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Narratives of dialogue in parliamentary discourse

Constructing the ethos of the receptive politician

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This paper puts forward an argument about the relation between narratives and constructed dialogue in political discourse. Narratives of dialogue are special cases of constructed dialogue that emphasize the embeddedness of the speaker, displayed as a discourse participant engaging in a conversation with an ordinary citizen or a public figure. Close analysis of British, German, and French parliamentary debates reveals how narratives of dialogue shape an image of the speaker involved in a dialogue. While being engaged in the activity of debating, parliamentarians simultaneously perform the act of debating. I argue that the main point of narratives of dialogue is not so much to report on a prior or hypothetical situation, but to create the ethos of a Member of Parliament receptive to their interlocutors.

Keywords: constructed dialogue, narrative, identity construction, parliamentary discourse, public image, ethos

1. Introduction

As an interactive form of political interaction, parliamentary debates epitomize the instantiation of polyphonic voices. One of the ways to display the multiplicity of viewpoints is to stage a possible discussion through what I call *narratives of dialogue*, which I define as a subform of “constructed dialogue” (Tannen 1986) where the act of performing a dialogue becomes the central focus of the narrative. I argue that Members of Parliament (MPs) who quote other discourse participants not only – or not really – report on previous utterances. Rather, they construct their ethos as politicians willing to engage in a dialogue with other discourse participants. Ethos is here understood as the public image that speakers discursively construct in order to highlight certain aspects of their identity (Amossy 2001).

While previous work on the discursive construction of leadership in political discourse has shown how political actors use the first person and related verb constructions (Fetzer and Bull 2012; Kranert 2017) to enact their political selves, this paper shifts the focus on how politicians interact with various ‘others’. I delve into how parliamentarians “‘do’ competence and responsiveness” (Fetzer and Bull 2012, 129) through the lens of narratives of dialogue. In these “small stories” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008), politicians not only engage in discussions, but also stage the dialogue as an event in itself. In doing so, they highlight their receptiveness – a component which seems to play a role for the category ‘reception’ (Fetzer and Bull 2012, 132; Kranert 2017, 187) and deserves further explorations.

Instances of “constructed dialogue” (Tannen 1986), also referred to as reported speech, speech (re)presentation, or quotes, make speakers operate a shift in footing, defined as “participant’s alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self” (Goffman 1981, 128). By fabricating an instance of dialogue, MPs do more than simply invoking other voices: they set out, through an apparently anecdotal narrative, a situation in which they perform their own role. In doing so, politicians position themselves as *co-interlocutors* rather than representatives or spokespersons of the words of others. Moreover, they construct themselves as amenable to new ideas, which qualifies them as receptive politicians.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 gives an overview of the research on constructed dialogue and narratives with a focus on political discourse. It underlines the points of connection and outlines a definition of *narratives of dialogue*. The corpus of parliamentary debates as well as the method for coding instances of constructed dialogue are presented in Section 3. Sections 4, 5, and 6 examine the functions of narratives of dialogue in relation with specific linguistic features. I first present instances of narratives of dialogue relying on semantically indeterminate third-person forms such as *someone*, *some*, or *every- one*. I show why disclosing the identity of the discourse participants involved may appear unnecessary to introduce the ethos of a politician open to suggestions. Next, I consider instances of narratives of dialogue where famous enunciators – the persons uttering the words in the narrative – are brought into play, and show that this enables MPs to highlight one aspect of their professional identity: their connections. Finally, I address the case of the ‘ordinary voter’, usually represented by means of a singular, indefinite noun phrase. I conclude by showing what types of ethos are articulated with narratives of dialogue.

2. Bringing constructed dialogue and narratives together

Referring to what has or may have been said is commonly labeled *reported speech*. The term “is used to refer to the presentation of discourse that purports to be from a prior occasion, and may originate from another author” (Holt 2009, 1). The expression *reported speech* is, however, misleading: the introduction of past, future, or fictive utterances is never merely ‘reporting’, because every reference to another discourse creates a new context. Accounting for this difficulty, several competing notions have been proposed: speech presentation, speech representation, quotes or quotations, and constructed dialogue.

The term *speech presentation* is usually lauded for its neutrality (Marnette 2005, 49; Semino and Short 2004, 15), especially compared to *speech representation* (Baynam and Slembrouck 2009), which conveys the idea of reproduction. The notions of *quotes*, *quotations*, and *quoting* allow for a focus on the activity of quoting as a practice or, as Bublitz (2015, 2) puts it, “as an act of taking up text and, in doing so, performing a shift of context, focus and perspective”.

The concept of *constructed dialogue* captures the fabricated nature of the juxtaposition of voices (Tannen 1986, 2007). Tannen’s argument is that every instance of constructed dialogue always transforms the utterance referred to. Speakers take over stretches of talk with different communicative intentions than the ones expressed in the initial or original context. I retain the idea that the integration of another discourse—no matter whether it is seen as real or fictitious, exact or approximate, uttered by the speaker or by others—is, first, always constructed, and, second, always a dialogue with other speakers, forms of self, times, or places. In political discourse specifically, constructed dialogue has been shown to serve the challenging of political opponents (Fetzer 2012), the legitimization of the speaker and their political party (Kuo 2001), or the construction of ordinariness (Fetzer and Weizman 2018).

