

Insulting as (un)parliamentary practice in the British and Swedish parliaments

A rhetorical approach

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Everyone on the British side understands the constraints. Foreigners, for obvious reasons, do not. Insulting a visiting President may be fine if it's intentional. But if not, it is careless and can be damaging.

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1. Introduction

Why study parliamentary insults, rather than parliamentary politeness conventions? And why a comparative study? The reason for choosing this particular topic is threefold. First, the intention was to counterbalance the proliferation of studies concerned almost exclusively with linguistic politeness. Second, an institution's principles of conduct may often be most clearly revealed through violations and disruptions of normative forms of politeness and through negotiated claims about those violations. Third, since verbal abuse involves evaluative statements grounded in specific social and cultural systems of moral values, a comparative study can best reveal the institutionally and culturally available forms of verbal offence, the insult response frames, the ideologically based patterns of ascribing blame and assuming responsibility, as well as the relative balance between the insult's rudeness and the target's vulnerability. Institutional acts of verbal abuse and defamation, such as parliamentary insults, provide a rich ground for the study of interpersonal dynamics, of the unpredictable changes in the power balance and of the reasoning fallacies underlying verbal controversies.

The present analysis focuses on the implications and consequences of traditionally established norms and values and of culture-bound institutional constraints that underlie unparliamentary rhetorical manifestations. When tackling controversial issues, it is normally the task of the opposition to suggest alternative solutions and to criticise the government and its representatives, who are in their turn expected to counter-attack and to provide justifications for their policies and course of action. The emotional aspects of parliamentary adversariality can be detected at several discursive levels and in varying forms, and most of them are basically perceived as detrimental, although this need not always be the case:

As it is the case with adversariality, there are ancillary aspects to controversy which are clearly of negative value. Controversies often involve rudeness, disrespect, hostility, animosity, name-calling, put-down, insults, *ad hominem* attacks, misinterpretation, diversions into unnecessary and irrelevant themes, intolerance, dogmatism, wasted energy, failures of communication, and waste of time and talent... (Govier 1999)

From a rhetorical point of view, parliamentary debates represent prototypical instances of the *deliberative genre* of political rhetoric, but elements characteristic of the *forensic* and *epideictic genres* are also present, even if to a lesser extent. Although MPs' (Members of Parliament) interventions exhibit a number of representative features of these classical genres of rhetoric, their verbal confrontational exchanges are a far cry from the ideal critical discussion envisioned by proponents of various forms of normative theories of argumentation (cf. Van Eemeren 1992). Abusive and insulting behaviour is generally perceived as a deviation from the commonly assumed rationality of public debate. It is usually meant to call into question the addressee's *ethos*, i.e. credibility and moral profile, while enhancing the speaker's own *ethos* in an attempt to strike a balance between *logos*, i.e. logical reasoning, and *pathos*, i.e. emotion eliciting force.

As far as insults are concerned, it is not simply the occurrence of offensive language that needs to be taken into account, but also the type and intensity of the abuse, as well as the reactions triggered by the perceived or alleged offence. Within the framework of the present study, parliamentary insults are envisaged and analysed in terms of the degree, focus and target of the institutional adversariality-based verbal abuse, rather than as deviations from politeness rules. Non-verbal forms of insulting behaviour and certain politeness-related discursive moves, such as interruptions, have been left out from the present analysis, because their inclusion would have involved a far broader analytical frame that would go beyond the scope and goal of the proposed study.

2. Aims and method

For the purposes of the present analysis, I have chosen to examine and compare the distinctive features and functions of the British and Swedish MPs' 'unparliamentary' language and behaviour. The present approach is located at the interface between rhetoric, discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics. The examination of a number of specially selected parliamentary debates reveals some recurring patterns of ideological conceptualisation of human rationality and human emotionality, as they are reflected in varying strategic uses of insults as unparliamentary rhetorical practices. Unlike other types of insults, parliamentary insults fulfil different functions with regard to reinforcing certain beliefs and values, challenging others, as well as to imposing or rejecting certain norms and principles that regulate the practices for negotiating short-term and long-term political goals.

The investigation has been carried out contrastively, by focusing on the cognitive processes that underlie the discursive manifestations of more or less hostile or aggressive behaviour in the British House of Commons and the *Riksdag*, i.e. the Swedish Parliament, with a view to identifying the culture-specific and institutional correlations between their underlying external causes, internal motives and actual effects. Two major issues are addressed from the start, namely the more general characteristics of institutional insults, on the one hand, and the more specific manifestations of insulting rituals in the two parliaments, on the other. The questions to be asked in the first case are the following: What counts as an insult in the two institutional settings? How do accusations turn into insults or into responses to insults? When and why do ironical utterances become insulting? To what extent are insults institutionally sanctioned in the two countries? In the second case, the relevant questions are: Which types of parliamentary insulting strategies are preferred and dispreferred, respectively, in British and in Swedish debates? Are there any consistent and deep-going similarities and differences between insulting behaviours in British and Swedish parliamentary debates? To what extent and in what ways does abusive language reflect institution-specific and culture-specific constraints?

3. Corpus

In order to carry out a contrastive investigation of (un)parliamentary confrontational strategies, two sets of transcripts have been examined, namely

transcripts of debates in the House of Commons (selected from the *Hansard* records), and transcripts of debates in the Swedish *Riksdag* (selected from the *Rixlex* records). Some of the prototypical manifestations of confrontation in parliament are to be found in *Question Time* in the British House of Commons and in its counterpart, *Frågestunden* (*i.e.* Question Time) in the Swedish *Riksdag*. This is why transcripts of these sessions have also been included in the corpus under examination. In both countries, Question Time is devoted to questioning the foremost representatives of the Government, namely the Prime Minister and/or Government Ministers, by their fellow parliamentarians. The question-response sequences represent the default adjacency pairs of Question Time and they often display exchanges of challenging, accusatory and often denigrating, remarks between MPs belonging to Opposition MPs and Government MPs, but also friendly and cooperative questions from MPs belonging to the Government party.

4. Unparliamentary language revisited

In several types of discourse, the abusive use of language emerges as a product of socio-cultural practices and beliefs, and it is likely to occur in contexts where power differences are salient, tensions are high, and the cost-benefit is appealing to the speaker (Jay 1999). While the discursive norms underlying most institutional settings tend to discourage confrontational behaviour as a dispreferred form of interaction, one of the basic prerequisites of parliamentary debates is to deal with controversies, to negotiate the reasons and results of disagreement, and thus to handle overt and strong expressions of emotional bias. Diverging or opposite ideological commitments and goals are asserted, refuted and defended by means of ritualised parliamentary practices. It is not the (un)parliamentary words and phrases themselves that are insulting, but the interlocutors' roles and relation to each other, the insult initiator's offensive attitude and the intentionality of derogatory conceptualisations. A relatively general definition of ritual insults that may apply to different discourse types and situations has been provided by Irvine (1993), who examined insults in a Wolof village in Senegal:

[...] insults are not simply a set of statements, or a type of content inherent in statements. Instead, insult is a communicative effect constructed in interaction - constructed out of the interplay of linguistic and social features, where the propositional content of an utterance is only one such feature. (1993:110)

As far as parliamentary insults are concerned, the MPs' mind set and emotional balance or, rather, imbalance, becomes a motive force in the use of abusive language, whereby strong negative emotions and energies are allowed to explode (though under fairly controlled forms). A definition that applies specifically to unparliamentary language is provided in Ilie (2001):

Parliamentary insults represent institutional instances of aggressive self-assertion, which imply both standing out from the group and arguing on behalf of the group. To sum up, parliamentary insulting strategies can be seen as subversive transgressions of the institutional boundaries of parliamentary language use and practices. (2001:259)

Depending on their past history and evolutionary development, both the British and the Swedish parliaments are currently experiencing different types and degrees of change. The House of Commons (Searing 1994; Dbring 1995; Norton 1997) is increasingly becoming a more specialised and less closed institution under the growing influence of interest group activities through parliamentary lobbying. In Sweden the parliamentary committees have become more active, more bills and resolutions are proposed, more interpellation debates are held (Damgaard 1997). As a result, the parliamentary parties have become more competitive in the Swedish Riksdag. Moreover, "the increased level of conflict or disagreement reflects a higher level of party competition and each of the parties has a strong need for public visibility in order to attract and maintain electoral support" (Damgaard 1997:92).

4.1 Unparliamentary language in a cognitive theory perspective

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive schemata theory provides a comprehensive and integrative framework that gives a consistent view of the human process of understanding with regard to the image-schematic structures which mesh with our embodied experience. Since schemata are rooted in pre-conceptual embodiment patterns, insulting strategies give indications about emotional perceptions and culture-specific constraints on the network of inferential processes and implied meanings that are derived in the course of institutional confrontation. The cognitive part of the theoretical framework of the present study is based on Ilie's analysis (2001) of the cognitive mechanisms of insulting language in the House of Commons. That approach was inspired by the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Sweetser (1990), Johnson (1990/1987) and Goatley (1998), especially their emphasis of the importance of preconceptual bodily activities for shaping our consciousness and mental

processes through metaphorical projection and metonymic conceptualisation. A brief summary of the criteria used in Ilie's approach to the cognitive analysis of parliamentary insults is provided in the following account:

There are three main reasons why insults are perceived as more challenging and more intense than reproaches, accusations and criticisms. First, they allow for the emotional force of the message to exceed its rational force, which affects not only the targeted addressee, but also other participants who are witnessing the verbal exchange. Second, insults reinforce the ideological bias of stereotypical patterns of reasoning by integrating them into publicly accessible conceptualisation structures. Third, while accusations or criticisms do allow for the addressee's right and possibility to justify and/or rehabilitate him/herself, insults undermine the addressee's image, position, and authority so seriously as to inhibit any further dialogue. (2001:260)

A certain use of abusive language often results in stirring up prejudices and stereotypes by calling into question, and/or undermining the justifiability of the other party's conceptual categories, while strengthening the stability of one's own party's conceptual categories. Eventually, the political use of ideologically rooted insults can reveal as much about individual as about cognitive group representations. One of the claims made in this paper is that rhetorically constructed parliamentary insults are often used to minimise cognitive differences within one's own political group and to maximise cognitive differences between this group and adversarial groups.

