

Identity co-construction in parliamentary discourse practices

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1. Introduction

In the emerging new virtual world of communication by mobile phones, email and internet, traditional political institutions like Parliament have managed to keep pace and retain their position as arenas of political dialogue. A number of recent reports have found that many citizens, particularly the young, want to be part of the political debate, not simply as passive observers but as responsible and committed citizens. While pursuing their role as principal arenas of national debate, parliaments and their institutional agents (Members of Parliament, parliamentary civil servants, parliamentary officials, staff of political parties) have started to open up a wide public dialogue that should provide better insight into parliamentary practices and activities (Baldwin 2005, Soininen and Turkka 2007).

Parliamentary proceedings are broadcast nowadays on radio and television, as well as reported in the press and in specialised publications. However, in spite of the growing visibility and importance of parliaments as democratic institutions, the linguistic mechanisms and rhetorical strategies of parliamentary discourse have not been in focus until lately. There is only one notable exception, though: the U.K. Parliament, which has traditionally drawn considerable attention (see, for example, Searing 1994, Norris and Lovenduski 1995, Limon and McKay 1997) and continues to be much explored.

Whereas other types of political discourse have systematically been analysed by political scientists, sociologists and even pragmatists, parliamentary discourse has generally been an under-researched area. Political scientists have been mainly concerned with the structure, changes and evolution of parliamentary institutions, focusing on the democratic nature of parliaments (Judge 1993, Copeland and Patterson 1997, Heidar and Koole 2000, Strøm et al. 2003), on parallels between different parliamentary systems (Liebert and Cotta 1990, Döring 1995, Olson and Norton 1996, Esaiasson and Heidar 2000), on transnational aspects of the European Parliament (Morgan and Tame 1996, Katz and Wessels 1999), and on the changes in parliamentary interaction brought about by live telecasts of parliamentary proceedings (Franks and Vandermark 1995, Axford and Huggins 2001).

Only a few recent studies have examined linguistic, discursive and/or rhetorical features of parliamentary discourse, such as parliamentary deliberative argumentation (Steiner et al. 2004), parliamentary question-response patterns (Chester and Bowering 1962, Franklin and Norton 1993) or gender aspects in parliamentary debating styles (McDougall 1998, Gomard and Krogstad 2001). However, apart from a few major publications (Wodak and Van Dijk 2000, Bayley 2004), no systematic investigations have been carried out so far about parliamentary practices in terms of the institutionalised uses of language, the language-shaped power relations between institutional agents, or the interplay between verbal interaction patterns and the participants' political agendas.

In order to reduce the gap in previous research, the present study focuses both on analytical issues and on institutional functions of parliamentary practices with a particular emphasis on co-

constructed parliamentary identities through parliamentary confrontation. In a period of increasing social paradigm shifts, globalisation phenomena and political polarisations, it has become necessary to examine underlying parliamentary institutional structures and relations, as well as argumentative deliberation strategies. As institutional bodies, parliaments are generally regarded as democratically constituted for political deliberation, problem solving and decision making. Parliamentary debates do not only reflect political, social and cultural configurations in an ever changing world, but they also contribute to shaping these configurations discursively and rhetorically.

At the same time, we need to keep in mind the fact that parliamentary interaction is not just about problem-solving, but also about constructing, challenging and co-constructing identities through language at micro and macro levels (Wodak and Van Dijk 2000; Harris 2001; Ilie 2001, 2006a). The aim of the present study is to explore the impact of parliamentary discursive and behavioural interaction on processes of local and global identity construction. The term *identity* is used here to refer to the ongoing process of parliamentarians' defining their positions and roles: the way a parliamentary speaker is placed and self-placed in the societal system and its political parties/groups, the way a parliamentary speaker conceives of and addresses his/her interlocutors, and the way in which a parliamentary speaker is perceived, addressed and referred to by his/her fellow parliamentarians, and by a multiple audience. The examples examined in this article have been selected from the Hansard transcripts of parliamentary proceedings in the U.K. Parliament.

2. Parliaments and parliamentarism

Parliamentary institutions play a key role in national political debates and parliamentary work at national and trans-national level has increased in importance, quality and impact on public affairs. A better knowledge of the interplay between parliamentary procedures, rhetorical traditions and political discourse styles will contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which MPs interact and impact on the work of ministers and civil servants. The current reactivation of rhetorical resources of parliamentarism offers new opportunities for promoting more in-depth scholarly analysis of parliamentary discourse mechanisms, behaviour strategies and dialogue patterns. Whereas research rooted in social and political sciences focuses primarily on the explanation and interpretation of facts and socio-political processes, linguistic and rhetorical research has benefited from the cross-fertilisation with other disciplines in order to explore the shifting and multi-layered institutional use of language, the communicative interaction of institutional agents, the influence of institutional language on the thinking processes of human agents, the interdependence between language-shaped facts and fact-based language conventionalisation and change.

Parliamentarism is often praised, relative to presidentialism, for its flexibility and responsiveness to the public. At the very core of the parliamentary politics lies the principle of speaking *pro et contra* on every issue under debate (Palonen 2007). No other institution can compete with parliament as to regularly offering a political arena for open deliberation and dissent, by discussing opposite points of view and co-constructing alternative proposals through interaction between political adversaries. Parliamentarism is criticised, though, for its tendency to sometimes lead to unstable governments, as in the German Weimar Republic, the French Fourth Republic, Italy, and Israel. Parliamentarism became increasingly prevalent in Europe in the years after World War I, partly imposed by the democratic victors, France and England, on the defeated countries and their successors, notably Germany's Weimar Republik and the new Austrian Republic.