How do these aspects of constructed dialogue connect with narratives? Narratives usually refer to past events told in a sequential order (Labov 1972). The term can thus also apply for instances of constructed dialogue structured along spatio-temporal elements. Such discourse phenomena would then represent instances of constructed dialogue embedded in a narrative, or, as Wicczorek (2016, 207) phrases it, *narrative reports*, an expression that captures the specific function of utterances “incorporated into short narratives that include reported speech frames [and] add to the rhetorical force that narratives inherently exhibit”.

In order to be construed as narratives, instances of constructed dialogue must first “involve[] a sequence of events organized in such a way as to have a beginning, middle, and end” (Ryfe 2006, 74). Secondly, in order to be disentangled from mere chronologies, “stories pivot around a problem, which is sometimes referred to as a dilemmatic situation or a complicating event” (Ryfe 2006, 74). Finally, “the meaning of stories lies in context—in the way they are addressed by someone to others in a context of interaction” (Ryfe 2006, 74). Narratives frequently comprise dialogues: when we tell a story, we often refer to what has been said on this occasion.

More specifically, narratives are understood as “privileged forms/structures/ systems for making sense of self by bringing the coordinates of time, space, and personhood into a

unitary frame” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, 378) – which is what makes them particularly powerful tools for the construction of the ethos of a receptive politician. Indeed, “how the referential world is constructed points to how the teller *wants to be understood*” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, 380). A critical point of entry into the “referential world” is the source of the utterance, or how other figures are constructed from the point of view of the speaker. Whether speakers enact unknown or indistinct voices, famous enunciators, or ordinary voters, tells a lot, in return, about the aspects of their ethos politicians are highlighting.

The specificity of what I call *narratives of dialogue*, then, is that they are narratives revolving around an instance of constructed dialogue, where the instantiation of the dialogue – more than the content of what is said – builds the knot around which the narrative revolves as well as the social meaning that can be inferred from it. Specifically, I show that MPs use this strategy in order to construct the ethos of a receptive politician. By staging narratives of dialogue, politicians position themselves as apt at listening and reacting to other positions. It enables them to move beyond their role as representatives or spokespersons of the words of others by highlighting their role as a speaker – someone who speaks *with* others instead of *about* others.

3. Collecting and annotating quotes from a corpus of parliamentary debates

The analysis is based on a corpus of forty-four British, German, and French parliamentary debates that have been manually annotated in an XML-TEI format and made available online to the scientific community in open access (Truan 2016a; 2016b; 2016c).

After having fallen into oblivion, parliamentary debates are experiencing a revival of interest in discourse analysis (Burkhardt and Pape 2000; Ilie 2006). Indeed, they lend themselves particularly well to diachronic and contrastive analyses (Bayley 2004; Ilie 2010). Within the genre of parliamentary debates, plenary sessions reflect a tension between the desire to display a deliberation, i.e. the

search for consensus, but also a confrontation that makes it possible to account for the various forces involved – a tension that Ilie (2003, 73) sums up under “adversariality and cooperativeness”. As a “performance-oriented institutional interaction” (Bischof and Ilie 2018, 586), plenary debates represent a “conceptual nexus” (Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen 2016) enabling politicians to stage their professional and personal ethos – different aspects that can be summarized as ‘doing being receptive’, as will be shown in the next sections.

Each subcorpus is independent, yet all three corpora are comparable. One parliamentary debate per year about a major European Council meeting was selected. European Council meetings trigger plenary debates in the EU Member States, nonetheless in very different proportions. These discrepancies are reflected in the size of the corpora: the German corpus (DE-PARL) is the biggest one with 417,095 tokens, while the British (UK-PARL) and the French one (FR-PARL) amount for 188,913 and 137,620 tokens, respectively.

The corpus has been manually annotated according to the guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative. Of interest for this paper is the TEI tag <quote>, which “contains a phrase or passage attributed by the narrator or author to some agency external to the text”.¹ In the corpus, the quote tag is used when a speaker indicates that they are borrowing somebody’s words. It does not distinguish between various levels of constructed dialogue, however, and is encoded independently from typographic markers. An example is (1):

- (1) <u who="#HOWARD"><seg>In 1998, he said <quote>"We have to reform Europe and we are winning that battle"</quote>. [...]</seg> (UK 2004.11.08)

Note that the annotation captured all instances of constructed dialogue, which do not necessarily pertain to a narrative of dialogue, where the communicative act of *dialoging* with someone is put in the foreground. In Example (1), for instance, the instance of constructed dialogue does not qualify as an instance of narrative of dialogue. In this case, the constructed dialogue serves other purposes, notably making the quotee accountable for what the speaker claims they said. It does not revolve around a narrative in which the very act of initiating or pursuing a dialogue is enacted.

The manual annotation yielded the following results: 550 instances of constructed dialogue in the German corpus, 190 instances of constructed dialogue in the British corpus, 112 instances of constructed dialogue in the French corpus. The analysis remains, however, qualitative, and these numbers merely indicate that there are more instances of constructed dialogue in the German corpus, which is

1. <https://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/CO.html#COHQQ>, accessed on 31.10.2019.

consistent with the fact that the corpus is about three times as big as the French one and twice as big as the British one. (Keep this in mind when noticing that I present a few more instances from the German corpus.) Moreover, a large number of instances of constructed dialogue in the British corpus are similar to (1), which can be explained by the higher degree of technicity of parliamentary debates on Europe at the House of Commons (Truan 2016d, paras. 15–19).