Individual utterances can sometimes instantiate more than one type of *facework* strategy, for example "dual-effect strategies (directed toward self and other) and/or dual-face strategies (directed towards positive and negative face)" (Penman 1990:23). Parliamentary insulting behaviour often exhibits such dual-effect strategies in that the insult initiator's face is equally involved in the insulting process as that of the insulted interlocutor(s). Moreover, an overlap of targets may also occur, in that insults can be directed both to individual MPs and to their respective political parties. The insult target's *vulnerability* may reflect back on the vulnerability of the insult initiator. An MP's vulnerability pertains, on the one hand, to his/her role as a private person (including sub-roles such as member of a particular professional category, of a particular constituency, etc.) and, on the other, to his/her role as an elected spokesperson for a political party (including sub-roles such as member of a political party, champion of a particular ideology, holder of a position in the government, etc.). The interplay between the different manifestations of two types of vulnerability, namely individual vulnerability and institutional vulnerability, is decisive for the impact of unparliamentary language on the insulting, as well as

on the insulted MPs. Vulnerability is multi-layered in that it can be associated with one or several sub-roles of each of the two role categories.

By attacking one type or level of an MP's vulnerability, the insult initiator also intends to extend it by projection to other areas of the insult target's private and/or public face. The shifting interface between self-facework and other-facework in the debate proper makes it possible for the analyst to identify another important variable, that of *relative power*. In cognitive terms, several dimensions of an MP's personal vulnerability may be targeted by an adversarial MP who boosts his/her relative power by maximising self-facework.

4.2 Unparliamentary language in a politeness theory perspective

One of the basic notions involved in adversarial dialogue is that of *facework*, which is included in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978). However, while facework is seen to provide the underlying dynamics of face saving and mitigation of potential threat, the authors overlook the issues of face aggravation, such as insults. In Harré's (1979) view, the major goal of facework is the generation of *respect* for self and the avoidance of *contempt*. But it also implies that contempt can be conveyed as part of the interpersonal facework strategies and incurred by the self in certain circumstances. In parliamentary debates, for example, there are institutionalised tokens of respect and contempt that may operate as complementary dimensions.

Within the framework of politeness theory, rudeness is envisaged simply as a deviation from or a violation of rules and maxims of cooperative/polite communication, as has been shown by Kienpointner (1997). He duly argues that the dichotomy of politeness and rudeness should be replaced by a continuum and become a matter of degree rather than principle. Furthermore, while it is plausible to assume that cooperative strategies of verbal behaviour are present in any communicative exchange, it is also necessary to account for the fact that rudeness seems to be a universally occurring phenomenon. Among the types of rudeness discussed by Kienpointner is included the category of 'competitive rudeness in inter-group confrontation, which bears a certain resemblance to the unparliamentary nature of parliamentary insults.

With regard to rudeness, Kasper (1990) makes an important distinction between motivated and unmotivated rudeness. According to her, unmotivated rudeness refers to the violation of the norms of politic behaviour due to ignorance, whereas motivated rudeness refers to deliberate violations of norms in the sense that the speaker intends to be heard as rude and to hurt the interlocutor. She discusses three types of motivated rudeness: rudeness due to

lack of affect control, strategic rudeness and ironic rudeness. The third type, ironic rudeness, is viewed as a subset of strategic rudeness in that it is deliberate and goal-directed. Kasper's categories of rude behaviour can reveal group and personal variations both intra-culturally and cross-culturally and are useful in distinguishing between different manifestations of unparliamentary behaviour. The view taken in this study is that certain kinds of institutional rudeness, such as parliamentary insults, have acquired an acknowledged legitimacy that underlies ritualised confrontational encounters. During more heated debates, the exchange of rude remarks tends to get out of hand by becoming a default institutional adjacency pair. This tendency is nevertheless kept under control by the Speaker of the House, whose monitoring role is to intervene and call to order exceedingly troublesome MPs.

4.3 Unparliamentary language in a rhetorical theory perspective

Rhetorically, parliamentary insults can be regarded as attention-getters meant to shake up a political adversary into reacting emotionally and thus revealing less flattering aspects of his/her personality, political responsibility and/or moral profile. Of particular importance for the rhetorical part of the theoretical framework of this study are the classical Aristotelian appeals to *logos* (the appeal to reason), *ethos* (the appeal to a speaker's moral qualities) and *pathos* (the appeal to the audience's feelings), as well as contextualised culture-specific uses of figurative language. While the speaker's *logos* and *ethos* are relevant to the evaluation of the scope and focus of parliamentary insults, the speaker's *pathos* is undeniably decisive for the uptake of strong emotional undertones and credit claims (Ilie 2003b).

Parliamentary insulting behaviour represents a conventionalised and not unexpected response-triggering act because it is powerful enough to make the addressee prone to react. Thus, insults fulfil primarily two rhetorical functions, namely that of *movere* (= to move, to engage the addressee/audience emotionally) with special respect to the target of the insult, and the rhetorical function of *delectare* (= to please and entertain the addressee/audience) with special respect to the audience as a whole. In particular circumstances, certain types of insults may fulfil a third rhetorical function, i.e. *docere* (= to instruct and educate, but also to lecture the addressee/audience). The *docere* function can be detected as a surreptitiously used strategy in responses to insults, but also in insults themselves. The insulting mechanisms in the two parliaments can, for example, be differentiated to a certain extent according to their frequency of occurrence.

The present investigation starts from the assumption that what is generally referred to as unparliamentary uses of language represents instances of institutionally ritualised confrontational interaction. Parliamentary insults are offensive rhetorical acts performed in a highly competitive institutional setting. They are deliberate in the sense that they are intended to be perceived and recognised as such by the person targeted. Unparliamentary language uses can provide important clues about moral and social standards, prejudices, taboos, as well as value judgements of different social and political groups and individuals in a community. Because they underlie culturally defined negative values and norms, insults are meant to reduce the targeted person, group or institution (and what they stand for) to stereotypically undesirable or detestable attributes. Cross-cultural studies are particularly enlightening in this respect, since it can safely be assumed that the forms and functions of insults and their respective feedbacks vary in different cultures and institutional settings.

5. English and Swedish parliamentary insults

In spite of essential political differences, the Swedish *Riksdag* and the British House of Commons display significant parallels with respect to issues of procedure continuity and change, as well as a socio-culturally rooted search for stable and effective inter-party solutions. A number of institutional features shared by the parliamentary discourses in Britain and in Sweden, such as procedural rules, patterns of leadership, and decision-making routines, make it possible to undertake meaningful and context-sensitive comparisons of politically motivated strategies. Both British and Swedish MPs resort, on various occasions, to several strategies of discursive directness or indirectness when making derogatory evaluations of their political adversaries. The basic strategies and certain actual manifestations of unparliamentary language in the two parliaments display several commonly shared features. At the same time, however, there are institutional discursive patterns and rhetorical functions that can be distinguished in the unparliamentary uses of language in the two parliaments in terms of institution-specific and culture-specific norms. Three main aspects of insults in the two parliaments are going to be examined more closely, namely, manifestations of (un)parliamentary polarisation in 5.1, (un)parliamentary mitigation strategies in 5.2 and (un)parliamentary interplay between in-group identity and inter-group dissent in 5.3.

5.1 (Un)parliamentary polarisation: Political vs. rhetorical polarisation

English parliamentary debates are notorious for the very heated disputes that often turn into interpersonal verbal duelling. In general, the institutional debating patterns among British MPs display a confrontation-seeking tendency, which in many ways is the very opposite of what Swedish cultural norms recommend, namely to avoid confrontation and to minimise disagreement. This is partly a consequence of the postwar ideology of consensus and harmonising in Sweden and it represents "not only a culturally given personality trait but also the border between the private and the public in Swedish culture" (Daun 1996:77). It does not mean, however, that conflicts and confrontational situations do not arise in Swedish society, and particularly in the Riksdag. However, in order to keep things under control and to avoid extreme dissent, Swedish MPs show an inclination to steer the discussion mainly towards the assessment and interpretation of tangible facts and technical matters. Since there is a consensus to focus primarily on verifiable data (which is less likely to arouse controversies), emotional outbursts, interruptions, shouts and laughter, which are normal occurrences in the House of Commons, hardly occur during Swedish parliamentary debates. Unlike British rhetorical tradition, which allows for ridiculing and making fun of the most serious topics, Swedish traditional rhetoric requires that serious talk, such as political discussions, should preferably be kept apart from joking. An illustration is given in example (1) below.

- (1) Bo Könberg (fp): Herr talman! Jag lyssnade till socialministern [Margot Wallström, Sdem]. Jag lyssnade förstås till hela hennes inlägg, men bl.a. lyssnade jag när hon talade om att oppositionen ägnar sig åt att skära pipor i vassen. Det lyssnade jag med stor respekt på. Socialministern representerar ju det parti i Sverige som är mästare i den branschen, så det är klart att vi lyssnar på synpunkter av den typen. Skämt åsido är det förstås bra att socialministern säger att dessa frågor skall tas på allvar [. . .]
(Riksdagsprotokoll, 3 oktober 1997)

Bo Könberg (Lib): Mr. Speaker! I listened to the Minister for Social Affairs. I listened, of course, to everything she said, and in particular when she said that the Opposition are dealing with unscrupulous vote fishing. I listened to that most respectfully. After all, the Minister for Social Affairs represents the Swedish party which is unsurpassed in that field, so we obviously listen to their viewpoints. Joking aside, it is actually a good thing that the Minister urges us to take these issues seriously. [...]

By replying to the Social Democratic Minister's accusations with a counter-accusation, Könberg (Opposition MP) ascribes not only morally questionable activities to the Social Democrats, but also a considerable lack of self-criticism in that they blame the Opposition for the same, less than correct, political tactics as the ones used by themselves. The last statement in his intervention is meant to draw a line between the serious and the jocular styles, by signalling explicitly the transition from ironical, viz. non-serious, remarks to serious talk: "Joking aside, it is actually a good thing that the Minister urges us to take these issues seriously" ; This statement is also meant to reinforce the rational nature of the discussion by tactfully banking on an occasional (and superficial) convergence of opinions with the same minister who had been the target of his preceding ironical attack. This sensitivity to and consideration for the rigours of the interplay between a politician's personal and institutional role is a recurrent feature of Swedish confrontational strategies. This shifting facework act is intended to restore the other's face, while de-escalating the conflict dynamics (Rogan & Hammer 1994).

