

CHAPTER 2

Message Symbols in Practice

In a tale that has been told in many countries, an emperor sends word to the local rabbi that he must come to his court and answer three questions, otherwise he will be put to death. The questions and the rabbi's answers will be in signs. The rabbi is in despair, when a young man of the congregation, a lowly poultry dealer, offers to go instead. When the poultry dealer arrives at the emperor's court, the emperor lifts up one finger. The young man holds up two. The emperor holds up an egg, and the dealer pulls a piece of cheese out of his pocket. Finally, the emperor takes a handful of wheat and throws it on the floor; the young man picks up the grains one by one and puts them in his kerchief. The emperor declares himself satisfied. Afterward, the rabbi wants to know what happened. "He pointed to me with one finger," says the young man, "meaning he would take my eye out, so I held up two to say that I would take out both of his. He offered me some food, but I showed him I had some. Then he spilled some wheat on the floor, but I thought it would be a sin to waste it, so I picked it up." When the emperor's courtiers ask him what the exchange meant, he explains, "I held up one finger to say that I am the one ruler here; he replied that there are two: God reigns in heaven as I do on earth. Then I wanted him to tell me whether this egg is from a white or brown hen, and he answered me back: Is this cheese from a white or black goat? I showed him that God had scattered the Jews, and he replied that the Messiah will come and gather them together again."

If national leaders are very lucky even their misunderstandings will bring harmony. More realistically they should understand symbolic communication and its pitfalls. This chapter asks: What are the grammar and vocabulary of international symbols? It gives examples of how messages are translated into symbolic form, how receivers extract their meaning, and how ambiguities arise. It surveys several hundred international symbolic messages gleaned from newspaper articles. The data lead to the theoretical discussion of the next chapter.

Communicating clearly, which is the focus here, is different from communicating credibly. The credibility question asks why the receiver should believe what the sender is saying, and many game models have addressed it. However, this chapter is concerned with how the receiver understands what the sender is saying. Also, it does not ask what message content ought to be sent—the strategic use of symbolism for a certain goal will come later in connection with honor and face.

The Database

A collection of message symbols was assembled from the Nexis electronic database of newspapers and magazines. Nexis accepts a phrase from the user and retrieves articles that have it anywhere in their text. It contains all issues of several hundred publications back to the early 1980s and is so large that the problem is discrimination. Asking for any article with the words *symbol* or *symbolism*, might return a million or so items, and many of them would not involve message symbols. I searched for phrases that were likely to be associated with message symbols: the expressions *symbolic gesture* and *symbolic message* along with terms like *premier* or *secretary of state* gave items that were almost always appropriate. Of course, the miss rate was high—many message symbols were reported without using these words—but the goal was to get a large body of data, not a complete one. The years 1980 to 1995 yielded about 680 different international message symbols.¹

Some Rough Definitions

Before the items are described, some approximate definitions will be given of the mechanisms behind symbolic messages. Details are postponed to chapter 3, but having the basic ideas now will allow a grouping of the data according to the mechanisms used. A *prototype* is a semispecific instance used in place of a more abstract idea to help us manipulate it mentally. A robin, more than an ostrich, is prototypical of birds, and if we wanted to engage in reasoning about

1. It would be tempting to draw statistical inferences about what symbolic messages get sent and how often different nations use different techniques of symbolism or send various kinds of content, but that would be asking too much of the data. The sample was not a random one. The news sources in Nexis were not spread evenly over countries, and the search phrases may have systematically selected certain kinds of message symbols. Some data are better than none, however, and the 680 items can tell us roughly the form and content of what gets sent.

birds, we might think specifically about robins. Some prototypes represent classes of objects, and others are used for intangible ideas. The latter are *prototypical scenarios* and for concepts like love, envy, or anger, they give us a specific, mentally manipulable script. A *metonymy* is the choice of a part to suggest the whole. A *conceptual metaphor* is a mapping that translates an extended set of ideas from one domain into those in another. Life becomes a journey; or money a liquid, so one can talk about “liquidity” or “cash flow.” According to the theory developed in the next chapter, the simplest kind of symbolic message is sent by taking a prototypical story or category, choosing an action that is a part of the prototype, and performing that action. The action performed is the message symbol. The sender and receiver know the prototype and also have higher-level knowledge about each other’s knowledge of the prototype and this situation allows the receiver to reason from the message to the prototype it probably came from, and from there to the sender’s meaning. A head of state uses the prototypical scenario of friendship—dines at the house of a former adversary, recognizing that among the things that friends typically do, is invite each other to dinner. For some symbolic messages, another element, a metaphor, appears in the chain of logic between the prototype and the intended meaning. In this example, the metaphor is the mapping of international activities to interpersonal ones. A state is like a person, a country is like a person’s house, dining together is typical of friends, so the message symbol is understood as meaning that our nations are allied.