I have divided narratives of dialogue according to the source of the utterance, suggesting that the co-interlocutors the speaker engages with are one of the most prominent factors in establishing what kind of parliamentarians they want to sound like. Three main categories of discourse participants have emerged from the data: unknown enunciators, famous enunciators, and ordinary voters.

4. Indeterminate voices: Establishing a dialogue with the opponents

In this section, I present instances of narratives of dialogue mapped onto a twofold rhetorical move: presenting what others will say and then introducing the speaker's argument. Specifically, I focus on instances of constructed dialogue introduced by a referent denoted by a singular third-person form such as *someone* or *everyone*. I examine how MPs anticipate dissent by putting words into their challengers' mouths in the future tense. By doing so, parliamentarians reframe the debate by telling how they would react. Because they *know* what their opponents will say – it is phrased as a future bound to happen –, speakers can present themselves as, first, competent politicians knowing what counterarguments may emerge and, second, defuse the real dialogue before it actually takes place. The role played by third-person forms in this respect is significant: out-group members are rarely referred to via second-person forms ('you will say'), but constructed as a collective, yet imprecise enunciative source.

Let us first consider the following example:

- (2) DR. ANGELA MERKEL (CDU) [majority]: Das wird auch *der Geist* sein, in dem wir heute und morgen in Brüssel beraten werden, wo doch *jedervorher* sagt: **Die Vielfalt ist so groß, Europa ist zerstritten, die werden keinen Millimeter vorankommen.** *Ich sage Ihnen:* Wir werden vorankommen, und zwar genau in dem von mir beschriebenen Sinn, weil die Werte, die uns einen, Werte und Ziele sind, mit denen Europa auch im weltweiten Wettbewerb des 21. Jahrhunderts bestehen kann, weil wir uns alle, alle Staats- und Regierungschefs der Europäischen Union, aller 27 Mitgliedstaaten, dem Geist verpflichtet fühlen und weil wir die gemeinsamen Werte auch wirklich teilen.

(DE 2012.10.18)

DR. ANGELA MERKEL (CDU) [majority]: This will be *the spirit* in which we will be advised today and tomorrow in Brussels, where *everyone* is announcing: **diversity is so huge, Europe is divided, they will not make an inch of progress.** *I am telling you:* we will make progress, namely exactly the way I have described it because the values that unite us are values and goals with which Europe will still be here, in the global competition of the 21st century because we all, all heads of state and government of the European Union, all 27 Member States, feel bound by this spirit and because we actually do share these common values.

Excerpt (2) shows how a dialogue is established between what critiques will say and what the speaker actually says. Angela Merkel preempts the future by assuming that a certain ‘spirit’ (*Geist*) will prevail. While she imagines that the counterdiscourse will take place in Brussels, she also surmises that such an utterance is so plausible and pervasive that it will be said by ‘everyone’ (*jeder*). This extract is thus an example of “choral dialogue” (Tannen 2007, 114–15), where “the dialogue is attributed to more than one speaker” although it is virtually impossible that ‘everyone’ will utter the same words. “Rather”, Tannen continues, “the line of dialogue is offered as an instantiation of what many people said”.

Throughout the narrative of dialogue, a discussion is instantiated with the imagined speakers of such utterances and with the MPs attending the debate. Put differently, the speaker simultaneously depicts two worlds of discourse: one within the projected future “as the site of the possible and potential, represent[ing] a contested rhetorical domain” (Dunmire 2005, 482) and one in the *hic et nunc* of the speech event, with her real-time interlocutors.

This two-layered conversation moreover involves the staging of the speaker as they speak. By turning her answer to both her critiques and the other MPs (‘I am telling you’, *[i]ch sage Ihnen*), the speaker accomplishes an act of performativity. She indeed frames her utterance as constructed dialogue instantiated by herself at the time of the utterance. Arguably, utterances such as ‘I am telling you’ have been framed as “a simple reinforcement of the [following] assertion” (Marnette 2005, 67) – and not as engaging in any dialogue.

It is however possible to consider such instances as a speaker’s performance of them doing ‘having a conversation with someone’. Following Marnette, I argue that the *verbum dicendi* “expresses two different things [at the same time, I would add]: a speech act and the staging of that speech act” (2005, 67–68). Such an inter- actional pattern is manifest in (2). The proposition ‘I’m telling you’ (*[i]ch sage Ihnen*) is constitutive of a dialogue, understood as a succession of turns. Precisely because it involves the act of responding and the staging of this act, the excerpt revolves around the speaker – rather than the quotee.

Without the utterance introduced by ‘I’m telling you’, the critical observation made by the anonymous, yet multiple voice (‘everyone’), would have remained a single turn. Because the utterance is followed the speaker’s reply, the excerpt becomes a dialogic interaction. With the addition of the second turn, the speaker performs a shift in footing between her role in the fictional dialogue and her speech with the public attending the debate. The utterance is caught in-between the constructed dialogue with the opponents and the actual dialogue with peers in the parliamentary arena.