Debating British MPs can often be seen to adopt the opposite approach, namely their speech tends to gradually gather momentum, even if they start on a relatively balanced and consensual note. They often finish their interventions on a sarcastic or ironical note, as in (2) below:¹

- (2) John Butterfill (Con): I am sure that all hon. Members accept that the euro's success is vital to this country's economy and will wish the euro well, but that makes the issue of the corporate governance of the central bank even more important. *The Prime Minister has rightly said* that there will be an important principle of rotation of board members, but will he confirm that Mr. Noyer, a Frenchman, will be the vice-president for the first four years, to be followed by Mr. Trichet, another Frenchman, who will be the president for eight years? When the Prime Minister embarked on his marathon lunch with Mr. Kohl and Mr. Chirac, where lunch went on to tea, then to dinner and then to supper, *did he realise that they were going to have him for breakfast?* (Hansard Debates, 5 May, 1998, Column 575)

The two examples above represent only a couple of several polarisation patterns that are recurrently used by Swedish and British MPs, respectively. British MPs resort more frequently than their Swedish counterparts to climactic pathos-oriented strategies, such as the hyperbolic rhetorical question in (2), when attacking or counter-attacking their political adversaries. Swedish MPs show more restraint in using colourful metaphors, since they are more concerned with building up an ethos based on common sense, moral virtue and practi-

cal wisdom, on the one hand, and balancing other-face threatening acts with other-face saving acts, on the other. While British parliamentary debates exhibit a stronger *political polarisation*, whereby the adversarial relations between opposite political camps are constantly and intensively reinforced, Swedish parliamentary debates exhibit a stronger *rhetorical polarisation*, whereby serious and reasoning talk is traditionally kept apart from playful and entertaining talk. These two types of polarisation are reflected in the unparliamentary language strategies used in the two parliaments. *British insulting acts are particularly based on pathos-oriented logos, whereas Swedish insulting acts are particularly based on ethos-oriented logos.* Basically, the persuasive power of a speaker's ethos and pathos depends ultimately on the audience that the speaker has in mind. The form and content of the manifestations of ethos and pathos reflect to a large extent the background, mind sets and expectations of the targeted audiences.

5.2 (Un)parliamentary mitigation strategies

Within the institutional frame of parliamentary debates, MPs' identity and multiple roles are normally challenged and called into question by political adversaries. This is usually achieved by means of mutual negative evaluations. In order to avoid being accused and institutionally sanctioned for using explicit unparliamentary language, MPs in both parliaments resort to a number of mitigation strategies. It is the directness, as well as the strength, of insults that is often mitigated. On examining the two parliamentary corpora, three recurrent mitigation strategies have been identified: (i) the juxtaposition of opposite notions, i.e. contempt vs. respect; (ii) the formulation of insults as questions rather than as statements, and (iii) the attribution transfer strategy.

5.2.1 *The juxtaposition of opposite notions: Contempt vs. respect*

In political controversies, scornful behaviour is an explicit display of disrespect that challenges the legitimacy of the other as a person deserving respect. *Contempt* is undeniably a very strong emotional ingredient of insults that perpetuates inter-group conflict fuelled by identity issues. By publicly expressing contempt towards a person, one increases that person's vulnerability, thus damaging his/her image, prestige, authority and reputation (Ilie 2001). It is therefore symptomatic, and fully understandable, that rhetorical appeals to the notion of *respect* should co-occur with the use of abusive words addressed to the interlocutor. The insult initiators do sometimes attempt to neutralise the harmful effect of the expressions of contempt by means of the concomitant use

of verbal tokens of respect. This strategy enables the simultaneous performance of both self-face saving acts and other-face saving acts, helping to strike a balance between other-face threatening acts and other-face saving acts. Consider Blair's utterance "if I may respectfully say so" in (3) below:

(3) William Hague (Con): *It is no good the Prime Minister wriggling off the point because he does not know the answer to the questions. [. . .]*

The Prime Minister (Tony Blair, Lab): I think that *the right hon. Gentleman's comments may look a little foolish* when the results of the consultation are announced, *if I may respectfully say so*. Since this *is about the only health service subject that he dare raise – he knows that he has nothing to say about anything else* – it is correct that there have been many representations on community health councils, and it is for that reason that we said we would listen to them. [. . .]

(Hansard Debates, 14 February, 2001, Column 307)

The co-occurrence of Blair's obviously insulting statement "the right hon. Gentleman's comments may look a little foolish" and the conventionally respectful phrase "if I may respectfully say so" is signalling an explicit incongruity, enhanced by the abusiveness of the following insults: "this is about the only health service subject that he dare raise - he knows that he has nothing to say about anything else!". As Cicero once remarked, a politician's major motivation, and sometimes only reward, is to gain public respect and esteem, while at the same time she always runs the risk of being humiliated and losing respect. One of the British MPs' ways of dealing with this dilemma is to try to reach a balance between expressing contempt and apparently indicating respect for the targeted MP. To this end they resort to a recurring two-sided institutional strategy, which creates a striking incongruity between the genuine expression of contempt (through the proffered insult) and the ritualistic expression of respect for the targeted MP.

Könberg's ironical attitude in example (1) in 5.1 above where he discloses the discrepancy between the Minister's words and deeds is conveyed not only by the rhetorical strategy of pretending to admire what he is actually attacking, but also by appearing to adopt an over-respectful attitude: "I listened to that *most respectfully*". The ironically meant expression of respect is conveyed in the Swedish excerpt by an adverbial phrase, which functions as a complement at sentence level, i.e. it qualifies the predicative verb 'listened': In the English example (3), however, the hypothetical clause "if I may respectfully say so" is a ritualistic utterance that functions metadiscursively at inter-sentential level, i.e. it conveys a comment on the speaker's previous statement. Könberg's ad-

verbial represents an instance of ironical overstatement created by pragmatic incongruence, whereas Blair's metadiscursive utterance operates as a rhetorical understatement. The notion of *respect* is central to interpersonal communication in most cultures and this is why the ironical use of the term *respect* in connection with insults by MPs in both the Swedish and the British Parliaments is significant. It act's as a reminder of the rhetorical tension between the concepts of contempt and respect when invoked simultaneously.

5.2.2 *The formulation of insults as questions rather than as statements*

Another recurrent (un)parliamentary mitigation strategy of both British and Swedish MPs involves conveying negative evaluations of political adversaries in question form, as illustrated in (4) and (5) below:

- (4) Sir Peter Tapsell (Con): Is the Prime Minister not being *disingenuous* in pretending that he cannot understand the political fact that article 109a of the Maastricht Treaty invalidates the appointment of anyone to be president of the European Central Bank who is not intending and hoping to serve an eight-year term? [...] My question is this: is not what I predicted 12 days ago exactly what has happened under *the ineffectual presidency of this British Prime Minister* [Tony Blair, Lab]?

(Hansard Debates, 5 May, 1998)

Birger Schlaug (mp): [...] Arbetstiden måste sänkas. 40-timmarsvecka är inte någon naturlig. Jag skulle vilja fråga Moderaterna, Socialdemokraterna, Folkpartiet och Centerpartiet: Vad menar ni med att vara sådana envisa betongfundamentalister? [...]

(Riksdagsprotokoll, 12 oktober 1996)

Birger Schlaug (GreenP): The number of working hours must be reduced. The 40 hour-week is not a natural choice. I would like to ask the Conservatives, the Social-Democrats, the Liberals and the Centrists: Why do you persist in being such *concrete fundamentalists*?

(Riksdag debates, 12 October, 1996)

Sir Peter Tapsell can get away with his insults targeted at Prime Minister Blair precisely because they are not directly conveyed in a statement, but only inferable from the questions in which they occur. By avoiding to actually say that the Prime Minister is disingenuous, the MP indirectly declines responsibility for uttering an insulting statement. Instead, he addresses an apparently regular, but not exactly innocent, question, whose underlying meaning can obviously

be understood as an insult. However, since he does not make any direct statement to that effect, Sir Peter Tapsell cannot be held accountable for proffering the insult.

In the Swedish example, Schlaug similarly avoids making a direct statement that would describe MPs of different political colours as "concrete fundamentalists" : In Swedish political jargon, the notion of 'concrete party' refers to a political party (often the Social Democratic party or the Conservatives 'Moderaterna') that does not pay particular attention to environmental issues. He is asking instead to be told why they are "such concrete fundamentalists", so that this attribution is treated as a currently acknowledged description. In institutional settings, such as courtrooms and parliaments, why-questions like these are frequently multi-layered and loaded questions, specifically intended to surreptitiously introduce ready-made assumptions and prejudicial ideas. When used for argumentative purposes by politicians with hidden agendas these types of questions tend to contain reasoning fallacies. In both (4) and (5), above, the insult initiators are committing the *fallacy of many questions*, whereby more questions than one are piled together in an apparently single question. In (4), the first question uttered by Sir Peter Tapsell is rhetorical in that it elicits not an answer, but an acknowledgement from the audience to the effect that the Prime Minister is being disingenuous. As for the second question, it is a multiple question since it falsely presupposes that the speaker and the audience have previously agreed that 'the presidency of the British Prime Minister is ineffectual: Starting from this assumption, the question focusses on one issue, namely the correctness of the speaker's prediction. A similar case is displayed by Schlaug's question in (5), where the speaker also starts from a false premise, namely that an agreement has been reached, according to which the members of all the four parties are considered to be "concrete fundamentalists".

5.2.3 *The attribution transfer strategy*

A mitigation strategy commonly used by MPs in adversarial encounters and especially in (un)parliamentary exchanges is what I propose to call the *attribution transfer* strategy. It consists in the speaker's making use of indirect attribution strategies in order to avoid taking direct responsibility for using derogatory qualifiers to characterise someone. Thus, instead of directly applying a negative qualifier to the targeted person him/herself, the insulting MP applies it (by transfer) instead to one of the targeted person's acts or statements. Consider the second question in (4) above, where it is one of Blair's institutional roles that is primarily called into question, namely his role as a President of the European Union. However, Sir Peter Tapsell is careful not to apply the derogatory quali-

fier "ineffectual" to Blair as a person, but to his EU-presidency, thus avoiding taking the blame for calling the Prime Minister names. Swedish MPs also resort to the strategy of attribution transfer, although to a lesser extent than their British counterparts. Consider example (6) below:

- (6) Cathrine Pålsson (kd): [. . .] Jag tycker att Margot Wallström [s] gör ett feigt konstaterande. (Riksdagsprotokoll, 3 oktober 1997)

Cathrine Pålsson (Christian-Dem): [...] I think that Margot Wallström [Sdem] is making *a cowardly statement*.