The most geographically widespread parliamentary system is the *Westminster system*, named after the meeting place of Britain's parliament. It is a series of procedures for operating a legislature. The Westminster system is to be found in Britain and in many nations of the Commonwealth countries, such as Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Jamaica, New Zealand and India, and in non-Commonwealth states like Ireland.

Parliamentary systems vary according to the degree in which they have a formal written constitution and the extent to which that constitution describes the day to day working of the government. They also vary as to the number of parties within the system and the dynamics between the parties. Moreover, relations between the central government and local governments vary in parliamentary systems, they may be federal or unitary states. Parliamentary systems also vary in the voting freedom allowed to back bench legislators. Several nations that are considered parliamentary actually have presidents who are elected separately from the legislature and who have certain real powers. Examples of this type of governance are Ireland and Austria. In both of these nations, there is a tradition for the president to not use his powers. France's Fifth Republic has a separately elected president who has a large role in government, but who is constitutionally weaker than presidents in Ireland and Austria. France is considered to have a 'semi-presidential system' of government. Some scholars see France's government as half presidential, half parliamentary. Others see France's system as alternating between presidentialism and parliamentarism. France swung between different styles of presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary systems of government. The modern Fifth Republic system combines aspects of presidentialism and parliamentarianism.

3. Parliamentary discourse practices

The interaction that takes place in parliamentary discourse can be regarded as a form of cognitive and rhetorical process that reflects both institutional and non-institutional discursive conventions. Parliamentary dialogue is a convention-based form of institutionalised communication between institutional agents for the benefit of the citizens concerned. It complies with a number of basic rules and norms that apply to casual dialogue in general, but it also exhibits specific institutional features that are absent from casual dialogue. Using Charaudeau's (2005) notion of *communication contract*, parliamentary discourse can be regarded as a political discourse genre characterised by norm-regulated interaction which takes place among politically elected representatives for deliberation and decision-making purposes in specific political institutional settings (such as parliaments), and which displays recurrent institutionalised communication patterns.

Three primary goals of parliamentary proceedings can be identified: to negotiate political solutions, to reach agreements and to make decisions, the results of which affect citizens' real lives. More often than not, the discussions in Parliament regard divergent proposals and incompatible solutions, and the outcome of the debate reinforces the positions of the proponents of the winning alternatives. The confrontational dialogue fuels not only a rhetorical stance and a role awareness of the interactants, but also a sense of competitiveness and an agonistic behaviour that underlie the polarisation of political power (Ilie 2003b).

Parliamentary discourse is shaped by means of institution-based rhetorical devices through the participants' ongoing adjustment and re-adjustment to preceding speakers and discourses, to their own prior discourses, to the audience's cognitive and information background, as well as expectations. In parliamentary interaction the structuring and understanding of statements is conditioned by what interlocutors assume and assert about each other's mental representations of

the world, such as cognitive frames, political commitments, social visions and personal/professional life experience.

While engaging in a ritualised debate, the interlocutors use and take advantage of institutional practices to exploit each other's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Members of Parliament (henceforth MPs) can be seen to challenge, ridicule and question their opponents' ethos, which in its turn contributes to increasing the intensity of their own pathos (see Ilie 2001). At the same time, their interaction is constantly marked by a strong awareness of acting for and in front of several sets of audiences that may often have decisive roles to play in the development and outcome of the interaction. During the process of establishing and reinforcing a viable relationship with these audiences, MPs are actually involved in strengthening their own ethos, namely personal credibility and institutional reliability.

The rationale of parliamentary dialogue lies in the existence of opposite political camps and, implicitly, in the confrontation of different, and often opposed, standpoints and representations of reality. The ongoing confrontation is paralleled by ongoing attempts to destabilise and/or re-establish the power balance. Thus, parliamentary discourse can be duly regarded as "shaped by relations of power, and invested with ideologies" (Fairclough 1992: 8). It is important to note, however, that in all parliaments much of the parliamentary work takes place in committees. The plenary session is the most visible aspect of parliaments' work. Less visible, but of central importance is the work done in committees, since reports drafted by committees provide the basis on which Parliament takes nearly all of its decisions. The composition of each committee reflects the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups. Parliamentary committees have the task of ensuring that all items of parliamentary business are considered thoroughly before any decisions are taken. MPs devote a great deal of time to their responsibilities in parliamentary committees, which are normally not open to the public (while committee reports, statements and minutes are public documents). Negotiations and deliberations are carried out about the various issues in proposals and counter-proposals in order to reach agreements and compromise solutions. The outcomes of the committees' working groups are dependent to a great extent on the power struggle in which timing, coalition-building, persistence and thorough knowledge about the fields in question are important.

4. Approaches to parliamentary discourse practices

Two analytical perspectives can be effectively used to explore the characteristics, structure and functioning of parliamentary discourse practices: a *pragma-linguistic perspective* and a *rhetorical perspective*.

From a *pragma-linguistic perspective*, parliamentary discourse is a particular *genre of political discourse*. As such, it displays particular institutionalised discursive features and ritualised interaction strategies, while occasionally some context-specific rules and constraints are being purposefully circumvented. MPs' discursive interaction is constantly marked by their institutional role-based commitments, by the dialogically shaped institutional confrontation and by the awareness of acting in front of and for the benefit of a multi-layered audience. Parliamentary debates are meant to achieve a number of institutionally specific purposes, namely position-claiming, persuading, negotiating, agenda-setting, and opinion building, usually along ideological or party lines. A number of particular contextual factors need to be taken into account when examining the characteristics of political identities involved in parliamentary discourse: the public nature of the discourse, the mediated discourse processes (through the intermediary of the Speaker or President of Parliament), the assumption of positive versus negative bias towards the

Government, as well as the constraining procedural and communication rules governing the interaction itself. At the same time, the prerequisites of parliamentary collaborative deliberation help sustain the common identity of MPs through generally respectful and civilised discourse styles, in spite of occasional, but predictable, uses of unparliamentary language (Ilie 2001, 2004).