Keeping in mind this complex interlocking of voices, consider (3):

- (3) OSKAR LAFONTAINE (DIE LINKE) [opposition]: *Der eine oder andere* wird nun sagen, **das sei einfach nur dahergesagt und nicht begründbar**. *Ich möchte ganz deutlich sagen*, dass diese Regierung aufgrund ihrer Politik nicht daran mitwirkt, ein soziales und damit ein demokratisches Europa zu bauen.

(DE 2006.12.14)

OSKAR LAFONTAINE (DIE LINKE) [opposition]: Now *some people* [literally: The one or the other (person)] will say that **this is just empty talk and not justified**. *I would like to say very clearly* that this government, due to its policy, does not contribute to building a social and, by doing so, a democratic Europe.

The indeterminate, hypothetical speaker who utters the words ‘this is just empty talk and not justified’ is not framed as a collective entity but as an isolated, anonymous voice. By contriving their own answers as dialogue, i.e. by performatively introducing the act of answering, the speakers establish a political dialogue with the opponents and stress the significance of their communicative act.

Interestingly, such a pattern appears relatively frequently in German parliamentary discourse: there are 160 occurrences of the pattern ‘I am saying/telling you’ (*ich sage*) or ‘I must/want to say’ (*ich muss/will sagen*). Occurrences in the past tense are not included since they may be viewed as instances of constructed dialogue, not as speech in the making. The first collocate² is the colon: punctuation mark indicates that the formula is followed by the message that the speaker wants to accentuate. The second one is the personal pronoun ‘you’ in the dative case (*Ihnen*), which shows that such an expression is oriented towards the addressees in almost a third of the cases (53 occurrences). The following collocates illustrate the rhetorical move of ‘making a point’ against one’s opponents, manifest in the adverbs ‘expressly’ (*ausdrücklich*, 14 occurrences), ‘once and for

2. A collocate is a word that occurs around another word. The search has been made in the software TXM (Heiden 2010) with the default parameters: ten words before and ten words after the key words.

all' (*einmal*, in particular in the expression *noch einmal*, 18 occurrences), 'openly' (*offen*, 6 occurrences), and 'clearly' (*deutlich*, 11 occurrences), as well as in the intensifier 'very' (*ganz*, 18 occurrences) and the adversarial connective 'but' (*aber*, 18 occurrences).

The semi-fixed formula 'I am telling you' appears as a preferred way of saying things in German contemporary discourse. The English equivalent, *I say/I tell*, occurs 26 times. By contrast, the string of words *je dis/ dirai* in French yields only 5 occurrences. This finding may be read in the light of what I call 'displaying indirectness, but playing it tough' at the German Bundestag (Truan forthcoming). By embedding their central message into a narrative of dialogue, MPs convey their message indirectly, as a response to an anticipated critique.

Example (4) from the British corpus also presents a fictive situation in the future tense:

- (4) MR. DAVID CAMERON (TORIES) [majority]: This [the European Commission] is an organization that responds not simply to pressure, but to political realities, so we have to make sure that the political reality after the next election is **someone walking into the Berlaymont building or the European Council building and demanding change**, rather than **someone wandering in and just saying, Relax – there's nothing you need to do. We don't have to have a referendum. We don't need a renegotiation. One day we'll join the single currency.** All the pressure would be off and, yes, **some in Brussels** would breathe a sigh of relief, because it would be business as usual with Labour and probably the Scottish National party too. (UK 2015.03.23)

As in (2), the fictitious dialogue takes place in Brussels, in a place still to be identified (the Berlaymont building or the European Council building). This narrative of dialogue animates successive speech roles: a positive one ('someone demanding change', probably David Cameron projecting himself after the next election), and two negative ones (someone saying 'Relax – there's nothing you need to do', and some breathing). The words 'Relax – there's nothing you need to do [...]' are not merely quoted but integrated into the vision of a fictive discourse participant in movement, 'walking into' a building, 'wandering in'.

Framing what others will say is always paired with an answer to such criticism:

- (5) MR. TONY BLAIR (LABOUR) [majority]: **Some people will say that** all the power should be put into the hands of the Commission and the European Parliament; **others, such as ourselves, will say that** the Commission must retain its independent right of initiative [...]. (UK 2001.12.17)

Similar to the structures pervading all narratives of dialogue, the arguments of both the opponent(s) and the speaker are presented side by side. Yet the speaker's point is always final, and strategically closing the utterance. Both arguments are equally framed in the future sense, i.e. as utterances which have not (yet) occurred.

The following example from the French corpus shows that the speakers may correctly picture what opponents will say, as the call in-between³ in (6) highlights:

- (6) FRANÇOIS BAYROU (UDF) [majority]: Comme il est écrit à l'article 2 de notre Constitution, le principe de notre République, c'est «le gouvernement du peuple, par le peuple, pour le peuple». **Certains diront encore** que c'est une utopie.
 JEAN-PIERRE BRARD (CR) [opposition]: **Cela reste une utopie !**
 FRANÇOIS BAYROU (UDF) [majority]: Pour nous, c'est le nécessaire.
 (FR 2002.12.03)
- FRANÇOIS BAYROU (UDF) [majority]: As it is written in article 2 of our Constitution, the principle of our Republic is “the government of the people, by the people, for the people”. **Some will say again that this is a utopia.**
 JEAN-PIERRE BRARD (CR) [opposition]: **It remains a utopia!**
 FRANÇOIS BAYROU (UDF) [majority]: For us, it must be done.

