Applying Multi-Perspective Approaches to the Analysis of Parliamentary Data

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The growing availability of digital corpora of parliamentary proceedings has provided invaluable resources for large-scale machine-based analysis. However, most corpus-driven methodologies have often been primarily concerned with statistical results and quantitative analyses, rather than with text-based and discourse-driven analyses of the content of parliamentary proceedings (Baker, 2006; Partington, 2012). In general, quantitative corpus linguistic analyses point to general patterns or trends of language usage, but these need to be interpreted - through qualitative analysis - in terms of (institutional) context, party affiliation, interpersonal power balance, and debate topic, to name but a few. A helpful solution would be to set up a mixed toolbox that integrates quantitative techniques with qualitative discourse-analytical approaches.

While transcripts of parliamentary proceedings have been made available in several countries, researchers are still confronted with the controversial question of (in)accuracy. For example, UK Hansard reports, which are theoretically supposed to be verbatim, are actually edited in order to remove the more serious shortcomings of MPs' oral delivery (Slembrouck, 1992). First, intrinsic elements of spontaneous speech, such as false starts, involuntary repetitions, or incomplete sentences, are left out. Second, the written version does not reflect certain features of spoken language, such as intonation, stress and regional accents. Moreover, certain reformulations are produced by Hansard editors to avoid clumsy or unclear messages. (Mollin, 2007) compared a sample of the official transcript to a transcript made from a recording of a House of Commons session and found that characteristics of spoken language, such as incomplete utterances, hesitations and contextual talk had been omitted. Since the transcripts are not entirely accurate, analysts of parliamentary discourse corpora need to watch the video recordings (Ilie, 2010; Ilie, 2013; Ilie, 2018), which can provide important clues about 'missing links', inconsistencies and the like.

Since they are based on a more sophisticated and fine-grained analysis, qualitative approaches to corpus data (Sealey and Bates, 2016) can provide deeper insights into the wide-ranging correlations between the purely linguistic, the contextual and the performative levels of the parliamentary proceedings under consideration. This presentation discusses and illustrates the meaning negotiation that emerges at the interface of the micro- and macro-levels of analysis regarding the parliamentary dialogic confrontations recorded in the Hansard reports. Three interrelated processes of meaning construction and contextualization can be identified in parliamentary debates: lexical selection (key words, labels, forms of address), collocational patterning (clichés, quotations, ritualistic formulas), and interpersonal co-performance (question-answer sequences,

statements and counter-statements, follow-ups). These processes can be analysed in relation to metadiscourse and interdiscursivity (using transcripts of parliamentary corpora), whereas the behavioural and interpersonal dynamics need to be analysed in relation to visual prompts (which presupposes access to videorecordings).

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