From a *rhetorical perspective*, parliamentary discourse belongs to the *deliberative genre* of political rhetoric, which is defined as an oratorical discourse targeting an audience that is asked to make a decision by evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of a future course of action. However, elements characteristic of the *forensic* and *epideictic genres* are also present. The forensic genre is recognizable in the rhetorical framing of disputes concerning past actions and interactions. Special types of forensic speeches are performed during parliamentary hearings. The epideictic genre can be identified particularly in MPs' (direct or indirect) rhetorically shaped self-presentations during key parliamentary speeches. The co-occurrence of features belonging to the three rhetorical genres confirms the Bakhtinian view that genres are heterogeneous. One of the major functions of MPs is to participate in problem-solving tasks regarding legal and political deliberation, as well as decision making processes. In their discourse MPs deliberately call into question the opponents' *ethos*, i.e. political credibility and moral profile, while enhancing their own *ethos* in an attempt to strike a balance between *logos*, i.e. logical reasoning, and *pathos*, i.e. emotion eliciting force. A particularly significant rhetorical feature of parliamentary interaction is the fact that speaking MPs address simultaneously multiple audiences (parliamentary plenum, parliamentary reporters and journalists, visitors, TV-viewers – national and international public). This calls for the use of context-bound and situation-adjusted communication strategies, including specific combinations of literal and figurative linguistic styles (Ilie 2010).

Whereas *pragmatics* is primarily concerned with the rules of language use and with the grammar-based regularities, treating irregularities as arbitrary exceptions or as mistakes, *rhetoric* is primarily concerned with the practice of language use through creative use of language and with fostering new/innovative patterns of thinking/communicating, including unpredictable or unplanned linguistic deviations and purposeful irregularities. Hence, for a more nuanced and effective analysis of interpersonal debating styles, shifting institutional roles and multi-layered identities of the participants in political and parliamentary interaction, it is useful to adopt a combined pragma-rhetorical approach. As was shown in Ilie (2003b), this approach makes it possible to better capture the interplay between micro-level and macro-level characteristic features of discursive and behavioural parliamentary confrontation.

By using a combined *pragma-rhetorical approach* (Ilie 2006b), a macro-level and a micro-level, as well as a multi-level, analysis of parliamentary discourse can be carried out which makes it possible to identify and examine the interplay between several significant features: the linguistic manifestations of the interlocutors' shifting roles (institutional and interpersonal) and relationships with their addressees and with third parties, of the interlocutors' cooperative and conflicting goals, the dialogic patterns of argumentation between political adversaries, the ongoing meaning negotiation between interactants, the interweaving between MPs' face-threatening and face-enhancing or face-saving speech acts, and the argumentative strategies displaying the interdependence between rational and emotional reasoning patterns.

5. Identity co-construction in parliamentary discourse

From a pragmatic perspective, a useful starting point for understanding the complexity of the notion of identity is the view advanced by Goffman (1959), according to whom identity co-construction is basically a face-to-face process whereby interactions are framed within social

institutions and enacted by various interlocutors. An identity's multiple facets are socially and culturally situated: they become visible and can be understood only in the process of interaction with others. As in other institutional forms of dialogue, MPs' self-presentations involve expectations about the addressee and the audience, as well as anticipation of their possible reactions. Hence it comes as no surprise that MPs are likely to present multiple aspects of their identities to various audiences. During parliamentary interactions, MPs can be seen to signal context-sensitive aspects of their identities that shape the perceptions of different categories or layers of audiences.

A special interdependence emerges between parliamentary speakers' intentionality and their interlocutors'/audiences' expectations and reactions, which in their turn influence speakers' reactions and thus contribute to continuous identity co-construction. Parliamentary interaction exhibits a permanent competition for power and leadership *roles*, but also for fame and popularity as concrete manifestations of MPs' public *image*. Although in principle the membership of a parliamentary assembly consists of MPs as institutional peers, it nevertheless displays a great deal of heterogeneity in terms of individual and institutional identity (including civil status, socio-cultural background, professional profile, personal preferences, etc.). For the analyst, the central issue is to identify an integrative theoretical framework able to handle the great diversity and complexity of ongoing parliamentary identity construction and co-construction. A helpful approach can be found in *positioning theory* (e.g. Davies and Harré 1990, Harré and van Langenhove 1991, Harré and van Langenhove 1999), which may be adjusted to become applicable to parliamentary discourse interaction: "Human beings are characterized both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity. It is one and the same person who is variously positioned in a conversation. Yet as variously positioned we may want to say that that very same person experiences and displays that aspect of self that is involved in the continuity of a multiplicity of selves" (Davies and Harré 1990: 46-47). Two main types of positionings are distinguished, namely *interactive positioning*, in which what one person says positions another, and *reflexive positioning*, in which one positions oneself (see Harré and van Langenhove 1999).

As has been pointed out in previous studies on parliamentary practices, the ritually and rhetorically reinforced parliamentary discourse practices emerge, develop and change in relation to the institutionally shaped and continuously changing parliamentary roles, party-political profiles and ideological positions of MPs. During parliamentary proceedings MPs interact with each other through mutual positioning, i.e. by positioning themselves and by being themselves positioned (by their interlocutors). This is why we can find a close relationship between the parliamentary interlocutors' reflexive and interactive positionings, on the one hand, and the socio-political impact of their speech acts at micro- and macro-level, on the other.