Acknowledging that *certain* ('some') will not agree with him, Bayrou introduces anticipated dissent. His utterance is followed by a call in-between from an MP belonging to the parliamentary group 'Communistes and Républicains'. The third-person form *certain* ('some') is overwhelmingly used to refer to the Communists rather than any other parliamentary group. It is thus no surprise that the narrative of dialogue transforms into a real dialogue during this heated debate.

The examples presented in this section have shown that making the opponents speak can be framed as an anticipation of expected critiques. Presenting the detractors' fictive utterances in the future tense enables the speaker to formulate their own utterance in the future tense, too, thus projecting the dialogue of both speakers in a fictive situation. By finally uttering those words that may never be uttered otherwise, the speaker shapes in return an image of the co-interlocutors: those incapable of saying what needs to be said.

3. I propose to label shorter, unauthorized turns by speakers other than the one currently holding the floor as 'calls in-between' – a possible translation of the German term *Zwischenruf*. By doing so, I account for the specificity of this type of turns in parliamentary interaction (Truan 2019a, 333).

5. Well-known voices: Displaying the professional politician

I now turn to a second series of examples revolving around specific enunciative sources. Contrary to the instances of Section 4 where the focus was on dialogue in the making without indicating who will utter it, the instances of Section 5 are tied up with a specific discourse participant absent during the plenary session. I argue that in such cases, narratives of dialogue contribute to an ethos of professionalism by showing the MP in their everyday professional environment, while simultaneously highlighting how knowing famous people is nothing special. Politicians are then able to stress two seemingly contradictory aspects of their identity: their network and belonging to the elite, but also the ordinariness of such situations.

Let us consider (7):

- (7) DR. THEODOR WAIGEL (CSU) [opposition]: Ich habe einmal vor ein paar Jahren **Alan Greenspan** gefragt: Wie hast du vor zehn Jahren über den Euro gedacht, wie hast du vor fünf Jahren über den Euro gedacht und wie denkst du jetzt über den Euro? Dalachte er und sagte: Vor zehn Jahren „zero or below zero“, vor fünf Jahren hielt ich es ebenfalls für aussichtslos und jetzt bin ich froh, dass es neben dem Dollar diese zweite Weltreservewährung zur Stabilisierung des Weltwährungssystems gibt. (DE 2001.12.12)
- DR. THEODOR WAIGEL (CSU) [opposition]: A few years ago, I asked **Alan Greenspan**, “what did you think about the euro ten years ago, what did you think about the euro five years ago, and what do you think about the euro now?” He then laughed and said, “ten years ago, ‘zero or below zero’ [in English], five years ago, I still thought it had no perspective and now I am happy that this global reserve currency exists next to the dollar to stabilise the international monetary system”.

Excerpt (7) is a typical example of narrative of dialogue characterized by a change of perspective marked by the shift from the informal second-person pronoun *du* (‘you’) to the third-person pronoun *er* (‘he’). In the first part of the excerpt, the speaker drops out the current speech situation to project himself in a former situation, symbolized by a lower degree of formality. In this way the speaker shows that he is close to the referent quoted, Alan Greenspan, although the latter is a public figure. The choice of the informal pronoun *du* thus belongs to the speaker’s representation (and translation) of past events: the staged dialogue must have occurred in English (Alan Greenspan is an American economist). The construction of familiarity between these public figures, however, relies on linguistic cues to appear authentic.

A similar though slightly different process can be seen in (8):

- (8) VOLKER KAUDER (CDU) [majority]: Gestern war **der portugiesische Botschafter** *bei mir* und hat darauf hingewiesen, dass Portugal dringend Unterstützung bei Investitionen in eine modern Infrastruktur und bei Beschäftigung brauche. (DE 2015.03.19)

VOLKERKAUDER (CDU) [majority]: **The Portuguese ambassador** was *at my place* yesterday and he mentioned the fact that currently, Portugal desperately needs support in the investment in a modern infrastructure and employment.

The speaker shows his closeness to the quoted referent by emphasizing that the Portuguese ambassador came to visit him personally (*bei mir*, ‘at my place’). This occurrence qualifies as a narrative of dialogue because it remains linked with a specific communicative situation: the exchange with the ambassador becomes a leitmotiv in Kauder’s speech and is quoted several minutes later on another occasion:

- (9) VOLKER KAUDER (CDU) [majority]: Das zweite Thema, wenn wir über Wachstum und Innovation sprechen, bleibt natürlich – auch darauf hat **der portugiesische Botschafter** *gestern* hingewiesen –, dass wir mehr in Zukunftsbereiche investieren müssen. (DE 2015.03.19)

VOLKER KAUDER (CDU) [majority]: The second topic that we have to tackle when we are talking about growth and innovation is, of course, and as **the Portuguese ambassador** also said *yesterday*, that we have to invest more in future-oriented areas.