The examples that follow, then, were described by the press between 1980 and 1995 as symbolic messages or symbolic gestures, except where noted. The survey shows that the bulk of the messages sent can be accounted for by a relatively short list of prototypes, metonymies, and metaphors.

Scenarios and Metaphors

The COUNTRY-AS-A-PERSON metaphor was the most frequent in the sample. The reason for its popularity is evident: it transfers the international domain to the interpersonal one, where the symbol sender can use the many prototypes around social relations. It includes two submetaphors. One can be termed A-COUNTRY-AS-A-SPECIFIC-PERSON. Saddam must get out of Kuwait, said Bush, but no one was so obtuse as to counter that Saddam was not in Kuwait, that he had made a short visit in August 1990 but had flown home. The other subtype is A-COUNTRY-AS-AN-UNSPECIFIED-PERSON, and it has various aspects: one thinks of countries as “friendly” or “hostile,” of those with large militaries as

“strong.” Industrialization is maturity and other nations are “underdeveloped.” The national person does not always have a gender, but when it does it is more likely to be male, especially in the context of war. Occasionally it is female (Milliken and Sylvan 1991; Rohrer 1995; Weber 1994, 1995), as in the 1990 talk of the “rape” of Kuwait.

These examples show that conceptual metaphors occur in networks, with some that overlap or represent subcases of others. Treating a nation as its leader allows war to become a physical fight between people and the United States to “push” Saddam out of Kuwait or deal him a “knockout punch.” The metaphor A-COUNTRY-AS-A-PERSON is linked to A-WAR-AS-A-GAME and to another metaphor that came up often in the data, A-TERRITORY-AS-A-HOUSE. Examples from this network will be described first.

A-COUNTRY-AS-A-SPECIFIC-PERSON:

The Friendship Scenario

In this case the political leader generates a symbol by selecting an action from the prototypical scenario of friendship and support. What do we think of friends as typically doing?

They get together and are seen together;
they engage in social activities together—taking trips, dining, staying at each other’s houses;
they join and help one another on tasks;
they do favors for one another;
they use various conventions that signal friendship, like greetings, handshakes, embraces, or gifts.

In regard to meeting and being seen together, the database contains 72 meetings of international figures described as symbolic messages or gestures. Of these, 16 involved public association. In July 1994, after North Korean president Kim’s death, some of his advisors stood with his son around the bier, to show that the latter had the support of the apparatus. A common form was appearing at a joint news conference. Engaging in leisure activities together came up six times and included a leader traveling with, eating with, enjoying recreation with, or staying over with another. In April 1987, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker attended Seder dinner with Jewish refuseniks.

Conventional signals of personal friendship appeared in many examples:

there were 13 symbolic handshakes and embraces, 6 instances of symbolic gift giving, and 4 examples of using titles or salutes or friendly appellations to show the respect concomitant with friendship. Examples were the Arafat/Rabin handshake of 1994 and Nelson Mandela's display at the May 1994 opening of the South African Parliament when he walked across the floor to embrace his rival Mangosuthu Buthelezi. In May 1988, the mayors of Istanbul and Athens played backgammon and, the newspapers noted, called each other by their first names. A related symbol of approval, although not friendship, was German premier Kohl's 1994 promise to shake the hand of the last Soviet soldier to leave German soil.

A recurrent pattern, of which there were 13 instances, involved an important person doing something for another country, by means of an action that would normally be performed by someone of lesser status. When a leader does the deed in person, the act is lifted out of bureaucratic routine to tap the COUNTRY-AS-ITS-LEADER subtype. The deviation from regular practice and the person's high position are clues that a symbolic message is being sent. It is hard otherwise to explain why in November 1992 Russian president Yeltsin went to South Korea and personally delivered to the president the black box from the downed KAL 007 airliner. In July 1994, the FBI director in Moscow personally received files on former Russian citizens accused of gang activity in the United States. After sacred Bolivian weavings were recovered from American art dealers, in October 1992, U.S. treasury secretary Nicholas Brady turned them over in person to Bolivian president Jaime Paz Zamora. The previous month, French president Mitterand had personally returned two historical cultural documents to South Korean officials. Prototypically, important people spend their time on important business.