A rhetorical perspective can be added to the pragmatic perspective by applying Goffman's concept of *footing* in the process of understanding the dialogic process of identity co-construction. As he points out, we may gain or lose our footing in an encounter or a conversation, just as much as we may change footing: "A change of footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and to the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance" (Goffman 1981: 128). At the same time, it becomes apparent that a continuous change of balance is taking place while interlocutors are interactively changing footing in pursuit of their own goals. Another insightful observation made by Goffman concerns the speaker's performing three speaking roles, that of *animator*, the person who speaks; that of *author*, the person who is responsible for the text/what is said; and that of *principal*, the person "whose position [i.e. where the speaker stands] is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say" (Goffman 1981: 144).

As we all know from experience, in casual conversations among friends, the three roles – animator, author and principal – tend to be one and the same person. In the case of MPs, parliamentary identity management involves precisely the discursive ability and the rhetorical skills necessary for upholding a balance among Goffman's three speaking roles. In most cases it is an obvious and widely recognised requirement that a speaking MP should ideally combine the role of animator (intrinsically social and dialogic, in terms of personal charisma and persuasive power) with the role of author (basically conceptual, in terms of message coherence and argumentation force) and the role of principal (primarily symbolic and representative, in terms of personal commitment and party-political authority). Whenever the third role does not coincide with the previous two, it usually stands for a hierarchically superordinate person, such as a party leader, head of Government, etc.

On examining the dynamics and functioning of parliamentary interaction, the following three main aspects become salient and have a significant bearing on the investigation of parliamentary proceedings:

- *Parliamentary confrontation* of ideas/principles/beliefs takes the form of critical questioning, criticism and accusation of political adversaries, while the officially recognised parliamentary goals are to negotiate political solutions, to reach agreements and to make decisions.
- *Parliamentary identities* are co-constructed by MPs complying with institutionally established communication constraints, while they resort to particular linguistic choices, discourse strategies and emotional/rational appeals to circumvent the institutional constraints.
- *Parliamentary positionings* on specific issues are normally conveyed by means of institutionally codified procedures (voting, etc.) and actions (motion submissions, etc.), while in plenary sittings MPs position themselves linguistically at all discursive levels, such as metadiscourse, agentivity, transitivity, shift of deictic pronouns, inclusive vs. exclusive use of pronouns, relations of conditionality and concession.

As far as parliamentary confrontation is concerned, MPs are taking turns at enacting two basic discursive parliamentary roles, i.e. the role of *speaker* and the role of *listener*. Political adversaries can be seen to exchange criticisms and counter-criticisms, as well as accusations and counter-accusations. The interplay between enactments of MPs' identities and positionings displays recurrent changes of footing that are accompanied by challenges to and co-construction of MPs' roles and identities. Irrespective of the roles or identities enacted as participants in parliamentary proceedings, MPs are well aware of their performing in front of and for the benefit of a multiple audience.

6. Parliamentary addressees and parliamentary audiences

In all parliaments MPs engage in parliamentary interaction as speakers, on the one hand, and as listeners or audience members, on the other. MPs are involved in an institutional *co-performance* which is meant to both address and involve (sometimes even *co-act* with) an audience of fellow MPs as active participants, expected to contribute explicit forms of *audience-feedback*, e.g. questions, responses, disruptive interventions. What is important for MPs is to consistently promote a political line which meets the general wishes of voters (as expressed at general

elections), to support and reinforce the issues on the political agenda, as well as to take effective initiatives and concrete measures.

The various categories of directly or indirectly targeted addressees and audience members are represented schematically in Fig.1 below:

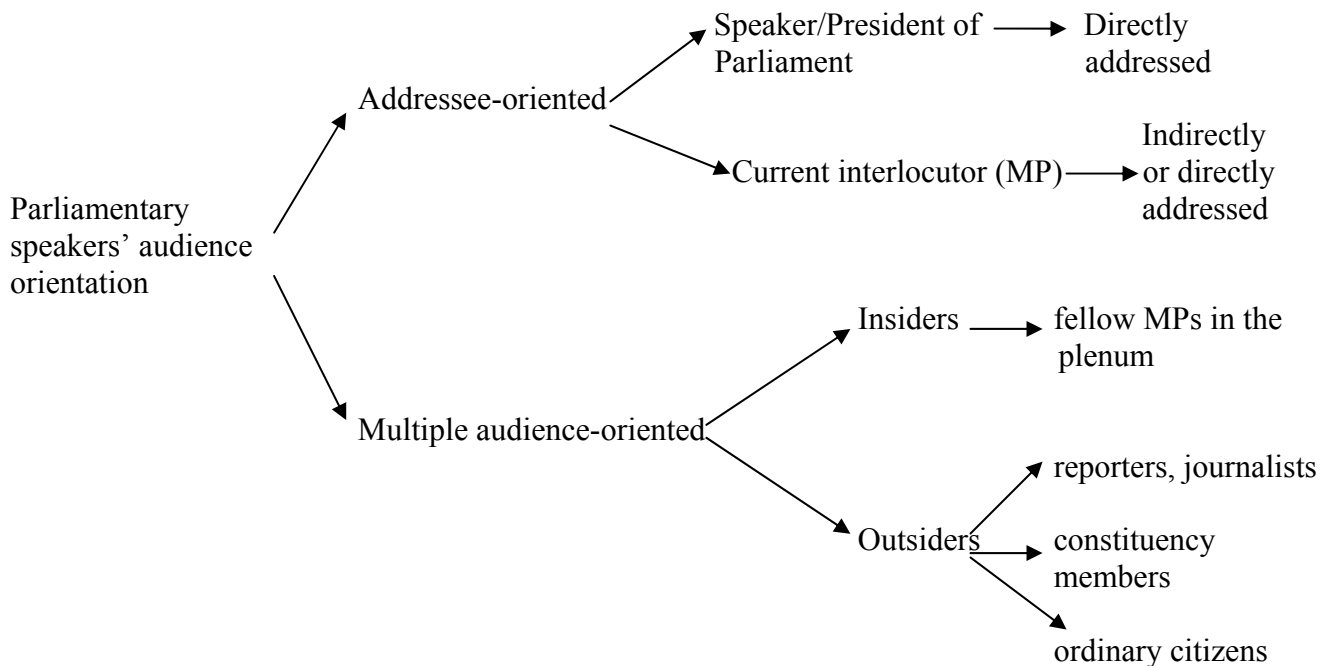


Figure 1. Addressees and audiences targeted by parliamentary speakers

As has already been pointed out, the basic parliamentary activity performed in the public eye consists in MPs publicly interacting with each other and debating issues on the parliamentary agenda. When taking the floor, speaking MPs target their interlocutors (primary addressees) while addressing, at the same time, a multiple parliamentary audience (fellow MPs) and the TV-audiences. However, according to parliamentary conventions, MPs can normally address their interlocutors (fellow MPs) only through a moderator, i.e. the Speaker or President of Parliament. As a rule, in parliaments the Speaker or the President is addressed directly by MPs. But parliaments differ with respect to the ways in which the current interlocutor is addressed, i.e. indirectly (in the 3rd person) and/or directly (in the 2nd person). The MPs in several parliaments, such as the French and the Italian Parliaments, are normally addressed in the 2nd person. In some parliaments, such as the Swedish Riksdag, both strategies of parliamentary address are used, although the MPs' officially recommended form of address is the 3rd person (Ilie 2010). In others, such as the U.K. Parliament and the Canadian Parliament, for example, MPs consistently follow the rule of addressing fellow MPs in the 3rd person. The multiple parliamentary audience present in the plenum is made up of both insiders and outsiders. The insiders are all MPs (including the Speaker/President, front benchers, backbenchers, etc.), whereas the outsiders are usually reporters, journalists, visitors, members of MPs' constituencies and ordinary citizens.

The rules controlling parliamentary forms of interaction are subject to a complex interplay of institutional and socio-cultural constraints: the overall goal and impact of the institutional activity in which the MPs are engaged, the nature of the institutionalised relationships (social distance and

dominance) between MPs, the extent to which MPs share common sets of assumptions and expectations with respect to the parliamentary activity and speech events that they are involved in (Ilie 2000, 2003a). While in non-institutional settings rules of dialogic interaction are simply regulative and therefore provide a wider choice, in institutional settings, such as the Parliament, they are constitutive and therefore are discourse-integrated. It goes without saying that different parliaments display different degrees of flexibility and constraint as to discursive and behavioural practices.

7. Parliamentary participant roles

On examining the nature of multi-party dialogues by comparison with two-party dialogues, it is essential to consider factors such as: common ground, group homogeneity/heterogeneity, dialogue conventions, as well as participant roles and identities. In a two-party dialogue there is always a speaker (addresser) and an addressee. Both are regarded as ratified participants. In a multi-party dialogue several participant roles can be identified. Goffman (1974, 1981) introduced a useful distinction between *direct participants* (speakers and addressees directly involved in the dialogue), *side-participants* (present, but not directly involved in the dialogue) and *overhearers* (passive observers, onlookers). This classification was further developed by Clark (1996), who proposes to add the distinction between *participants* and *non-participants*. The participants include the speaker and the addressee(s), as well as other co-locutors taking part in the conversation but not currently being addressed, i.e. *side participants*. In principle, side-participants have a choice: they may or may not actively contribute to the dialogue. Overhearers, who are regarded as non-participants, fall into two main categories: *bystanders* and *eavesdroppers*. Bystanders are those who are openly present but not part of the conversation. Eavesdroppers are those who listen in without the speakers' awareness. Overhearers have generally a more limited access to relevant information and thus to the main interlocutors' mutual understanding because they have no opportunity to intervene and negotiate an understanding or clarification of the issues under consideration. These role distinctions apply to multi-party dialogue in general and can be used as a starting point for mapping parliamentary participant roles and political identities.

As a result of the increasing mediatisation of parliamentary proceedings, MPs perform a major part of their work in the public eye, namely in front of several kinds of audiences made up of MPs, journalists, politicians and laypersons. An investigation of parliamentary interaction of debating MPs reveals role shifts between their institutional roles as elected representatives of a part of the electorate and their non-institutional roles as members of the same electorate they represent. MPs who are current speakers, as well as their fellow MPs acting as direct addressees can be regarded as active parliamentary participants. The audience of listening and onlooking fellow MPs can be regarded as side-participants. Unlike certain kinds of non-institutional multi-party dialogue, parliamentary interaction exhibits a supplementary institutional role, namely the role of dialogue *moderator*, a role of Chairperson assigned to the Speaker of the House or President of Parliament (this parliamentary role is called differently in different parliaments). As far as the category of overhearers is concerned, it is rather difficult to designate a prototypical category in parliament. However, the category of parliamentary bystanders can be seen to consist of *insiders* (parliamentary reporters and political journalists) on the one hand, and *outsiders* (members of the electorate, ordinary citizens, visitors), on the other. We can also distinguish the category of parliamentary eavesdroppers as represented by the more remote audience of TV-viewers, who may be either political insiders, or political outsiders, and may consequently display non-institutional, institutional or semi-institutional identities in relation to the parliamentary interaction.