And it finally reappears at the end of Kauder’s speech:

- (10) VOLKERKAUDER (CDU) [majority]: Ich will noch einmal **den portugiesischen Botschafter** zitieren – er hat mir ausdrücklich gesagt: Herr Kauder, das können Sie öffentlich verwenden –: Wenn man Griechenland jetzt auf eine Art und Weise nachgibt, wie es nicht in Ordnung ist, dann kann ich in meinem Land nicht mehr erklären, warum die Menschen überhaupt Opfer auf sich genommen haben und auch in Zukunft noch Opfer auf sich nehmen sollten.

(DE 2015.03.19)

VOLKER KAUDER (CDU) [majority]: I want to quote **the Portuguese ambassador** one more time. He explicitly said: “Mr. Kauder, you can use this publicly”: If one gives in to Greece’s requests now, in a way which is not okay, then I can’t explain anymore [to the citizens] in my country why people have taken responsibility for the victims and should keep doing it the future as well.

As a matter of fact, this narrative becomes so vivid that even another speaker incorporates it into his speech as well:

- (11) MATERN VON MARSCHALL (CDU) [majority]: Dafür, dass zum Beispiel die duale Ausbildung – Herr Kauder, Sie haben das im Zusammenhang mit **dem portugiesischen Botschafter** angesprochen – ein Erfolgsmodell Deutschlands ist [...]. (DE 2015.03.19)
- MATERN VON MARSCHALL (CDU) [majority]: The fact that the dual training in German is a success [...] – you mentioned it in the context of **the Portuguese ambassador**, Mr. Kauder.

Interestingly enough, the name of the Portuguese ambassador will never be disclosed, which shows that his symbolic function is more important than his actual identity. Arguably, assigning your words to someone else allows you to minimize your enunciative involvement. In this context, it enables a conservative MP to tell southern countries what they should do without making it sound like an imposition. By framing the need for reform and the positive role model Germany plays as coming from a representative of these countries, the speaker minimizes the face-threatening act the ‘advice’ represents.

The most prominent aspect of this narrative of dialogue, however, is not so much to hide behind the ambassador’s words, as he is nor well-known nor a pivotal figure for German contemporary politics, and as what he finally “says” is expected in the mouth of a member of the Christian Democratic Union. Rather, the function of this pervasive narrative of dialogue is to frame the speaker as a professional politician seeking advice from like-minded professionals. When they refer to other political figures in a casual way, as something that happened in passing, MPs show their embeddedness in relevant networks. Simultaneously, by depicting how they are at home, with people they (say they) know well, MPs also present themselves in a friendlier environment, at the intersection between their professional and private life.

Whether this strategy serves the speaker’s communicative goals still remains to be assessed. Maybe paradoxically, putting forward one’s identity as a politician close to other politicians may be an easy entry into the traditional tension between MPs as representatives of the people and part of an elite. Being per *du* (informal ‘you’) with Alan Greenspan can then be interpreted as an indicator of further distance from the citizens.

Until now we have seen that narratives of dialogue are pervasive resources both in opening a (fictive) space for contesting voices, thus letting see a potential that will be brushed off, and in unfolding seemingly contradictory aspects of a parliamentarian’s identity. Next, I turn to the third category of enunciators I have identified across the three corpora of British, French, and German parliamentary debates: the ordinary voter, usually expressed through singular, yet unspecific, person-referring expressions.

6. Singular anonymous voices: Talking to the ordinary voter

The figure of the ordinary voter⁴ must be assessed in contrast to the ways people are usually represented. People are often voiced in a very impersonal way in my corpus of parliamentary debates, in particular through generic expressions (*people, everyone, all*) (Truan 2019b). Against this background, a well-developed strategy is the mobilization of collective, yet particular voices (as opposed to generic reference):

- (12) HENRY SMITH (TORIES) [majority]: **The constituents to whom I spoke over the weekend, on the doorstep and in community meetings**, were certainly not amused by the irony of a surcharge of 1.7 billion from the European Union having to be paid because our economy is so successful, and they were very much behind my right hon. Friend in wanting to say no to the payment. Does the Prime Minister agree that we should take no lessons from the Labour party, who gave away 7 billion in terms of our rebate in return for absolutely no reform of the European Union? (UK 2014.10.27)

Framing one's question as coming from the constituents themselves is a way to minimize the face-threatening act towards the Labour by implicating that the speaker is merely transmitting information. Being embedded in a narrative linked with a time (*over the weekend*) and a place (*on the doorstep and in community meetings*), this extract displays the MP as someone playing their role as representative: meeting with constituents, all the more during the weekend, thus showing his dedication.

In other cases, the reference to the discourse participants is specific. The quoted referent personifies the common sense the politician endorses in the name of their constituents. Examples (13) and (14) offer a typical illustration of this phenomenon:

- (13) JÉRÔME LAMBERT (SOCIALISTE) [opposition]: *Récemment encore, un vieux pictocharentais, personnage souvent sympathique et toujours épris de bon sens*, me disait : « Nous décentralisons notre pays alors que nous construisons l'Europe, demain la France ne sera plus qu'une mosaïque de régions et ne pèsera plus rien dans les décisions européennes » ... Cette réflexion est lar-

4. Among the 12 occurrences of the lemma *voter* in the British corpus, two correlate with the adjective *ordinary*, which makes it the second collocates of *voter* (co-frequency of 2 for 7 occurrences of *ordinary* in the corpus). By contrast, the French voter (7 occurrences) is not 'ordinary'. It is difficult to directly compare the French lemmas *électeur* ('voter'), as it has a negative semantic prosody and activates negative representations in French politics (Truan 2019b, 321). The distribution of the German lemma *Wähler* ('voter') is not so strongly marked, yet there is also no association with any type of standard voter.