(Riksdag debates, 3 October, 1997)

Pålsson avoids calling Wallström herself a coward, although this is obviously her implicit message. Instead, she operates an attribution transfer of the negative qualifier "cowardly" from the position of subject complement that qualifies/labels the person herself ('Wallström is a *coward*') to the position of nominal attribute that qualifies one of that person's acts/sayings ("Wallström is making a *cowardly* statement"). Such indirect strategies of name-calling are powerful rhetorical devices, contributing to create in-group solidarity by alienating out-group members. Attribution transfer is also one of the strategies used by the Liberal Democrat MP Kennedy in (7) below:

- (7) Charles Kennedy (LibDem, Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Which does the Prime Minister [Tony Blair, Lab] consider the voters of London will view as more offensive: *the Conservatives' disgraced mayoral candidate or Labour's discredited selection system?*

(Hansard Debates, 24 November, 1999)

Kennedy is not calling the Conservatives and/or the Conservative Party "disgraced", just as he avoids calling Labour MPs and/or the New Labour Party "discredited" : Instead he transfers these two derogatory qualifiers from the position of subject complements to that of nominal attributes. Moreover, he makes use of one further strategy. The disjunction highlighted by Kennedy relies actually on a recurrent argumentative fallacy, namely the fallacy of *false alternative* or *false dilemma*, which occurs when the speaker fails (deliberately or not) to consider all the relevant alternatives. One of its common forms involves the polarisation of positions, reducing all possible alternatives to only two and discarding them as equally unacceptable (Ilie 1999). On closer investigation, it becomes apparent that the other political alternatives, such as smaller political parties, are deliberately overlooked. In this case, Kennedy has purposefully excluded the other British political parties that are competing for the

Londoners' votes, in order to implicitly assert the role of the Liberal Democrats as the only viable option.

The House of Commons, unlike the Swedish Riksdag, exhibits also instances of unmitigated negative attribution, as illustrated in Hague's intervention in (8) below:

- (8) William Hague (Con.): Is it not the truth that a Government who promised no tax increases at all and better public services all round have now produced higher taxes all round, accompanied by a crisis in the police, a crisis in teacher recruitment, a permanent crisis in the national health service, and a standstill on the railways and the roads? Nothing makes it clearer that *this Government is all spin and no delivery.* ' (Hansard Debates, 10 January, 2001)

When used without mitigation, direct and/or strong negative attributions are harmful in that they become exclusively derogatory accounts and blaming descriptions of political adversaries, bearing little relation to their actual policies and actions. Because they rely on and reinforce recognisable stereotypes, such attributions maintain and/or fuel inter-group conflict. At the same time, they have an entertaining function for the public at large, on the one hand, and a silencing function, on the other, in that their degree of rudeness cannot be easily matched by an equally powerful reply.

5.3 (Un)parliamentary dissociation between in-group identity and inter-group dissent

Group identification is based on perceptions of salient differences in the interpretation of socio-political events and phenomena. The stronger the perceived difference, the greater will be the tendency to form in-group and out-group identifications. Starting from the observation that individual and group identities are linked, Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that the more an individual's social and political identity is derived from group identity, the greater will be the motivation to define and denigrate an out-group. Parliaments in general are prototypical instances of identification and dissociation processes, which are being reproduced by in-group identity and inter-group dissent. Their concrete manifestations may, however, differ in terms of intensity and frequency of occurrence.

The emotional load of unparliamentary language reflects and at the same time strengthens the degree of inter-group conflict. Insulting language often consists of more or less stereotypical derogatory *attribution transfer strategies*,

as has been shown in 5.2.3, which are the cornerstone of developing and maintaining in-group and out-group differentiations. The nature and functions of ego-focused emotions differ considerably from other-focused emotions, depending on the view of self and of other(s). Special insulting strategies are often used to target simultaneously individual MPs and their respective parties. In the House of Commons it is not uncommon to come across *double or multiple insults*, viz. insults with a double or multiple target. One such instance is illustrated in (9) below:

- (9) William Hague (Con): [...] At this weekend's summit, all the major decisions about a single currency were fixed and fiddled, but can the Prime Minister tell us what happened behind the scenes that caused such anger among his fellow Heads of Government? How does he respond to the Italian Prime Minister, who said that he was "ill prepared"? or to the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, who, among others, protested that the Prime Minister had not even bothered to brief other leaders properly on the deal? [...] *Has he been taking lessons in diplomacy from the Foreign Secretary? Is this what the Prime Minister means by a new relationship in Europe?*
- The Prime Minister (Tony Blair, Lab): *With the greatest respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I think that the one group of people we are not entitled to take any lessons from about Europe are the Conservatives. [...]*
- (Hansard Debates, 5 May, 1998)

On uttering the scornful rhetorical question "Has he been taking lessons in diplomacy from the Foreign Secretary?"; the Opposition leader Hague is killing two birds with one stone. In other words, he is targeting simultaneously two MPs who are central figures of the ruling New Labour Party, namely Prime Minister Blair (to whom the question is directly addressed) and the Foreign Secretary (who is indirectly criticised). Hague intends thereby to weaken the authority of his political adversaries and to strengthen the position of his own party. However, while Hague's insult is personally addressed to the Prime Minister and is indirectly attacking the New Labour Party, Prime Minister Blair's counter-insult (see 6.2) is uttered on behalf of his own party and is explicitly targeted at the Conservative Party as a whole: "I think that the one group of people we are not entitled to take any lessons from about Europe are the Conservatives": He thus contributes to redirect the audience's attention from the one-to-one dispute to the larger and decisive confrontation between the two political parties.

Comparable examples of double insults may also be found in the Swedish Parliament, although to a lesser extent:

- (10) Lars Leijonborg (fp): Det har ett högt pris för Sverige att stå utanför EMU, [...] ett pris i form att det svenska ordförandeskapet år 2001 kan bli ett ännu större fiasko än statsministerns utlandsresor därför att utan förskapet, som Pierre Schori påpekar i en artikel i dag, marginaliserar oss inom EU. (Riksdagsprotokoll, 30 november 1999)

Lars Leijonborg (Lib): Sweden will have to pay a high price for choosing not to join the EMU, [...], a price in that *the Swedish chairmanship of the EU in 2001 can be an even greater fiasco than the Prime Minister's trips abroad*, because, as Pierre Schori [Sdem] argues in an article today, it will marginalise us within the EU. (Riksdag debates, 30 November, 1999)

Leijonborg (Liberal Party) is one of the Opposition party leaders who is actively supporting Sweden's joining the EMU. The insult targets Göran Persson in his double role as Sweden's Prime Minister and as Chairman of the EU. Leijonborg is using this intervention to undermine Persson's credibility by means of a double insult, namely by claiming that the latter's future role as Chairman of the EU is going to be a failure comparable to earlier unsuccessful trips abroad (the parallel alludes particularly to the Prime Minister's controversial visit to South Africa).

In his multiple insults in (11) below, Prime Minister Blair focusses first on facts, namely on what he calls Hague's misjudgements in order to provide tangible evidence for the fact that Hague is playing very poorly the role of Party Leader.

- (11) The Prime Minister (Tony Blair): It is not *the hopeless misjudgements of the Leader of the Opposition* [William Hague] over the Conservative party that should worry people; it *is his misjudgement over Bank of England in dependence* [...]. *As Leader of the Opposition he may be a joke, but as Prime Minister he would be a disaster.*

William Hague (Lab): At least my jokes are read out; *the Prime Minister's jokes are all in the Cabinet.* (Hansard Debates, 24 November, 1999)

Blair's derogatory phrase "the *hopeless* misjudgements of the Leader of the Opposition" can be seen as the result of an attribution transfer strategy operated in a possibly underlying sentence "The Leader of the Opposition is *hopeless*", where the subject complement "hopeless" may have undergone an attribution transfer to the position of nominal attribute in the actual sentence in (11). Blair is further reinforcing his insults when he attacks Hague's double political profile by establishing an ironical dichotomy between Hague's poor role as Leader of the Opposition, on the one hand, and his presumptive role as

Prime Minister, on the other. This is meant to provide further justification for Blair to exclude the possibility of Hague's becoming Prime Minister. Hague's counter-insult appears less powerful, also because he is operating a shift in discourse levels, from the confrontational to the reproachful and moralising tone, by commenting metadiscursively on Blair's intervention.

Even when they engage in unparliamentary exchanges, Swedish MPs are focussing more emphatically than their British counterparts on major ideological issues, in an attempt to reinforce traditional party-political values and in-group identity, as well as to highlight differences across party lines, as illustrated in (12) below:

- (12). Birger Schlaug (mp): Hans Andersson [v] sade att om man står på vår sida i dag så är man nästan en reaktionär kapitalist. En grundläggande kurs i ekonomisk historia vore kanske inte helt fel i det här fallet. [...] Anders Karlsson [v] målar ut att miljöpartister är kapitalets lakejer. Det är i och för sig kul att höra det, men jag är lite ironisk när jag säger att det känns roligt. [...] Jag tycker faktiskt att ni har fastnat i lite gammal rödvinsreorik, om jag skall vara ärlig. Jag tror inte att ni kan skilja på småföretag och ABB.

Hans Andersson (v): [...] Birger Schlaug talar mot bättre vetande. Detta tal om småföretagshat och sådant är fullständigt fel.

(Riksdagsprotokoll, 17 mars 1998, anf. 180)

Birger Schlaug (GreenP): *Hans Andersson [left] said that only a reactionary capitalist can be on our side. A basic course in economic history is what he needs. [...] Anders Karlsson [left] describes the environmentalists as footmen of the capital. It is actually funny to hear that, but I am being a little ironical when I say that it feels funny. [...]* To tell you the truth, I actually think that you got stuck with red wine rhetoric. I believe that you cannot tell the difference between a small company and ABB.

Hans Andersson (Left): *Birger Schlaug does not know what he is talking about.* This nagging about hostility against small companies is completely wrong.

(Riksdag debates, 17 March, 1998)

The exchange of insults between Schlaug and Andersson provides evidence for the fact that stereotypical thinking still controls inter-party controversies. The two Swedish MPs insult each other by specifically attacking each other's ideologies that allegedly underlie the policies of their respective political parties. Whereas environmentalists (members of the Green Party) like Schlaug are sometimes described by political adversaries as "reactionary capitalists",

Left Party MPs are sometimes blamed for still cherishing the long outdated (Communist) 'red wine rhetoric' and for lagging behind in the current debate concerning small and big companies. It is significant for this kind of ideology-oriented controversy that both Schlaug and Andersson are accusing each other of insufficient knowledge and understanding of the issues under consideration. Schlaug sums up his accusation of Andersson: "I believe that you cannot tell the difference between a small company and ABB" (focusing on the latter's lack of discriminating spirit), whereas Andersson's retort reads: "Birger Schlaug does not know what he is talking about" (focusing on the latter's ignorance).