In a typical confrontational two-party dialogue there is normally a proponent and an opponent. However, in complex dialogues of enquiry or deliberation, such as parliamentary dialogue, there are complex context-related identities associated to the collocutors' roles. Certain roles depend on the social organisation of the interaction. For example, a chair person, such as the Speaker or President of Parliament, assumes a well-defined institutional role, which implies establishing turn-taking, entry into or exit from the dialogue. Specific communicative acts or rituals are used to signal such changes. In a synchronous channel like the parliament, only one party is entitled to speak at a time. This is why the chairman has the role of assigning speaker turns. The categories of parliamentary participant roles and institutional identities have been mapped in Table 2 below.

Multi-party dialogue roles		Parliamentary roles	Institutional identities
Direct participants		MP = Current speaker (questioner, respondent)	Government or Opposition member
Moderator		Speaker/President of the Parliament	Parliamentary chair/referee
Side-participants		Fellow MPs	Government or Opposition members
Overhearers	Bystanders	Parliamentary reporters & political journalists	Insiders (semi-institutional identity)
		Occasional visitors	Outsiders = ordinary citizens (non-institutional identity)
	Eavesdroppers	TV-viewers, parliamentary channel viewers	Insiders/Outsiders = non-institutional, institutional or semi-institutional identity

Table 2. Parliamentary participant roles and institutional identities

8. Patterns of MPs' identity co-construction and role shifts

Contrary to what might be expected in other communication settings, MPs are not engaged in a straightforward dialogue with each other, or in a genuine reasoning process or truth finding discussion. Undoubtedly, they all are fully aware of the fact that they cannot realistically hope to persuade political opponents of the justifiability of their ideas and beliefs. What they actually hope

to do is to score points against political adversaries and thus enhance their public support. So, while addressing the current addressee(s), MPs' political statements and arguments are actually intended for the whole multi-level audience, made up of parliamentary participants, side-participants and overhearers, including voters.

Like actors on a stage, MPs are expected to enact several roles and thus reveal several aspects of their identities. Unlike actors on a stage, who are expected to suppress their private identity in order to impersonate a specific character, MPs are expected to perform in a double capacity, as institutional representatives, on the one hand, and as private persons, on the other, while carrying out their institutional commitments. MPs have to perform publicly for a wide audience according to parliamentary rules, while constantly oscillating between the two poles of their multiple roles, the public one as representatives of a part of the electorate, and the private one, as members of the same electorate that they represent. Illustrative excerpts are provided from the Hansard transcripts of parliamentary proceedings in the U.K. Parliament. Consider example (1) below:

(1)

Ms. Sally Keeble (Lab, Northampton, North): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate, because *the economy is of central importance to my constituents. I, too, represent middle England.* The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said that those whom Labour persuaded to vote for us last time would be *the worst affected by the economic measures* in the Queen's Speech. *There are many of them in my constituency. I recognise in the Queen's Speech a continuation of the economic policies that have greatly benefited my constituents.* (Hansard, 24 Nov 1999, Col 681)

Labour MP Sally Keeble's intervention focuses on the economic situation of the members in her constituency, on the one hand, and on the parliamentary confrontation with her political opponent, Francis Maude (Con), about the economic policies of the Labour Government, on the other. Consequently, she positions herself in her multiple role as an MP for her constituency Northampton, North, as a member of the same constituency, as a representative for middle England, and as a Labour MP. Her reflexive positioning is meant to reinforce her party-political profile as well as the Labour Party image. To give further support to her statements, Keeble enhances the significance of her own first-hand information as constituency member and representative by resorting to emotional, rather than rational appeals to the audience. Thus she uses the antithesis as a persuasive rhetorical device to refute Maude's negative characterisation of the situation in middle England (*the worst affected by the economic measures*), a situation that she describes in totally opposite terms, namely as a positive evolution for her constituents (*the economic policies that have greatly benefited my constituents*). At the same time, Keeble's statements are also addressed to parliamentary side-participants and to overhearers (including ordinary citizens and members of her own constituency).

There are frequent situations where MPs' discursive behaviour is accompanied by role shifts which make it possible to deal with interpersonal, as well as institutional positionings, as illustrated in the following example:

(2)

Mr. William Hague (Con, Richmond, Yorks): For once, I begin with congratulations – *I congratulate the Prime Minister and his wife on their happy family news. In future, when the Prime Minister hears the sound of crying in the next room, it will not be the Chancellor [Gordon Brown] wishing that he had his job.*

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have stated in the House in the past two weeks *that the tax burden is falling*. Now that *the Office for National Statistics* has joined a long list of organisations in showing that *the opposite is true*, who agrees with the Prime Minister that the tax burden is falling?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his congratulations. Secondly, *the answer is in the figures* that we have published, *which were, of course, checked by the National Audit Office*. [...] (Hansard, 24 Nov 1999, Col 608)

Hague, the then Opposition leader, enacts the role of fellow MP when he extends congratulations, thus acknowledging the Prime Minister Blair's private role as a husband and a father. However, at the same time, he, as a political opponent, cannot resist the temptation to make an ironical allusion to Blair's private and institutional roles, in an attempt to convey a deliberate interactive positioning of the Prime Minister's sensitive and complex relation to Chancellor Gordon Brown. Immediately afterwards, Hague switches over to his role as Tory leader and treats Blair as a political adversary. His powerful rhetorical question marks his explicit enactment of the role as leader of the Opposition, whose task is to argue and provide evidence proving that the Prime Minister (in this case even the Chancellor) is wrong and that his statements are incorrect. It is, thus, the institutional role that takes precedence in parliamentary dialogue and MPs are normally expected to carry out their professional commitments on the 'parliamentary' stage. Although Hague's rhetorical question is apparently addressed to the multiple audience as a whole, its obvious target is the Prime Minister, who, by virtue of the institutional question-response format of the interaction, is expected to provide a response. In this particular instance the obvious disagreement between the two party leaders concerns the level of tax burden. Consequently, their dispute takes the form of a battle over statistical figures. However, their arguments are hardly comparable since their respective evidence relies on different sources of information. Hague refers to statistical evidence from the Office for National Statistics to undermine the Prime Minister's credibility, while the latter counteracts by citing statistical sources from the National Audit Office that allegedly support his standpoint. So, for the moment neither party leader can win the dispute based on facts, but rather on the persuasive force of their rhetorical delivery.