gement partagée; on craint que notre pays, même s'il fait partie d'un ensemble plus fort, ne soit plus en mesure d'être véritablement entendu, non plus que ses citoyens. (FR 2002.12.03)

JÉRÔME LAMBERT (SOCIALISTE) [opposition]: *Recently again, an old inhabitant of Poitou-Charente, an often sympathetic figure, always filled with common sense*, was telling me: "We are devolving more powers as we build Europe, tomorrow France will be only a mosaic of regions and will not weigh anything in European decisions" ... This reflection is widely shared; one fears that our country, even if it is part of a stronger whole, is no longer able to be truly heard, nor its citizens.

- (14) PETER BONE (TORIES) [majority]: *Over the weekend*, my joint listening campaign with Tom Pursglove, the excellent Conservative candidate for Corby, was out knocking on doors. *One particular person who spoke to Tom* said, **I've been a Labour voter all my life, but Dave has said no to paying 1.7 billion, Dave has said no to unrestricted immigration from the EU and he's going to give us a referendum, so for the first time ever I'm going to vote Tory.** Does my right hon. Friend think that the rest of the country will follow that chap? (UK 2014.10.27)

By holding on to authentic verbal interactions in which they participated, the speaker discursively reconstructs the encounter, the contact, the concrete nature of the interaction that took place. The representation of a *vox populi* is depicted as a single event (*récemment*, 'recently', *over the weekend*) that nonetheless remains general and possibly generalizable (*un vieux pictocharentais*, i.e. any old inhabitant of Poitou-Charente?).

The instance of constructed dialogue is credited to unquestionable enunciative sources. Contrary to plural enunciators who are always fraught with battles for recognition (who said this?), it is difficult to question the fact that the speaker has really met the discourse participants they are relying on, thus giving the narrative of dialogue a sense of intimacy, authenticity, and vividness it may lack when 'the constituents' are referred to. The precise wording of the constructed dialogue deserves attention. The formal register in (13) unveils the seasoned MP's voice behind the old inhabitant of Poitou-Charente. Note in this regard the use of the first-person plural pronoun *nous* instead of the informal, and highly more frequent third-person singular pronoun *on* (both translated as 'we') and the expression *mosaïque de régions* ('mosaic of regions') that resembles a pre-fabricated, highly institutionalized pattern of speech. Conversely, it is highly unlikely that the 'one particular person' given a voice in (14) mentioned the current Prime Minister by calling him 'Dave' – an intimate form of address that reveals the voice of the Conservative MP Peter Bone who knows David Cameron personally.

These discourse participants are situated at the crossroads between under-specification and exemplification. Because they are not named ('one particular person', but no gender, no name, no age, no background), although spatio-temporal indications prove their existence, these singular, non-specific referents have an identifying function.

The mediation played by such enunciators as an intermediary to mitigate utterances formally addressed to other MPs is visible in (15):

- (15) ROLAND CLAUD (PDS) [opposition]: Wir wollen eine andere Frage stellen, meine Damen und Herren. Versetzen Sie sich einmal in die Lage **eines europafreundlichen Fernsehzuschauers, der versucht hat, den Nizza-Prozess in den Medien zu verfolgen**. Für **ihn** war dieser Vorgang quälend: nicht so sehr, weil es sich hier um schwierige und andauernde Prozesse handelt, sondern weil **er** seine Probleme in dem nicht wiederfand, was seine Regierung dort verhandelte. *Beifall bei der PDS* Dass dies das Problem von Nizza war, haben auch viele Kommentatoren gesagt. Nun wird **dem geneigten Fernsehzuschauer, der vielleicht auch heute die Rede des Kanzlers gehört hat**, gesagt, es werde eigentlich alles gut, wenn er die Regierung nur weiter gewähren lasse. Dass **dieser Mensch** in Konflikte kommt, werden Sie doch wohl eingestehen; ich finde, Sie haben es auch schon eingestanden. Das Problem ist also, dass sowohl die großen Erwartungen als **auch die Sorgen von Bürgerinnen und Bürgern** im Zusammenhang mit einer erweiterten Union hier zu wenig vorkamen. Auf die Ängste wird zu wenig eingegangen und die Hoffnungen werden zu wenig aufgegriffen. (DE 2001.01.19)
- ROLAND CLAUD (PDS) [opposition]: We want to ask another question, Ladies and Gentlemen. Put yourself in the shoes of **a pro-European TV viewer who tried to follow the Nice process in the media**. For **him** [+ masc in German], this process was excruciating: not so much because we are talking about difficult and ongoing processes, but because **he** couldn't find **his** problems in the government's negotiations. *Applause from the PDS* This was the problem of Nice, and many commentators said so. Now we are telling **the willing TV viewer, who maybe also heard the speech of the Chancellor today**, everything will be fine if **he** just lets the government do its thing. You will acknowledge that **this person** finds themselves in a conflict situation; I find that you have already acknowledged that. The problem is that both **the expectations and the worries of citizens** in the context of an enlarged Union were not addressed. The fears and hopes were too little discussed.

