complex legal, political, or procedural concepts in a single term.

3. **Contextually and pragmatically**, they serve as markers of authority, negotiation strategy, compromise, or condemnation, enabling diplomats to communicate nuanced positions efficiently while preserving formality and face.

Summarizing the analysis, we can state that the above mentioned demonstrates that Latinisms in contemporary English diplomatic discourse function on multiple levels, acting as indispensable tools in high-register diplomatic language, balancing clarity, brevity, strategic subtlety, and reflecting the intricate interplay between meaning, context, and rhetorical effect.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Latinisms – both assimilated and non-assimilated – remain indispensable to contemporary English diplomatic discourse. Far from being relics, these terms perform crucial communicative, lexical, and semantic functions. Their enduring presence reflects historical continuity, ritualistic formality, and pragmatic utility.

Lexical-semantic analysis shows that Latinisms convey polysemy, semantic precision, and context-sensitive meanings, enhancing clarity in high-stakes international communication. Terms such as *status quo*, *de facto*, *sine qua non*, and *persona non grata* are not merely linguistic artifacts, but functional devices in diplomacy.

The duality of assimilated and non-assimilated forms allows flexibility in expression, balancing linguistic economy with ceremonial weight. Overall, the study confirms that Latinisms constitute a specialized sublanguage within diplomacy, justifying their systematic lexical and semantic investigation. Future research may explore diachronic developments, comparative analyses with other diplomatic languages, or extended corpus studies to further illuminate Latin's continuing influence.

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Լատիներեն արտահայտությունների կիրառությունը ժամանակակից անգլերենի դիվանագիտական տերմինաբանության մեջ

Մանանա Դալայան,
Մարինե Մկրտչյան

Անվտվում

Հանգուցային բառեր. փոխառություններ, դիվանագիտական խոսույթ, բառապաշարային և իմաստային առանձնահատկություններ, միջազգային հարաբերություններ, համատեքստ

Ուսումնասիրությունը ընդգծում է, որ լատիներենից փոխառված արտահայտությունները ժամանակակից անգլերենի դիվանագիտական խոսույթում շարունակում են մնալ կարևոր գործիքներ՝ ապահովելով ճշգրտություն, պաշտոնականություն և ավանդույթների շարունակականություն: Լատինիզմները կարող են լինել ադապտացված (*sanction*) կամ ոչ

աղապատացված (*pacta sunt servanda, de jure*), ինչն ազդում է նրանց բառապաշարային և իմաստային հատկությունների վրա: Վերլուծությունը դիտարկում է բառապաշարային, իմաստային և համատեքսային բազմազանություն: Լեզվական միջավայրում իրենց տեղը գտած լատինիզմները հաճախ ենթարկվում են իմաստային փոփոխությունների՝ պահպանելով առաջնային իմաստային շերտը և պաշտոնական ձևը, ինչպես նաև ապահովելով հստակություն և ճշտություն միջազգային հարաբերությունների խոսույթում: Լատինիզմները ոչ միայն նպաստում են տերմինների ճշգրտությանը, այլև ձևավորում են դիվանագիտական խոսքի հոետորաբանության գործառական ոճը: Արդյունքը հաստատում է նրանց կարևորությունը լեզվաբանական, իմաստային և գործաբանական տեսանկյունից՝ ապահովելով մշակութային և միջազգային հաղորդակցման կայունություն:

Использование латинизмов в современной английской дипломатической терминологии

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Резюме

Ключевые слова: латинизмы, дипломатический дискурс, лексические и семантические особенности, международные отношения, контекст

Исследование подчеркивает устойчивое значение латинизмов в современном английском дипломатическом дискурсе как ключевых инструментов, обеспечивающих точность, официальность и преемственность дипломатических традиций. Латинизмы могут быть адаптированными или неадаптированными, что определяет их лексико-семантические свойства и функциональную роль в коммуникации. Анализ выявляет лексическое, семантическое и контекстуальное разнообразие этих единиц, показывая, как они сохраняют исходный смысл или подвергаются семантической адаптации в зависимости от коммуникативной ситуации.

В практике дипломатической речи латинизмы служат средством точного обозначения сложных юридических, политических и процедурных понятий. Адаптированные формы демонстрируют семантическую гибкость и подчиняются нормам современного английского, тогда как неадаптированные сохраняют исходную латинскую форму и юридическую точность, обеспечивая формальную строгость. Они выполняют прагматические функции: выражение одобрения или наказания, фиксацию временных соглашений, обозначение легитимного или фактического статуса, а также установление условий переговоров.

Латинизмы способствуют семантической точности, формируют риторически выверенный и функционально насыщенный стиль дипломатической речи, отражая историческую преемственность, культурные традиции и международные нормы коммуникации. Результаты исследования подчеркивают значимость систематического лексико-семантического и контекстуального анализа латинизмов для лингвистической теории и практики дипломатии, способствуя стабильности международного взаимодействия.

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