A-COUNTRY-AS-ITS-LEADER: The Leader's Personal Implementation Symbolizing Important National Policy

In some examples that are related but outside the friendship scenario, a leader personally implements some decision to endorse it as important national policy. In August 1990, at an air base in the central Amazon, Brazilian president Fernando Collor shoveled cement into a shaft that the previous military government had built to conduct a nuclear test. The symbol was repeated at another site the following year. (His actions may have been *only* symbolic—according to Krasno 1994, the test sites were quietly kept functional.) In August 1989, the leader of the Hungarian Democratic Reform Party personally opened a pad-

locked gate to allow East German refugees to enter Hungary. In January 1993, as U.S. marines left Somalia, two local leaders tore down the barricades separating parts of their city as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation.

A-COUNTRY-AS-A-SPECIFIC-PERSON: Visits to Recognize Another Nation's Status

Symbolic messages often draw on prototypes around status. An important expectation in some cultures involves who acts as the host. A friend of mine who came from Europe to New Haven, Connecticut, in the 1940s, remembers her difficult adjustment as a young faculty wife. She and her husband were invited to social dinners, but when she tried to reciprocate, her invitations were politely but repeatedly declined. She discovered the reason years later: those higher up entertain those lower down but not the reverse. This rule has lost some force, but the idea is still around in other contexts—if the company president wants to meet with a lower employee, it is the employee who goes to the president's office.

Visiting another's country is therefore a statement of the other's importance. The database includes 74 trips to visit described as symbolic. In February 1993, the Lebanese prime minister expressed a wish that the U.S. secretary of state would come to Beirut to symbolically recognize Lebanon's sovereignty. In January 1992, the premier of Japan visited Kyongju, the historical site of the kingdom that first unified Korea. By recognizing the importance of the city, he was symbolically accepting Korean unity, sending the message that, contrary to Koreans' suspicions, Japan sincerely wished to see their country united. Another pattern, related to chapter 12's discussion of prestige, is to reward a country by arranging an important meeting there. In November 1989, it was proposed to hold a PLO/Israel meeting in Cairo to recognize Egypt's contributions to peace.

The rule of visiting to show respect also applies to individuals. In 1985, Senator Edward Kennedy spent the first night of his visit to South Africa at Bishop Tutu's home, signaling his friendship and recognizing Tutu's importance. (Here there was no COUNTRY-AS-A-PERSON metaphor—the senator was speaking for himself.) In February 1989, President Bush visited Beijing and invited a dissident Chinese astrophysicist to a dinner as support for human rights.

Some messages have caused trouble because they were ambiguous as to which prototype was intended. In June 1992, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited Beirut to meet the Lebanese president. He meant it as a recognition of Lebanon's independence, but some critics saw it as friendship with a puppet of Syria. Baker arrived there directly from Damascus, and this element was taken

as supporting the worse interpretation. More than communications that succeed, misunderstandings like these hold lessons for diplomats.

A-COUNTRY-AS-A-SPECIFIC-PERSON:
Metaphors Not Involving the Leader

The elements mapped in a conceptual metaphor are flexible. The scheme of TERRITORY-AS-A-HOUSE could have the territory be a country or a city; in the COUNTRY-AS-A-PERSON metaphor, the person is usually the leader, but it could be some other citizen, perhaps a diplomatic representative. Twenty-three acts involved diplomatic recognition and representation. Ronald Reagan's 1986 choice of Edward Perkins, an African American, as ambassador to South Africa was seen as symbolic. A prototypical angry gesture is refusing to talk to someone, so refusing to grant diplomatic recognition can be a sign of disapproval. In June 1987, the French government signaled its displeasure with apartheid by refusing to accept South African envoys. Just as one would walk out of a friend's house after a serious argument, international censure is expressed by an ambassador returning home. In the converse of the friendship scenario, disapproval is conveyed by refusing to deal with someone.

Sometimes a country does a favor to another country's citizen or group as a positive symbol toward the country. Favors to private individuals yielded 42 symbols in the corpus. The beneficiaries included family members who were reunited or persons needing medical care who were given visitors' visas. In November 1985, Andrei Sakharov's wife, Yelena Bonner, was allowed to travel to the United States for treatment. Deported individuals were allowed to return or political prisoners were released as symbolic gestures, the latter action used frequently in Israeli/Palestinian relations.