6. Responses to insults by English MPs and Swedish MPs

The use of insulting language is extremely challenging for the target of the insult, and this explains why it triggers strong emotional reactions, primarily from the addressee(s), but also from other discussants or members of the audience. There is an anecdotal parallel between Arturo Toscanini and Herbert von Karajan which illustrates the way in which cultural and situational variations occur and are reflected in the personal and institutional features of both the insult initiators' behaviour and the insulted audience's reactions. The musicians in the pit of La Scala are said to have thoroughly enjoyed Toscanini's abusive remarks, while the musicians in the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra deeply resented the very similar sarcasm of Karajan.

It is the uptake of insults, rather than the intrinsic value of insulting utterances themselves that often determines the insulting force of a statement, and, more importantly, the magnitude of the perceived insult, namely whether an insult is meant and received, respectively, as a rather playful or as a more serious move. Sometimes it is difficult to draw a line between the two, since individuals may vary considerably as to the degree to which they feel offended by emotionally loaded language. Like insulting MPs, targeted MPs can and do react to utterances, often on several discursive levels (institutional, interpersonal, ideological, etc.) at the same time. Institutional conventions and rhetorical constraints appear in the form of a necessary choice between opting, for example, for the playful or non-literal frame of the insult, or breaking that frame in order to respond seriously to the insult.

The neutral and rather unemotional rhetorical style traditionally used in the Swedish Parliament was long considered the only legitimate one. However, increasing international contacts at personal and official levels, the newly emerging European cooperation, as well as the new 'rhetorical situations'

(Bitzer 1968) have gradually affected the nature and form of Swedish parliamentary discourse. This is particularly noticeable in the MPs' increased involvement in the use of and reactions to unparliamentary language. Three main aspects concerning responses to insults are discussed below, namely addressee-responses vs. other-responses to insults in 6.1, ironising vs. moralizing responses in 6.2 and responses to insults focused on ideological notions like 'democracy' vs. responses to insults focused on mental capacities like 'intelligence' in 6.3.

6.1 Addressee-responses vs. other-responses to insults

As has already been mentioned, important clues about the intention and the effect of insults are provided by responses to insults. These responses may be provided by the insult targets themselves as *addressee-responses*, or by other participating MPs as *other-responses*. Two instances of responses are provided in (13), the former being an other-response, while the latter an addressee-response.

- (13) Birgit Friggebo (fp): [. . .] Kenneth Kvist [v] sade att det tog 40 år för EU att upptäcka medborgarna. Det tycker jag faktiskt är en skymf emot fäderna till Gemenskapen och sedermera EU. Hela syftet var att undanröja risken för att medborgarna än en gång skulle drabbas av krigets fasor i Europa.

Kenneth Kvist (v): Herr talman! Jag tror att det är en felsyn att det skulle vara EU:s huvudsakliga syfte att vara en sorts fredsprojekt, det är framför allt ett ekonomiskt projekt, ett systemprojekt, ett projekt för att stärka storföretagen och försvaga de fackliga organisationernas möjligheter att åstadkomma vissa förändringar.[...]

Birgit Friggebo: Herr talman! Jag tror att Kenneth Kvist nu ägnar sig åt att skriva om historien. [...] (Riksdagsprotokoll, 28 mars 1997)

Birgit Friggebo (Lib): Kenneth Kvist [Left] said that it took the EU 40 years to discover its citizens. I think that *this is actually an insult to the founding fathers of the Union, viz. EU*. Their major goal was to diminish the risk for the citizens of being affected again by the horrors of war in Europe.

Kenneth Kvist (Left): Mister Speaker! I think that it is wrong to say that the EU's major task is a sort of peace project, it is primarily an economic project, a systemic project, a project meant to strengthen big companies and to weaken the possibilities of trade union organisations to achieve certain changes. [. . .]

Birgit Friggebo: Mister Speaker! *I think that Kenneth Kvist is now committed to rewriting history.* [. ..] (Riksdag debates, 28 March, 1997)

Friggebo's first response concerns what she perceives as Kvist's insult targeted at the founding fathers of the EU. When admonishing Kvist, she is reacting in her capacity as one of the promoters of the EU. Her response also contains counter-arguments to Kvist's statement. Since this responsive strategy does not seem to work, she adopts a new strategy in her second intervention, namely she provides an addressee-response in which she implicitly accuses Kvist of giving a biased reinterpretation of historical facts. The responsive strategies illustrated in example (13) above are more common in Swedish than in English parliamentary debates. Their rhetorical force consists in resorting not so much to hyperboles, but to *litotes*, i.e. understatements that signal an underlying message. Because the message is conveyed in plain terms, more is understood than is said in litotes.

Claiming to feel insulted or to have detected an insult addressed at a third party is a fairly common rhetorical strategy in both parliaments, because it enables the speaker to accuse and even insult in his/her turn the alleged insult initiator. Consider the following example:

(14) Mr. Lilley (Con): On a point of information, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *Is it not customary for someone who makes a false accusation to apologise, rather than, after recognising that the person accused is not guilty, letting it be a matter for further derogation?*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is purely a matter for debate.

Mr. Darling (Lab): A former Minister complains that he has been falsely accused of being a Minister. I can understand why he feels guilty about that. *If he thinks that it is an insult to say that he was a junior Social Security Minister; of course I am sorry for insulting him. I did not realise that it was insulting to say that someone was a member of a Government.*

Mr. Tim Boswell (Con): My right hon. Friend was a junior Minister in the Treasury at that time.

Mr. Darling: He cannot deny that he was a member of the Government when these problems arose, or is that an insult, too? *Is it insulting to say that someone was a member of the Conservative Government? It may be; I do not know.* (Hansard Debates, 9 July, 1997)

In order to restore his institutional image, Conservative MP Lilley takes up the issue of insults based on false accusations in relation to what he describes as Labour MP Darling's offensive statement. He is supported by his fellow Conservative MP Boswell, who argues for the necessity of making a correc-

tion concerning the former junior minister's actual ministerial department (the Treasury and not Social Security). It is obvious that Darling does not admit to having insulted the Conservative MP and his is only a circumstantial apology: "If he thinks that it is an insult [. . .] of course I am sorry for insulting him". The actual core of the dispute concerns the focus of the insult: Lilley considers that he cannot be blamed for issues pertaining to Social Security issues since he was a junior minister in the Treasury, whereas Darling considers that he should take the blame anyway, as a member of the Conservative Government.

The following example displays an instance of a response to what is perceived as a collectively felt insult.

- (15) Mr. Fabricant (Con): [...] I remember the Deputy Prime Minister, when still in opposition, discussing that in the House of Commons just a few months ago. When I intervened on him to ask about the effects of the national minimum wage on small businesses, he said, "Well, it works in America, doesn't it?" It works in America because the national minimum wage there is around £2 an hour. *Is that to be the national minimum wage in the United Kingdom? If it is, many trade unions will regard it as an insult. If it is not- if the figure is.E4 or £4.50 an hour- it will be an insult to people in work.* (Hansard Debates, 15 May, 1997)

While in example (14) above the insult initiator is criticized by both the insult target and by a fellow MP, in (15) Conservative MP Fabricant chooses a more generally valid strategy when he reacts to an alleged insulting statement by the Labour Deputy Prime Minister. He intends thereby to be perceived as the champion of fair wages for all the "people in work".

6.2 Ironising vs. moralising responses

Responses to insults that are insults themselves can be regarded as *counter-insults* (see examples in 5.3). They are meant to reciprocate the insult, which thus bounces back at the insult initiator. Insults and counter-insults are most common occurrences in British parliamentary debates. Consider example (16) where Hague and Blair try to outsmart each other in the use of hyperbolically formulated one-liners:

- (16) Mr. William Hague (Con): Is this not the real verdict on this Government, without an inquiry? *A Government of spin and dishonesty-guilty. A culture of cronyism and favours - guilty. A Prime Minister who promised a new type of politics and has once again failed to deliver-guilty.*
The Prime Minister (Blair, Lab): Shall I tell the House what the Conserva-

tive party is really angry about? *Last week, my official spokesman compared Conservative economic policy to that of Mickey Mouse. I want to make it clear that he has been reprimanded strongly for that. We are a fan of Mickey Mouse. It was wrong to compare Conservative economic policy to that of Mickey Mouse.* (Hansard Debates, 31 January, 2001, Col. 303)

Actually, the ironical tone used by the two political adversaries on exchanging rude comments about each other confirms one of Schopenhauer's observations that rudeness defeats all arguments. Indeed what else can silence 'an adversary more surely than an insult? And who can argue with an adversary who keeps behaving rudely? In fact, neither Blair, nor Hague can be easily silenced. Each of them answers back, but not with water-tight arguments, which would be out of place during such unparliamentary encounters. This particular exchange consists exclusively in insulting and counter-insulting each other. The default adjacency pair is made up of two successive face threatening acts. Hilariously far-fetched and ironically meant analogies, like Blair's-parallel between the Conservatives' economic policy and that of Mickey Mouse, have a hyper-rhetorical dimension intended to emphasise the basic ideological gap between the two parties.

As a result of growing internationalisation of the political debate and intensified political consultations with EU-countries, the manifestations of the Swedish political debate have been lately undergoing a number of changes: discussions of controversial issues are becoming more frequent, while personal opinions, as well as interpersonal confrontations, are starting to play an increasingly important role. Nowadays even the previously excluded *delectare* rhetorical function is not entirely absent from Swedish parliamentary insults, as illustrated in (17) below:

- (17) Jan Bergqvist (s): [...] I sitt sätt att argumentera påminner Anne Wibble [fp] en hel del om den amerikanske generalen i Koreakriget som tvingades till en snöplig reträtt, men drog sig tillbaka med parollen: Nu anfaller vi åt andra hållet. [...] (Riksdagsprotokoll, 12 oktober 1996)

Jan Bergqvist (SocDem): [...] By her way of arguing, *Anne Wibble [Lib] reminds us of the American general in the Korean war who was forced into a deplorable retreat, but withdrew with the slogan 'We shall now attack in the opposite direction'.* [...] (Riksdag debates, 12 October, 1996)

Ironically intended rhetorical parallels like the one used by Bergqvist in (17) may nowadays occur in the Swedish Riksdag, although not as frequently as in

the House of Commons. What is nevertheless more typical of unparliamentary exchanges in the Swedish Riksdag is the admonishing tone adopted by MPs who attack political adversaries when claiming to have detected insulting expressions or statements in their interventions. The reaction to what presumptive addressees perceive and interpret as insults takes the form of moralising responses, which are often metadiscursively expressed, as in (18) below:

- (18) Birgit Friggebo (fp): Fru talman! Den sista delen av anförandet tycker jag faktiskt är en liten oförskämd insinuation från Per Rosengrens sida. [...]
(Riksdagsprotokoll, 3 juni 1997)

Birgit Friggebo (Lib): Mr. Speaker! *I think I can detect a somewhat insulting insinuation* in the last part of Per Rosengrens intervention. [...]
(Riksdag debates, 3 June, 1997)

An admonishing remark such as Friggebo's is best suited as a moralising stance, which is supposed to be deliberate and controlled, as if it were meant to follow the biblical saying "A fool is quick-tempered; a wise man stays cool when insulted" (Proverbs 12:16, TLB). Starting from the basic democratic principle of egalitarianism, Swedish debaters are expected to refrain from strong personal attacks and direct confrontation, as well as to avoid showing off and ridiculing, thus abstaining from an exaggerated use of ambiguities and innuendos. This may explain why occasional ironical statements are normally responded to in a moralising tone.