The explicit addressees of (15) are 'Ladies and Gentlemen' who are invited to engage in the hypothetical situation depicted by the speaker (see the imperative mood '[p]ut yourself in the shoes'). Throughout the extract, the conclusions drawn are also oriented towards the other MPs ('[y]ou will acknowledge'). The

‘pro-European TV viewer who tried to follow the Nice process in the media’ is thus never the addressee of the excerpt but remains the discourse participant one talks *about*, not *to*. Calling this figure into existence functions as an act of recognition (‘I know that you exist’) and as an act of identification (‘I – maybe as opposed to others – know how you feel and will make your voice heard’). Although this mediated dialogue paradoxically stresses the *indirect* access to representatives in our modern democracies, it also appears as one of the only ways to make the voice of citizens heard in the parliamentary arena.

Interestingly, narratives of dialogue revolving around discourse participants in the singular – i.e. an old inhabitant of Poitou-Charente’ in (13), ‘[o]ne particular person’ in (14), ‘a TV viewer’ in (15) – relies on longer extracts than when people are mentioned in the plural. Although this individual (grammatically encoded through singular NPs) remains unidentified or generic, the emphasis is put on the value of the experience rather than on numbers, as in plural generics (‘people think’) or quantificational NPs (‘many (people) think’). It is, however, implied that this discourse participant may be representative for the whole class they stand for. Enacting a single discourse participant is thus an introductory phase during which the speaker also constructs an ethos of proximity and familiarity with their constituents.

When enacting scenarios with individual voters, politicians recreate the conditions for a dialogue as it supposedly happened face-to-face. Members of Parliament emphasize how they engage in a dialogue with their constituents outside of the parliament, and activate the representation of closeness, intimacy, and home via the constituency. Parliamentarians thus display themselves as being open and receptive when getting to know a diverse population.

7. Conclusion: Narratives of dialogue in the service of ethos of familiarity and authenticity

Within narratives of dialogue, how discourse participants are instantiated puts different aspects of a politician’s ethos in the foreground. Narratives of dialogue function as a means of establishing proximity to the discourse participants being quoted by highlighting two aspects. First, the speaker’s personal connection with the discourse participant creates an ethos of familiarity, be it with unidentified voices portrayed in specific (yet often fictive) situations, professional connections, or ordinary citizens. Second, the emphasis on the situation of utterance in which the exchange supposedly happened creates an ethos of authenticity. Both aspects are situated at the intersection between private and public domains of reference, and contribute to ‘doing democracy’.

The parliamentary ethos of familiarity and authenticity is intertwined within the three main functions that narratives of dialogue perform in the corpus. First, narratives of dialogue unlatch a polyphonic space for the representation of dis- sent. They thus allow for a dialogue with the opponents through indeterminate voices (*someone* or *everyone*). Second, narratives of dialogue, when referring to situations during which the speaker describes themselves with someone famous, emphasize the embeddedness into relevant professional networks. Finally, narratives of dialogue can be combined with the figure of the ordinary voter, thus allowing MPs to construct themselves as close to the people.

While the discursive construction of the people has been shown to be a standard feature of current populist discourse, “referring to the people is a common feature of parliamentary talk for all speakers and all parliamentary groups” (Truan 2019a: 334). Specifically, “the mere mention of the “people” cannot be regarded as a feature of populist rhetoric.” (Truan 2019b: 201, also see 205). Indeed, the rhetorical moves identified in this paper are not populist per se, as all parliamentarians use them (or, then, we would have to say that politics in general has become populist – a claim that goes beyond the scope of this paper).

In fact, narratives of dialogue may be a particularly useful and widely used resource in parliamentary discourse *because* they offer a convenient way out on how to perform facework “as a form of communicative skill” (Bull and Fetzer 2010, 156) while displaying an image of the self only in relationship with others. Because plenary sessions, as the place where citizens’ voices should be heard, paradoxically also are exactly the place where *only* Members of Parliament get to speak, narratives of dialogue not only render the vividness of possible inter- actions, but also situate parliamentarians as willing to engage in a dialogue with other discourse participants.

When reconstructing previous or forthcoming interactions and giving themselves the role of a discourse participant, speakers perform their own role as someone engaging in a conversation. They thus narrate the act of being in a conversation. Narratives of dialogue appear prominently in parliamentary dis- course in three distinct national contexts. While comparisons with other dis- course genres are necessary to assess whether narratives of dialogue are specific to parliamentary discourse or simply broadly used, the data suggests that the representative function MPs (are expected to) play in parliamentary settings shapes the mode of representation of constructed dialogue.

In order to fulfil their representative function, Members of Parliament per- form three communicative acts simultaneously: they speak *about*, *for*, and *to* the people (Truan 2019a). By speaking *with* discourse participants through narratives of dialogue, they initiate a dialogue that functions as a prototype for the dialogue taking place in parliamentary interaction. In other words, they perform democracy by establishing a virtual space where different perspectives get interwoven. Because they show how meaning emerges through interaction, narratives of dialogue can be seen as miniatures of how parliamentarians construe their encounters with diverse discourse participants, and display themselves as amenable to new ideas. In this sense, narratives of dialogue appear as one of the crucial moments where parliamentary democracy as the fragmentation of voices brought together under the umbrella of representatives becomes visible.

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