The presence of a multiple parliamentary audience of side-participants makes itself felt in the course of parliamentary interactions, in particular during Prime Minister's Question Time, which is one of the prototypical forms of ritualised parliamentary dialogue in a great number of parliaments (called *Question Period* in the Canadian Parliament, *Frågestund* in the Swedish Riksdag, *Questions au Gouvernement* in the French Parliament, *Heure des questions* in the Belgian Parliament). This sub-genre of parliamentary discourse is devoted to questioning the foremost Government representatives, namely the Prime Minister and/or Government Ministers, by their fellow MPs. Government members are held accountable for their political statements and actions. The Speaker or President acts as Chair and moderator, calling up the MPs who want to ask questions. The targeted Minister is expected to reply, and afterwards the MP is normally entitled to a supplementary question arising from that answer. The Minister is expected to answer the follow-up question as well. Then the Speaker calls the next questioner, and so on.

In the U.K. Parliament, the first question, about the Prime Minister's engagements is always predictable. However, it offers several possibilities for asking supplementary questions arising from the respective answer, which are the really tricky ones for the Prime Minister, as well as for the other responding Ministers, who have to be prepared for all kinds of unexpected questions. Question Time becomes particularly confrontational when the questioning is carried out by members of the Opposition. The examined data suggests that two of the more frequent rhetorical

strategies used by both questioning MPs and responding MPs are rhetorical questions (Ilie 2006a) and rhetorical parentheticals (Ilie 2003c).

The exchange between Menzies Campbell (Liberal Democrats) – as questioner – and Tony Blair (Lab and the then Prime Minister) – as respondent – in example (3) unveils several parliamentary discursive and rhetorical strategies involved in the interplay of the participants' institutional roles and identities.

(3)

Sir Menzies Campbell (Lib-Dem, North-East Fife): But is it not clear where responsibility for Iraq lies? *The President made the decisions, the Prime Minister argued the case, the Chancellor signed the cheques and the Tories voted it through.* That is where the responsibility for Iraq is to be found.

The Prime Minister (Tony Blair): And if *the right hon. and learned Gentleman's policy* had been implemented, Saddam Hussein and his two sons would still be running Iraq. [Interruption] Yes they would. Hundreds of thousands of people died in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. *We removed Saddam. We are fighting terrorism now in Iraq. Our troops are there* with the United Nations mandate and the full support of the Iraqi Government. It is not British soldiers or indeed American soldiers that are committing acts of terrorism in Iraq; *it is people who are going there specifically to stop that country's democracy working.* I believe that *our job is to stand up for Iraq* and its democracy against terrorism. (Hansard, 2 May 2007: Column 1505)

The Liberal Democrat MP Menzies Campbell had already asked a first question (*Now that the former secretary of State for Defence has admitted that there were serious errors in the planning for post-war Iraq, who takes responsibility for those errors?*), which received a rather straightforward answer (*The responsibility for everything to do with the conduct of the Iraq war is, of course, taken by the Government*). In (3) he proceeds to ask a follow-up question addressed to Tony Blair. The introductory question is definitely not an answer-eliciting question, but a rhetorical question, which implicitly conveys a strong accusation addressed to the Prime Minister: *It is clear where the responsibility for Iraq lies – it lies with the Prime Minister.* Such a rhetorical question serves as a face-threatening act and allows the questioner to score a point against the Prime Minister and to make him lose face in front of the multiple parliamentary audience. In this particular case, the rhetorical question is directly followed by the questioner's own answer in which he accuses the Prime Minister of uncritically adopting the American president's policies: *the President [Bush] made the decisions.* Blair's answering strategy consists of two steps. First, he counter-attacks the questioner by stating that the implementation of Tory policies would have supported a continued dictatorship under Saddam in Iraq. Second, Blair justifies his Government's policies by providing information about anti-terror the activities of British troops in Iraq, which are intended to trigger position reactions in the parliamentary audience and thus to boost his own image.

In a deliberate attempt to capture the attention and goodwill of fellow MPs and of parliamentary overhearers, Blair makes skilful use of the inclusive and exclusive 1st person plural pronoun, which is, as usual, prone to ambivalent interpretations. The first *we* in *We removed Saddam* can reasonably be interpreted as referring exclusively to in-group membership, i.e. the Labour Government, whose policies led to the removal of Saddam. The second *we* in *We are fighting terrorism now in Iraq* can also be interpreted as primarily pointing to the Labour Government in-group membership, although reference to other British political parties and groups cannot be

completely ruled out. The third, possessive use of *we* in ***Our troops are there***, opens up a wider scope of reference in that the collective phrase *our troops* is obviously meant to include all British soldiers in Iraq, irrespective of political allegiance. The fourth use of *we* as a possessive pronoun in *I believe **our** job is to stand up for Iraq* obviously invites an inclusive interpretation.