A Swedish debater's virtue consists in sticking to facts and in putting forward well-balanced standpoints since Swedish debating style does not encourage extreme polarisation of opinions. However, even if the frequency of moralising responses to insults is higher by far in the Swedish debates as compared to the English ones, there is, nevertheless, a gender-based commonly shared feature; moralising responses tend to be provided to a larger extent by female, rather than by male, MPs.

- (19) Ms. Glenda Jackson (Minister for Transport in London, Lab): [...] The right hon. Gentleman [Mr. Ottaway, Con] seemed to suffer from a desperate lack of argument and conviction. Again, the Labour Party was strongly represented in the bulk of his speech, which was devoted to re-quoting what my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) said on Second Reading. The right hon. Gentleman was not alone in dubbing my right hon. and hon. Friends "lobby fodder" : *It was an insult leveled at my hon. Friends by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway)* as well. [Interruption] I am delighted to hear the right hon. Member for Sut-

ton Coldfield say, "Shame" : *Indeed it is shameful* that the trust placed in my hon. Friends by the electorate in London should be so described. In truth, in describing my hon. Friends as lobby fodder, *the right hon. Gentleman offers an insult not to them, but rather to the people of London* who exercise their franchise in every election with both information and conviction. (Hansard Debates, 26 November, 1997)

Paradoxically, while these moralising replies are supposed to refute extreme manifestations of sophisticated rhetorical skills, they display in fact the speakers' patronising attitude in that they show that they do not lower themselves to the discarded discussion style of their interlocutors.

Metadiscursive devices are extensively used by British MPs in connection with insults (Ilie 2000, 2003x), but not necessarily for the same purposes as those of their Swedish counterparts. More often than not, their comments introduced in parallel with their ongoing discourse are deliberately meant to be perceived as insults too, as illustrated in (20):

- (20) The Prime Minister (Tony Blair, Lab): [...] The position of the official Opposition nowadays – *if there is such a notion* – is that the pound should be lower, which is an odd position for the Conservative party to argue. (Hansard Debates, 5 May, 1998)

Blair's metadiscursive statement, *if there is such a notion*, has the function of simultaneously questioning the existence and/or validity of the very political grouping that he is referring to, viz. "the official Opposition". As for responses to insults, British MPs normally exhibit an ironising, rather than moralising, attitude, in that their statements are primarily intended to fulfil an entertaining function, namely the rhetorical function of *delectare*. It is a *hyperbole*-based rhetoric, i.e. based on deliberate effect-seeking exaggeration, which is expected by the British parliamentary audience, as well as by the public at large in Great Britain.

Somehow comparable, although relatively fewer, examples of metadiscursive ironising devices can be found in Swedish parliamentary debates as well. Consider (21) below, where the Conservative MP's metadiscursive statement is meant to call into question, and even cancel, a successful attempt of the Social-democratic ruling party to introduce a new tax:

- (21) Gunnar Hökmark (m): [...] Tobinskatten är en tull på valutatransaktioner. Den kommer att göra det dyrare för låntagarna. Hur tänker ni, om ni skulle lyckas genomföra den, kompensera låntagare i fattiga länder [...]? (Riksdagsprotokoll, 30 november 2000, anf. 168)

Gunnar Hökmark (Con): The Tobin tax is a duty on currency transactions. It is going to be expensive for money borrowers. How do you envisage, *provided you succeed in introducing it*, compensating the money borrowers in poor countries? (Riksdag debates, 30 November, 2000)

Instances of mixed responses, i.e. ironising and moralising responses can sometimes occur in the British Parliament. In such mixed responses, ironising counter-insults may be followed by moralising responses, as illustrated in the following example:

- (22) Mr. Oppenheim: I thank the hon. Gentleman for having the courtesy to give way. *He is in the misquotation mood.* He claimed earlier that I made a statement on "Breakfast with Frost" : *It may have been a little too early for the right hon. Gentleman - he was probably bleary.* [...] *I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will have the good grace to apologise for his earlier misquotation.* [...] (Hansard Debates, 11 December, 1996)

Reacting to what he perceives to be an insult, Oppenheim adopts first an ironical tone and then a moralising tone, when he voices a serious request for an apology. In general, when responding to perceived insults, British MPs tend to compete rhetorically in terms of appeals to pathos, whereas Swedish MPs are more prone to assert their respective political image by making particular use of appeals to ethos.

The insults proffered by Swedish MPs are also generally conveyed more indirectly than in the House of Commons. In fact, while we may refer to 'British' insults as instances of unparliamentary language, many 'Swedish' insults could be more adequately described as instances of sharp personal admonition and vehement criticism, as can be seen in example (23) below.

- (23) Leif Pagrotsky (s): Fru talman! Jag är inte å jour med debattreglerna för frågestunden. Hur många gånger får man komma tillbaka om man har gjort bort sig i en fråga, och gå ut och ropa på hjälp från någon annan kollega som har taletid kvar?

Jag ska upprepa de siffror som Eva Goës kanske inte hörde. Hon kanske inte hade hunnit hit då de nämndes. [...] Eva Goës hade också en uppgift om årets siffror. Jag har inte sett någon siffra ännu, men jag tvivlar på att den siffra hon nämnde har med verkligheten att göra.

Eva Goës (mp): Fru talman! Jag har dessutom anmält mig i förväg. Jag är inte här för att vara oförskämd, och jag tycker inte att Leif Pagrotsky behöver vara det heller. [...]

Leif Pagrotsky: Fru talman! Jag bara konstaterar att det inte finns några

siffror för i år ännu. Jag har inte sett några, och det vore intressant att höra vad Eva Goes har för källor. Jag tvivlar på att det stämmer.

(Riksdagsprotokoll, 29 maj 1997)

Leif Pagrotsky (Sdem): Mrs. Speaker! I am not familiar with Question Time debating rules. *How many times is one allowed to come back, if one has failed in one issue, and go out to ask for help from a colleague who still has speaking time left? I am going to repeat the figures that Eva Goës may not have heard. Perhaps she had not managed to get here when they were mentioned. [. . .]* Eva Goës also referred to this year's figures. I personally have not seen any figure yet, but *I doubt that the figure she indicated has anything to do with reality.*

Eva Goës (GreenP): Mrs. Speaker! My intervention was actually notified in advance. *I am not here to insult anybody, and I think that Leif Pagrotsky shouldn't do it either. [...]*

Leif Pagrotsky: Mrs. Speaker! I was only pointing out that *there are no figures for this year yet. I haven't seen any,, and it would be interesting to hear which are Eva Goes's sources. I doubt that they are correct.*

(Riksdag debates, 29 May, 1997)

The issues highlighted in the excerpt above and in several other instances in my corpus indicate that the focus of Swedish insults is often related to verifiable facts, such as lack of punctuality, breach of parliamentary rules, lack or inaccuracy of information. Unlike British unparliamentary language, which resorts to overstatements and hyperboles, the insults addressed by Swedish MPs are mitigated and operate more like litotes. In his first intervention, Pagrotsky performs several acts that Goes perceives as insulting. For example, he deliberately singles out what he regards as three shortcomings in Goes's parliamentary behaviour, namely breaking parliamentary rules (i.e. deceiving), being late (and thus missing part of the debate) and making up figures (i.e. lying). Three particular types of argumentative patterns underlie Pagrotsky's verbal attacks: an *ad hominem* argument, an *ad verecundiam* argument and an *ad ignorantiam* argument. In his first intervention in (23), the first insulting act takes the form of an *ad hominem* argument, which turns out to be fallacious when Goes provides evidence for the fact that his blaming her for breaking parliamentary regulations is unfounded. In his second and third insults during his first intervention, Pagrotsky makes use of the *ad ignorantiam* argument, which also turns out to be fallacious. An *ad ignorantiam* fallacy consists in the assumption that a proposition is true because it has not been proved false, or because the opposing proposition has not been proved true. It is an argument for or

against a proposition on the basis of a lack of evidence against or for it. If there were positive evidence for the conclusion, then we could find other reasons for accepting it, but a lack of evidence by itself is no evidence. By adopting a moralising tone, Goes indicates in her intervention that she is determined to refute what she perceives as Pagrotsky's unmotivated insults in order to stop him from continuing in the same vein. Unfortunately, her response does not deter him from repeating and reinforcing one of the insulting statements in his immediately following intervention.

While the *ad hominem* and the *ad ignorantiam* arguments are obviously fallacious in this case, the *ad verecundiam* argument displays a certain degree of validity. An *ad verecundiam* argument, or appeal to authority, is an argument that relies on the arguer's authority in the relevant field of expertise under consideration. Pagrotsky, as Government Minister, is expected not only to have first-hand knowledge about, but also to be directly involved in the release of overall figures concerning the country's economy. Consequently, he should theoretically have the authority and the required evidence to call into question what appear to be preliminary and/or officially unendorsed figures.

6.3 Responses to insults focused on ideological notions like "democracy" vs. responses to insults focused on mental capacities like "intelligence"

The targets of both British and Swedish parliamentary insults cover generally a wide range of aspects, from stigmatising descriptions of individual MPs' character, temperament and/or acts, to incriminating representations of adversarial party-political groups, as well as of their ideology. As expected in a political setting, *democracy* is one of the frequently invoked ideals in responses to ideology-related-insults.