A-COUNTRY-AS-A-NONSPECIFIC-PERSON: Friendship,
Support, Status, and Hostility

If the symbolic action is done by normal functionaries, the metaphor A-COUNTRY-AS-ITS-LEADER does not apply. Instead the whole country can be interpreted as the person. There were 36 instances of countries participating in tasks interpreted as symbolic shows of support. Examples were a French/West German army brigade conducting joint maneuvers in 1987 and the May 1994 proposal to send North Korean lumberjacks to work in South Korea. Similarly, Belize offered to send troops to help the U.S. contingent in Haiti.

Favors to a country in the form of aid and trade were continually described

as symbolic—the database contained 33 instances. The international help sent as symbolic gestures was the prototypical kind by which people help people. As symbols, nations would offer food or medicine, not a favorable exchange rate in a trade deal. Examples were U.S. air drops of food and medicine over eastern Bosnia or the provision of supplies to Afghanistan in 1992. Unfriendly symbolic gestures numbered 35, and involved sanctions and embargoes.

The GOING-TO-WAR Scenario

The data suggest that leaders hold a prototypical scenario for going to war. The resulting symbolic messages use only a metonymy and a prototype—the scenario is at the international level, so there is no need for a metaphor to map events down to the interpersonal level. The scenario involves several steps, including using harsh language; cutting economic, social and diplomatic ties; making plans with allies; augmenting and mobilizing one's forces, moving them up to the other's border, and then attacking. That is the prototype for actually going to war—to send a warning a state selects one or more of the preparations. Weapons procurement, military operations, and military aid, including reductions or cancellations of aid, were described as symbolic 36 times. Shows of force are an element of this prototypical set, and the database contained 73 examples, such as countries moving troops near Iraq or to Bosnia, or the United States sending Patriot missiles to Saudi Arabia and South Korea.² Token acts of violence, of which 19 were described as symbolic, included the U.S. attack on Libya and the bombing of Iraq following the allegation that Saddam Hussein had plotted to kill George Bush.

The TERRITORY-AS-A-HOUSE Metaphor

Chilton (1996) argues that metaphors around TERRITORY-AS-A-HOUSE were at the basis of Cold War thinking. The common phrase “national security” taps it—one “secures” one's house against outside entry by building it solidly and locking it. Like many metaphors, it can be misleading. The idea that one must seal one's nation against outside dangers induces a focus on external threats like invasions instead of serious internal dangers like poverty, drug use, or lack of resources for education or science. Usages like “international security” or “global security” try to fix this fault by implying that it is the whole that must be secured, not individual nations. However, the metaphor counterposes an in-

2. Vagts (1956) gives many examples of military shows of force over the last two centuries.

side to an outside, so these are oxymorons without a coherent source domain to exploit.

The metaphor makes geography symbolically important in the symbolic message. There were 16 messages that gave prominence to national borders—many symbolic actions were performed at borders instead of in national capitals. In August 1994, Jordanians and Israelis stood in rows and exchanged gifts across their common border to symbolize the new peace. The same month, U.S. secretary of state Warren Christopher crossed from Israel to Jordan on a newly constructed road linking the two countries. Allowing free travel within one's country is like hospitality in one's home. Israel made such a gesture in August 1994, when King Hussein piloted his own airplane over Jerusalem. Travel between countries symbolizes friendship, and ending travel means a chill. In September 1990, the United Nations voted to cut air links to Iraq and Kuwait. The TERRITORY-AS-A-HOUSE metaphor also leads to the practice of presenting keys to cities. During a February 1993 visit, the premier of Hungary was given the key to Bangkok. In October 1985, Queen Elizabeth received the key to Belize City.

The NORMAL-ACTIVITY and INDEPENDENCE Scenarios

A symbolic message, more than an explicit statement, must be interpreted by considering its context. Some actions are thought of as the routine activities of life, and continuing to perform them in an extreme situation makes a point. Ten remarkably normal activities were described as symbolic. In October 1990, the staff of the American embassy in Kuwait had been stuck there for months. They shampooed their hair and washed their cars as a gesture of resistance, as if they were not severely low on water. In October 1991, Saddam Hussein walked across a repaired Baghdad bridge, symbolically asserting that Iraq had recovered from the air attacks of the Gulf War. In September 1993, during his battle with the Russian Parliament, Boris Yeltsin took a stroll around Pushkin Square. These daily activities were seen as symbolic because of their context.

A variant involves acting differently to show independence. Five instances were recorded, such as Palestine in 1990 instituting its own summer time system to separate itself from Israel. Estonia had done the same in 1988 vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. A good example, not in the database, comes from UN secretary-general Perez de Cuellar (1997), who in 1986 was invited to join the foreign ministers associated with the Contadora Group in a series of visits to five Central American countries to advance the peace process for that region. The group was to travel together, but concerned about perceptions of his indepen-

dence, he arranged to travel in a separate aircraft, which would land at a different time than the foreign ministers' plane. In each national capital he insisted on a separate appointment with the president.

Getting One's Action Recognized as Symbolic

Belize offered troops to help the United States in Haiti, but what could they have added to America's military power? The event illustrates a prevalent phenomenon. Since a symbolic message is usually not an expression in the language, the intended receiver may not spot that it is a message at all. It is the sender's job to get the message recognized as such, and one way is to choose an action that in itself is ineffective. Belize's soldiers would make no real difference, so the audience looks for another explanation for the offer and recognizes it as symbolic. Declaring a cease-fire when hostilities have already stopped, declaring oneself nuclear-free when one never had an interest in those weapons, or signing a treaty to ban an inconsequential weapon all call for a symbolic interpretation since these actions have no other point. This practice is the source of usages like "merely symbolic" or "purely symbolic," and one might be tempted to include ineffectiveness as a requirement for symbolism. If symbols were unimportant by definition, however, the present study would be hard to justify. In the scheme used here, actions are symbolic not *because* they are ineffectual; ineffectualness is a device used sometimes to ensure that the actions get spotted as messages.

A related technique would be not only abiding by a treaty but surpassing it, for example, opening one's territory to verification beyond an arms treaty's provisions to show enthusiasm for the current agreement or an expanded one. The United States and Britain, for example, allowed inspections of their civilian nuclear plants beyond the requirements of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

An action will be more likely to be recognized as a message if it is extreme or bizarre. National leaders are constrained by the decorum of their office, but others can use striking images. There were 36 nongovernmental demonstrations in the corpus, such as that of the intellectuals who floated wreaths down the Danube to show support for the Bosnian people. The pope, who inhabits a world of ritual, released white doves from his window each year to symbolize his hope for peace. In April 1993 in Kuwait, 30 Kuwaiti babies born during or after the Iraqi occupation were brought to a memorial for U.S. war dead, with the symbolic meaning that American soldiers had not died in vain. A dramatic technique is to pack many commonly used symbolic themes into one action. An example including aid to individuals, performing a task jointly to show friendship, doing something for the first time, and carrying out details personally was

the August 1988 plan of Soviet cosmonauts to deploy a U.S. satellite into orbit from their space station. They went outside to personally release the satellite, which extended communication to doctors in remote areas.

The use of special dates emphasizes the symbolic nature of an event. Leaders called for peace on the fiftieth anniversary of World War II. In February 1986, Gorbachev made a progressive speech on the anniversary of Khrushchev's Secret Speech. Still, the most straightforward way to get a symbol recognized as such is to announce that it is a symbol—the famous handshake between Arafat and Rabin was presented that way well before their meeting.

The Symbolic Use of Language

Sometimes language is used symbolically, and this fact shows that symbolism cannot be defined simply as communication outside of language. A linguistic act can be symbolic in two ways: through the form of its language or through the meaning. There were eight examples of form, such as ex-Eastern bloc countries dropping the prefix "People's Republic of ____," Leningrad reverting to St. Petersburg, and the Strategic Defense Initiative being renamed the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization. In September 1990, Premier Yon of North Korea addressed his South Korean counterpart as "President," symbolically recognizing his legitimacy.

Classes of Speech Acts

Speech that was symbolic for its semantic meaning occurred 60 times in the database. Language performs several different tasks beyond asserting the speaker's beliefs, and the symbolic messages can be grouped by the kind of task they performed. One set of categories is³

- assertives, which assert the sender's belief in an idea;
- directives, which request or order the receiver to do something;
- commissives, which commit the sender to some action;
- expressives, conveying the sender's attitudes or feelings, such as congratulations or expressions of gratitude;
- effectives, which bring about a state of affairs, such as knighting or inaugurating someone;

3. The original set of speech act categories was due to Austin (1962), but the one used here is closer to Searle's as modified by Clark (1985).

verdictives, in which the sender announces a judgment and thereby determines an institution's policy, for example, declaring a winner where "the decision of the judges is final."