Confrontations, when unavoidable, have long been regarded in Swedish political debates as basically ideological and institutional, rather than person-focussed. This may account for the fact that insults perceived as such by MPs are more often than not associated with ideological and collective concepts such as 'democracy' and 'people', as illustrated in (24) and (25) below:

- (24) Birger Schlaug (mp): Ett ytterligare exempel på en sovjetiserad modell som EU har tagit efter är jordbrukspolitiken. [...] EU:s regelverk och EU:s lagstiftning hämmar tyvärr utvecklingen på liknande sätt som i Sovjet, därför att enskilda länder inte har rätten att gå före. Jag tycker att det är skamligt att vi, även om vi är överens om att man skall genmärka genmanipulerade livsmedel, inte får göra det. Jag tycker att det är en skymf mot

demokratin.

Håkan Holmberg (fp): [. . .] Jag har tidigare, men också i kväll, hört Birger Schlaug dra paralleller mellan den Sovjetiska unionen, som är avskaffad, och den Europeiska unionen, som han tycker bör avskaffas. Jag tycker att denna parallell är ganska stötande. [...] Jag tycker att han i så fall skall be om ursäkt för detta sätt att lägga upp argumenteringen. Be ester, letter, ryssar och ukrainare om ursäkt, för det är dem som det handlar om! De har levt under den Sovjetiska unionen. De vill nu bli medlemmar i den Europeiska unionen. [...] Det kan verka demagogiskt att ta upp detta, men det här sägs så många gånger från Miljöpartiet. Jag tycker att det är ovärdigt för svensk politik att man på det här sättet för en debatt och jämför det som har drabbat människor bara några mil från oss med demokratiska länders frivilliga samarbete. (Applåder)

(Riksdagsprotokoll, 28 mars 1997)

Birger Schlaug (GreenP): One further example of a Soviet-based model that has been taken over by the EU are the agricultural policies. [...] EU rules and regulations, as well as EU legislation, do, unfortunately, prevent a normal development in the same way as under the former Soviet Union, in the sense that individual countries do not have the right to take one step ahead. I think it is outrageous that we may not label genetically manipulated food. *I think it is an insult to democracy.*

Hakan Holmberg (Lib): I have heard Birger Schlaug on several occasions draw parallels between the Soviet Union, which has been abolished, and the European Union, which he thinks should be abolished. *I find this parallel quite offensive. [...] I think he should apologise for this kind of argumentation. Please apologise to Estonians, Latvians, Russians and Ukrainians, because this concerns them!* They are the ones who lived under the Soviet Union. Now they want to become EU members. [...] It may sound somehow demagogical to take this up, but those arguments have been repeated so many times by the Green Party. *I think it is unworthy of Swedish politics to witness such a debate* in which the plight of our close neighbours is compared with the voluntary cooperation of democratic countries. (Applause)

(Riksdag debates, 28 March, 1997)

- (25) Marianne Samuelsson (mp): [. . .] Vad är det för demokrati, och vad är det för insyn för människor? Det är en skymf.

(Riksdagsprotokoll, 26 maj 1998)

Marianne Samuelsson (GreenP): [...] What kind of democracy and what kind of consideration for people are these? It is an insult.

(Riksdag debates, 26 May, 1998)

Two major tendencies are generally noticeable in Swedish MPs' responses to what they perceive as insults. One tendency is to adopt a pedagogical and advisory role with the intention to produce a moral impact, as in (24) above: "I find this parallel quite offensive. [. . .] I think he should apologise for this kind of argumentation": The second tendency is to reinforce traditionally cherished moral values, such as those illustrated in (24): "I think it is unworthy of Swedish politics to witness such a debate in which the plight of our close neighbours is compared with the voluntary cooperation of democratic countries", and (25), respectively: "What kind of democracy and what kind of consideration for people are these? It is an insult" : Both statements fulfil the rhetorical function of *docere*, reflecting thereby a default moralising attitude characteristic of Swedish MPs' responses to perceived insults. Occasionally, a display of the *movere* function may accompany the *docere* function, as in the emphasis on "consideration for people" in (25), or in the urge to apologise to the people in the Baltic countries in (24): "Please apologise to Estonians, Latvians, Russians and Ukrainians, because this concerns them!"

Unlike Swedish parliamentary insults, their British counterparts are more frequently focused on personality features, such as wit and intellectual capacity. British parliamentary insults are concerned to a greater extent both with individual and collective/group intelligence. Since the unwritten rules of British parliamentary debates encourage and praise quick, witty and humorous interventions, it is no wonder that a major focus of British MPs' insults is the insulted target's intelligence level, as illustrated in (26) below:

(26) Garnier (Con): [...] *We have heard nothing intelligent from the [Labour] Government that would produce a climate of innovation.*

(Hansard Debates, 24 November, 1999)

The notions of intelligence and wit as crucial mental capacities in British parliamentary rhetoric are so significant that even MPs' responses to both actual or alleged insults acquire more weight when they invoke either of them as focus of the alleged insult, as illustrated in (27) and (28) below:

(27) Wardell: [...] When the former East Dyfed health authority had the gall to issue a consultation paper the quality of which was so low as *to insult the intelligence of the local people*, the Committee visited Tumble and was appalled to find that the chief nursing officer of the health authority had

never visited the hospital, although he was in large part responsible for drawing up the consultation document. The quality of this month's Dyfed Powys health authority document shows that it has not learnt the lessons of the old East Dyfed health authority. It is prepared to issue consultation documents that again *insult the intelligence of local people*.

(Hansard Debates, 27 February, 1997, Column 497)

- (28) Davies (Con): The effect of the Government's so-called concession is to tell people: "If your income is below £22,000, or whatever it is, you will be able to rebuild, but if you have a bit more money you will not be able to rebuild." That is tantamount to saying, "If you are financially able to rebuild, we shall prevent you from doing so, and if you are financially unable to rebuild, you will be allowed to do so." *That is insulting to, the intelligence.*
- (Hansard Debates, 17 April, 1999, Column 305)

Examples such as the ones above indicate that another important feature that distinguishes British from Swedish parliamentary insults is their specific focus. For example, derogatory statements focussing on a political adversary's education standards, and implicitly IQ levels, are not too uncommon in the House of Commons, as illustrated in (29) below:

- (29) St. Aubyn (Con): [...] Therefore, in 98 per cent of the cases that will now *suffer* the higher rate of tax, a clear penalty will be imposed as a result of the individual involved having died, and possibly because it may have taken some time before the assets of that estate were distributed to another group of individuals who were also, by and large, subject only to the basic rate of tax.

Burnett (LDem): *Did the hon. Gentleman get a degree in mathematics? I cannot understand his preposterous extrapolation.*

St. Aubyn: I have to confess that I did not get a degree in mathematics.

[...] (House of Commons Standing Committee E,
Finance 2 Bill, 11 June, 1998)

In (29) above, Burnett makes use of a rhetorical question, followed by a statement which is apparently meant to give the reason for uttering the question, when he is in fact adding insult to injury. The message he wants his addressee and the audience to infer may read as follows: 'It is most unlikely that the hon. Gentleman has got a degree in mathematics because he cannot make himself understood : By using the attribution transfer strategy, Burnett qualifies the attributed 'extrapolation' with the strongly connoted modifier 'preposterous: The validity of his argument is obviously questionable, since a degree in

mathematics does not automatically guarantee an increased ability to give clear explanations of mathematically complex issues. However this move operates as an unparliamentary blow below the belt directed by the Liberal Democrat MP Burnett against the Conservative MP St. Aubyn. Like most insults, this move operates as an *ad hominem* argument. An *ad hominem* argument implies that the person rather than the person's argument is being attacked. Its various implications for political discourse have been extensively analysed by Kelley (1994 [1988]):

In its crudest form, the *ad hominem* fallacy involves nothing more than insults – calling one's opponent an idiot, slob, lowlife, airhead, fascist, pinko, nerd, fairy, bleeding heart, wimp, Neanderthal, and so on through the rich vocabulary of abuse our language offers. [...] In politics, *ad hominem* arguments are a common technique of propaganda and a common device of politicians who try to enlist support by attacking their enemies. (1994 [1988]:140)

Such explicitly offensive statements like Burnett's, which are directly targeted at the intellectual capacity or academic merits of other MPs, are rather uncommon in the Swedish Parliament, where explicit defamations of an MP's education or intelligence levels are either culturally, or socially, unacceptable.

7. Rhetorical functions of (un)parliamentary language

Insults, like metaphors, are highly sensitive to personal experience. Cognitively, they operate a temporary removal of the repeatedly used schemata for thinking and perception, whereby certain features are highlighted, while others are suppressed. The emotional force of insults outweighs their rational force, which is meant to exploit the fact that people are generally more easily affected and persuaded emotionally than rationally. Emotional force works faster and its impact is usually stronger than that of rational force. Moreover, most people are less prone to resist or oppose emotional force than rational force. Parliamentary insults are specifically mapping individual and subjective meaning upon institutionally shared meaning.

Rhetorically, offensive irony and humour in connection with insults are meant to disguise the speaker's underlying hostile and scornful attitude. At the same time, they reveal the speaker's and the respective in-group's moral and socio-political values, as well as the sources of tension and discontent in inter-group communication or in a given community at a particular moment in time.

Insults are basically logos-oriented because they are intended to focus attention on, or to distract attention from, a particular topic or act by extremely powerful verbalisation. Speakers use insults as attention-getters in order to capture the audience's interest and, hopefully, adherence to challenging views, or, as ways to drift away from the main issue, normally by denying responsibility. Apart from the logos orientation, insults also display a speaker's ethos and/or pathos.

Ethos-oriented insults are intended to enhance the speaker's trustworthiness, while challenging or undermining the trustworthiness of -the targeted interlocutor. The examination of unparliamentary language in the two parliaments indicates that insults may fulfil all or some of the following ethos-oriented functions:

- to discourage and disarm adversary MPs by exploiting/increasing their vulnerability and by challenging their institutional role and authority;
- to boost one's image and to score political and/or personal points (increase one's personal credibility and prestige) by silencing and embarrassing political opponents;
- to undermine and deteriorate the ethos of adversary MPs (character and personality, moral values and standards, guiding beliefs, principles, ideals/visions, actions).

Recent research carried out by Krogstad and Gomard (2001) provides evidence for the fact that one of the most salient cross-national differences that have been registered between Danish, Norwegian and Swedish political speakers concerns the presentation of *ethos* arguments. Their finding that Swedish politicians made more use of ethos arguments than their Danish and Norwegian colleagues is also confirmed by Bauhr and Esaiasson's (2001) results. The contrastive analysis of Swedish and British parliamentary debates, and especially of their unparliamentary strategies, seems to confirm once again the significant role played by the speaker's ethos in the Swedish Riksdag.

The pathos orientation of insults is intended to capture the audience's undivided attention in order to trigger their emotional reactions. The rhetorical analytical tools accounted for in Sections 5 and 6 above reveal a higher occurrence of stronger emotional load in British insulting strategies as compared to their Swedish counterparts. The unparliamentary pathos of British MPs exhibits elements of both showmanship and competitiveness, which are less salient in the Swedish parliamentary debates. The examination of unparliamentary language in the two parliaments indicates that insults may fulfil all or some of the following pathos-oriented functions:

- to strengthen one's own group cohesion and to restore the political balance in its favour;
- to entertain the audience, both fellow MPs and the public at large, normally by making political adversaries lose face;
- to directly affect the audience emotionally, by sublimating and/or projecting more or less general underlying anxieties, worries, discontent, of certain social or professional categories, lobbying groups, etc.

In Swedish parliamentary debates, certain latitude is given to the display of pathos, but to a much lesser extent than in other parliaments (there can be no comparison, for example, with the explosive pathos of MPs in the Israeli Knesset). Since there is considerably less confrontational polarisation in the Swedish Riksdag, as compared to the House of Commons, the competitive spirit of the debates does not reach the same high levels, while the inclination for showmanship is less motivated. Priority is given to facts in pro- or counter-argumentation and this may be the reason why expressing negative feelings about an issue is normally not countenanced as a valid argument in Swedish debates, as has been pointed out by Daun:

A debater who shows too much emotional engagement in an issue has in principle lost the debate on those grounds (which does not preclude the debater's also attracting a certain amount of sympathy). A Swedish politician must keep a cool head and calmly and collectedly weigh the facts. (1996:124)

The British and the Swedish MPs clearly appreciate and cultivate two generally different sets of rhetorical virtues and accomplishments (although they also display partly overlapping features). Parliamentary insults are no exception in this respect. The performance-orientation of British parliamentary and unparliamentary discourse is enhanced by a particular audience expectation, namely to see MPs call into question other MPs and thus engage in a real battle of wits. This is why it is reasonable to conclude that British unparliamentary language is marked particularly by *pathos-oriented logos*, whereas Swedish unparliamentary language is marked particularly by *ethos-oriented logos*.

8. Concluding remarks

Why are parliamentary insults so frequent and how do they succeed in having such an impact? Probably because they call into question MPs' very prerequisites for participating successfully in the debates. Some of these prerequi-

sites are different in the British and the Swedish Parliaments. In the House of Commons it is essential to outsmart political adversaries by giving quick and witty replies and by displaying a sense of humour. In the Swedish Riksdag it is essential to give evidence for personal reliability and credibility, as well as cool-headed professionalism.

The contrastive analysis of British and Swedish unparliamentary language structures was intended to provide evidence for the fact that the preference for certain types of rhetorical appeals is rooted in political traditions, such as higher or lower levels of competition and conflict tolerance, higher or lower political control of societal developments, tendency towards open or closed confrontation, and process or result-oriented consensus.

The basic assumption is that what is generally referred to as unparliamentary uses of language constitute instances of institutionally ritualised confrontational interaction. Parliamentary insults are deliberately offensive rhetorical acts performed in a competitive institutional setting. They are specifically mapping individual and subjective meaning upon institutionally shared meaning. The emotional force of insults outweighs their rational force, which is meant to exploit the fact that people are generally more easily affected and persuaded emotionally than rationally. Because they underlie culturally defined negative values and norms, insults are meant to reduce the targeted person, group or institution (and what they stand for) to stereotypically undesirable or detestable attributes. More than any other interactional strategies, insults are to a large extent based on fallacies. The study of unparliamentary language strategies provides important clues about moral and social standards, prejudices, taboos, as well as value judgements of different social and political groups, as well as individuals in a community. Cross-cultural studies are particularly enlightening in this respect, since the forms and functions of insults and their respective feedbacks vary in different cultures and institutional settings.

A number of institutional features shared by the parliamentary discourses in Britain and in Sweden, such as procedural rules, patterns of leadership, and decision-making routines, make it possible to undertake meaningful and context-sensitive comparisons of politically motivated strategies. However, at the same time, the actual manifestations of unparliamentary language in the two parliaments display a number of institution-specific and culture-specific differences. One of the claims made in this paper is that rhetorically constructed parliamentary insults are often used to minimise cognitive differences within one's own political group and to maximise cognitive differences between this group and adversarial groups. These types of insults can be directed both to individual MPs and to their respective political parties. MPs' reac-

tions to insults may take the form of counter-insults or responses to insults. Three main aspects of insults in the two parliaments have been examined in this paper, namely, manifestations of (un)parliamentary polarisation in 5.1, (un)parliamentary mitigation strategies in 5.2 and (un)parliamentary dissociation between in-group identity and inter-group dissent in 5.3.

British parliamentary debates exhibit a stronger *political polarisation*, whereby the adversarial relations between opposite political camps are constantly and intensively reinforced, while Swedish parliamentary debates exhibit a stronger *rhetorical polarisation*, whereby serious and reasoning talk is traditionally kept apart from playful and entertaining talk. These two types of polarisation are reflected in the distinctive rhetorical strategies used in the two parliaments. British insulting acts are particularly based on pathos-oriented logos, whereas Swedish insulting acts are particularly based on ethos-oriented logos.

In order to avoid being accused and institutionally sanctioned for using explicit unparliamentary language, MPs in both parliaments resort to a number of mitigation strategies. On examining the two parliamentary corpora, three recurrent mitigation strategies have been identified: (i) the juxtaposition of opposite notions, i.e. contempt vs. respect; (ii) the formulation of insults as questions rather than as statements, and (iii) the attribution transfer movement.

As far as the first mitigation strategy is concerned, rhetorical appeals to the notion of *respect* co-occur with the use of abusive words, normally conveying *contempt*, addressed to the interlocutor. The institutionalised tokens of respect and contempt may operate as complementary dimensions in parliamentary debates because insult initiators sometimes attempt to neutralise the harmful effect of the expressions of contempt by means of the concomitant use of verbal tokens of respect. This strategy enables the simultaneous performance of both self-face saving acts and other-face saving acts, helping to strike a balance between other-face threatening acts and other-face saving acts.

A second recurrent mitigation strategy of both British and Swedish MPs involves conveying negative evaluations of political adversaries in question form. When used for argumentative purposes by politicians with hidden agendas, these types of questions often contain reasoning fallacies, such as the fallacy of many questions, or the fallacy of false dilemma. When used without mitigation, direct and/or strong negative attributions are harmful in that they tend to become exclusively depreciative accounts and blaming descriptions of political adversaries, bearing little relation to their actual policies and actions.

A third mitigation strategy used by MPs is what I proposed to call *attribution transfer*. It consists in the speaker's use of indirect negative attribution in order to avoid taking direct responsibility for using derogatory qualifiers to

refer to other MPs. Thus, instead of applying a negative qualifier in relation to the targeted person, the insulting MP resorts to a transfer and applies instead the negative qualifier to one of the targeted person's acts or statements. For example, it is the MP's statement or action that is qualified as 'cowardly, and not the person him/herself, although the latter is clearly the actual intended target.

Parliaments in general are prototypical instances of identification and dissociation processes, which are reflected by in-group identity and inter-group dissent. Insulting language often consists of more or less stereotypical derogatory attribution transfer strategies, which are the cornerstone of developing and maintaining in-group and out-group identifications. Both the House of Commons and the Swedish Riksdag exhibit instances of *double or multiple insults*, viz. insults with a double or multiple target. MPs do not only defend themselves and offend their political adversaries, they also become champions of their respective party's ideology and policies. Unlike their British counterparts, Swedish MPs tend to focus their insults more on ideology-related, than on personality-related differences and incompatibilities.

Responses to insults that are insults themselves have been treated as *counter-insults*. Other types of responses to insults are often critical, reprimanding and/or ironical comments on the preceding insult(s). British parliamentary insults are more often followed by counter-insults, whereas Swedish parliamentary insults are more often followed by castigating and moralising responses to insults. However, both patterns are identifiable in both Parliaments. Three main aspects concerning responses to insults have been discussed, namely addressee-responses vs. other-responses to insults, ironising vs. moralizing responses and responses to insults focused on ideological notions like democracy vs. responses to insults focused on mental capacities like intelligence.

The moralising and admonishing attitude of Swedish MPs is a far cry from the ironising attitude of British MPs. However, even if the frequency of moralising responses to insults is higher in the Swedish debates as compared to the British ones, there is, nevertheless, a commonly shared feature, namely moralising responses tend to be provided in both cases especially by female, rather than by male MPs. Unlike British unparliamentary language, which resorts to overstatements and hyperboles, the insults addressed by Swedish MPs are mitigated and operate more like litotes. Confrontations, when unavoidable, have long been regarded in Swedish political debates as basically ideological and institutional, rather than person-focused. Unlike Swedish parliamentary insults, their British counterparts are more frequently focused on personality features, such as wit and intellectual capacity. In British political culture it is

accepted/acceptable to adopt a playful tone, to show rhetorical skills, to linguistically outsmart one's opponents. Ironical criticism is expected and even encouraged by traditionally established ritualistic duelling. In Sweden there is no equivalent to such a strongly rooted institutional tradition, although ironical replies do occur. The ironical bias occasionally exhibited in the Swedish Riksdag is due to the individual personality of the debaters, rather than to a well-established institutional ritual. Starting from the basic democratic principle of egalitarianism, Swedish debaters are expected to refrain from strong personal attacks and direct confrontation, as well as to avoid showing off and ridiculing, thus abstaining from the use of ambiguities and innuendos. That is why occasional ironical statements are often responded to in a moralising tone. Paradoxically, while they are supposed to refute manifestations of sophisticated rhetorical skills, these moralising replies normally display the speakers' patronising attitude in that they show that they do not lower themselves to the playful style of their interlocutors. Because Swedish debating style does not encourage extreme polarisation of opinions, a Swedish debater's virtue consists in showing a preference for facts and in advancing well-balanced standpoints.

Note

1. In the citations from the House of Commons that follow, the MP's name is followed by his or her political party. It should be remembered that the only information concerning MPs in the official record published in *Hansard* is the MPs' constituency, and, in the case of a Minister, his or her position in the government. In this paper, party allegiances are considered important and have thus been added.

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