The symbolic messages that follow are grouped by the typical purpose of their language act, not by what the message was trying to accomplish on the particular occasion. A leader who offers hospitality to another is making a statement of friendship and therefore performing an expressive. Linguistically, however, an offer is a commissive, so that is the category used for the symbol here.

Expressives are statements of attitudes or feelings. There were 17, including declarations of support or approval labeled symbolic, many of them resolutions passed by legislatures. Countries sent apologies for past harms and offered condolences for losses. In October 1993, Premier Yeltsin apologized to Japan for the death of sixty thousand Japanese war prisoners held in the Soviet Union. In July 1994, President Clinton sent condolences on the death of North Korea's Great Leader Kim, and in February 1994 during a visit to Jordan, the prime minister of Israel offered condolences to King Hussein on the death of his son. The press described these instances as symbolic because they were more than messages between individuals. The sender was performing an element of the friendship prototype and tapping the COUNTRY-AS-A-SPECIFIC-PERSON metaphor as well. Clinton was expressing a U.S. desire to maintain ties with North Korea, and Israel's act was seen as indicating a wish for renewed friendly relations.

An example of an expressive in a symbolic mode was King Juan Carlos's 1991 apology for the expulsion of Spanish Jews during the Inquisition. Normally the apology comes from the perpetrators and normally it is delivered to the victims, but here both were long gone. Other common aspects of an apology, like punishing the guilty or making restitution (chap. 11), could no longer be undertaken. Therefore, as a speech act the king's apology was clearly defective. It made sense only as a symbolic message, part of a scenario involving friendship and reconciliation. Just as Belize's offer of troops was notable for its insignificance, the flaws in Juan Carlos's apology alerted the audience to a symbolic meaning.

Commissives, which pledge the speaker to a course of action, numbered 15. Belize's offer of military support was one. To get one's promise spotted as symbolic, one can include clear flaws—make it extremely vague, or make it empty by putting no time limit on its fulfillment, or make a commitment to an action beyond one's control, perhaps to something far in the future. Examples were

Premier Kohl's 1990 promise that Polish borders are safe forever, the 1992 nonaggression statements issued by the two Koreas, and Jordan's 1992 promise to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel. For Kohl's or the two Koreas' pledges, the ultimate fulfillment was not up to the person announcing the promise, and likewise Jordan could not sign a peace treaty alone. In July 1994, a group of Americans in Haiti opposed to U.S. intervention offered themselves as human shields. The offer could not have been accepted, and thus was seen as symbolic.

Directives include requests, commands, and invitations (the latter might also be viewed as commissives, as promises of hospitable treatment.) There were 12 instances, such as Central American nations setting a deadline for the Nicaraguan Contras to disarm, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee calling on President Reagan to reduce American involvement in the Iran-Iraq War, or the Senate calling for a comprehensive nuclear test ban. These directives were recognized as symbolic because they clearly had no force, unlike normal directives. They appeal to the scenario of how one tries to get someone to change course, one element of which is calling on the individual to do so.

Twelve instances of effectives appeared, including the United Nations setting up a war crimes tribunal for the Balkans and making 1993 the Year of Indigenous Peoples, and the U.S. Senate in 1986 ratifying the Genocide Treaty. In 1990 the Lithuanian legislature voted to secede from the Soviet Union. These acts were seen as symbolic just because they were really "ineffectives"—the party making the proclamation was not in a position to bring it about.

Verdictives, slightly different from effectives, are declarations of judgments that determine institutional policy. In 1987 the U.S. State Department announced that Kurt Waldheim's past made him ineligible to enter the country. As Austrian head of state, Waldheim was immune from being barred, so the audience had to look for a symbolic meaning. In August 1993, the State Department declared that Sudan was a supporter of terrorism, with the congressionally mandated consequence that foreign aid would end. The action was interpreted as symbolic because aid was already very small.

The final category is assertives, statements implying the speaker's belief in certain facts. Greek prime minister Papandreou was alleged to have claimed that the Korean airliner downed by the Soviet Union was a spy plane. When one person is a friend or supporter of another, a stereotypical behavior is to agree with what that individual says. A newspaper writer implied that this disloyal leader of a NATO state was symbolically expressing support for the Soviet Union. This was the lone example of an assertive in the corpus, but it is notable that every category of language act was used symbolically at least once.

Ceremonies and Awards

Thirty-five instances of symbolic gestures involved ceremonies or awards. A head of state frequently visited a gravesite or memorial to lay a wreath, the visitor often being from a former enemy state in the war being commemorated. Ceremonies tended to symbolism of all three kinds, and they will be discussed further in the next chapter, after the concept of focal symbolism has been developed.

Grammars for Symbols

Some messages in the corpus showed the beginnings of a symbolic grammar. Two phenomena in particular appeared: the use of intensifiers, analogous to words like *very*, or *definitely*, and the combination of established symbols to generate new meanings. The Gulf War yellow ribbons showed the use of an intensifier—if one ribbon is a welcome, one hundred ribbons make an enthusiastic one.

Many symbols were emphasized through an action being a “first”—18 had this feature. In November 1989, the United States and USSR cosponsored a United Nations resolution for the first time, marking the end of the Cold War. In July 1989, George Bush became the first U.S. president to address the Polish parliament, and in February 1994, the queen was the first British monarch to visit Russia since the revolution. All these were described by the press as symbolic messages or gestures. In a historic example from outside the database it was reported that Richard Nixon, when his plane landed in China, made sure that he was the first one down the stairs and the first to shake hands with his hosts (Ambrose 1989, 512–13). This was meant to intensify the symbolism.

A frequent element in grammars is the national flag. The flag is not a communicative act in itself—one must do something with it, like wave it, salute it, pledge allegiance to it, fly it over a certain building, or burn it. For message symbols, a flag functions like a word in a sentence, the whole action being the message. Flags alone are value symbols, like the pope’s doves or the queen’s very person, so using them in a message symbol has the effect of putting an emotionally powerful word into a speech. Across the world, nations hold protocols for their flags’ treatment, and the details suggest a grammar. It is proscribed to fly one national flag below another in time of peace, or to use it in advertising, or to let it touch the ground (McCaffree and Innis 1985). In 1987 during the Iran-Iraq war, a major international event was the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers in the Gulf with American flags to communicate that the United States intended to

protect them (Gamlen and Rogers 1993). A 1988 proposal for the Olympic Games was to have athletes from the two Koreas march together behind the Olympic flag. Often the shapes and colors in the design have meaning (Firth 1973), and some symbolic gestures involved including elements that recognized national groups. In the early 1960s a new Canadian flag was proposed that showed three blue maple leaves attached together in the pattern of a fleur-de-lis, the point being the unity of Canada's English and French cultures. In February 1992 on Independence Day, Sri Lankans flew black flags in place of their national flag to express their opposition to the government.

The Berlin Wall appeared in a network of symbols and showed the development of a grammar. It also showed how a grammar can span the three varieties of symbolism. The wall was built in 1961, but long before that, the city itself had been a symbolic outpost against communist expansion. This meaning was supported by the symbolic drama of the Berlin airlift, and the value associations generated probably had the historical consequence of reducing the cloud over Germany after World War II (Sutterlin and Klein 1989). When the wall was built, many Western politicians visited it immediately to demand strong action, but Konrad Adenauer, in the middle of an election campaign, failed to do so. His omission became symbolic, in the focal sense, of his complacency. The wall's strong value symbolism distorted history in the popular mind—many re-countings of President Kennedy's "I am a Berliner" speech place it at the wall, rather than at its actual location at City Hall. The wall physically divided Berlin, but as a focal symbol it divided Germany and Europe. It was put into message symbols: political rallies and musical concerts were held there, and toward the end, it was decorated with miles of graffiti. The focal and message importance of its demolition under Gorbachev was at least as important as that of its construction. The rubble was used to build roads connecting the sectors that it had previously divided.

Conclusion

The forms of symbolism in the database are diverse but they can be categorized under a few headings. A practical question is whether a symbolic message will be understood correctly, but the method used here does not answer that directly, since it does not give us access to the intention of the sender or the interpretation of the receiver. However, their problem is one of coordination, of generating common understanding, and their expectations will be set by what has typically been done in the past. The information here can help guide the construction of a message symbol by showing the most commonly used techniques.

Honor, Symbols, and War
Barry O'Neill
<http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=14453>
The University of Michigan Press