The interruption recorded (in the Hansard transcripts) during Blair's response is particularly significant because interruptions are relatively recurrent in the U.K. Parliament (and parliaments belonging to the Westminster parliamentary system), but not to the same extent in other parliaments (Ilie 2005b). While a British MP has the floor, fellow MPs (side-participants) do occasionally interrupt, reacting to the speaker's statements by means of interjections, elliptical utterances, imperatives. When the actual words are perceived clearly, interruptions are recorded literally in the transcripts, otherwise they are officially recorded by means of the generic designation 'interruptions' (in square brackets) as in example (3). Such interruptions create an opportunity for the current speaker to engage in an overlapping dialogue with the interrupting side-participant(s). Blair, like other speaking MPs are normally prepared to respond to the challenges conveyed by interruptions because they give him an opportunity to counterattack and to promptly refute their objections.

There are also instances when the Prime Minister, like other responding Ministers during Question Time, turns against the questioner if they disagree with the premises of the question. Let us consider the exchange in example (4):

(4)

Mr. John Baron (Con, Billericay): On 24 September 2002, the Prime Minister told the House that if Saddam Hussein was able to purchase fissile material illegally, it would be only one to two years before he had acquired a usable nuclear weapon. Given that a recent letter that I have from the Cabinet Office can find no basis for that claim – *a claim that was not attributed to the Joint Intelligence Committee and which did not reflect the standing JIC assessment, as the Prime Minister knew very well* – on what basis did the Prime Minister make that claim, both in a statement to the House and in the Iraq dossier?

The Prime Minister (Tony Blair): *I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says at all.* The fact is that if Saddam Hussein had been able to acquire fissile material, it would have allowed him to develop nuclear weapons. That is correct. The one thing that *we know* is that he was somebody who used, not nuclear, but chemical and biological weapons against his own people. So, *let me just say to the hon. Gentleman, some people may take the view that Saddam was not a threat; that is not my view. He was a threat and we dealt with him.* (Hansard, 2 May 2007: Column 1505-1506)

By contesting Blair's claim in the House, Tory MP John Baron positions himself against the Prime Minister's policy and line of action, which he regards as highly questionable and inconsistent due to lack of supporting evidence in favour of Saddam Hussein's acquisition of nuclear weapons. To reinforce his positioning, Baron uses a metadiscursive comment which occurs parenthetically (between dashes). Parenthetically made comments in parliamentary interaction have been described by Ilie as *parliamentary parentheticals*:

By means of parentheticals, speakers adjust their ongoing discourse to the situation, to their interlocutors and to their audiences, as well as to their own

end-goals. In doing that, their discourse shifts from the role as speakers to the role as observers and commentators. (Ilie 2003c: 253)

While parenthetical comments normally focus on the ongoing discourse and on the current speaker's positioning, they are also meant to target simultaneously one specifically addressed MP, as well as other fellow MPs, and a wider audience of overhearers. Baron's contestation of Blair's claim gains rhetorical weight on account of the official letter invoked parenthetically. More importantly, his metadiscursive parenthetical includes an interactive positioning in relation to Blair (*as the Prime Minister knew very well*), which is meant as a serious and hardly refutable accusation. In other words, according to Baron, the Prime Minister cannot complain about the lack of accurate information, and is therefore accountable for having made the wrong decision.

In his response, Blair uses an ethos-loaded rhetorical style to defend his political position and personal credibility. He categorically rejects the implications of Baron's accusations. One strategy he uses is a shift in deixis: while Baron attributes specific knowledge exclusively to Blair (*as the Prime Minister knew very well*), Blair widens the scope of knowledge attribution so as to include an indeterminate, but large number of people: *The one thing that we know is that he was somebody who used, not nuclear, but chemical and biological weapons against his own people*. To justify his Iraq policy and to further strengthen his political leadership role, Blair re-directs the focus of the debate from the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iraq to the person-oriented issue of Saddam being a threat. He does so through a disclaimer marked by a shift in agentivity, broadening its scope from the 1st person singular to the 1st person plural: *that is not my view. He was a threat and we dealt with him*.

9. Concluding remarks

This investigation has explored the interplay between interpersonal confrontation patterns, shifting institutional roles and multi-layered identities of the participants in parliamentary interaction. Specific examples have been provided from the Hansard transcripts of the U.K. Parliament. As has been pointed out, MPs are involved in an institutional *co-performance* which is meant to both address and involve (even *co-act* with) an audience of fellow MPs as active participants, who often contribute explicit forms of *audience-feedback*, e.g. questions, responses, interruptions. The interplay between various enactments of MPs' identities and positionings results in recurrent changes of footing that are accompanied by challenges to, and co-construction of, MPs' roles and identities.

In order to integrate a macro-level analysis with a micro-level analysis, a pragma-rhetorical approach has been used, which makes it possible to identify dialogic patterns of argumentation between MPs in terms of their cooperative and/or conflicting goals, of their face-threatening, face-enhancing or face-saving speech acts, as well as of their rational and/or emotional reasoning strategies.

On examining the dynamics and functions of parliamentary interaction, three main aspects have been particularly focused: *parliamentary confrontation* of ideas/principles/beliefs exhibited through critical questioning and accusation of political adversaries; *parliamentary identities* co-constructed through both complying with and circumventing institutional constraints; and *parliamentary positionings* conveyed, on the one hand, by means of institutionally codified procedures and actions, and, on the other, by means of pragma-rhetorical devices (such as metadiscursive parentheticals, deixis and agentivity markers).

For MPs, parliamentary identity management involves discursive ability and rhetorical skills in order to deal with interpersonal and institutional positionings. Thus, parentheticals are used not only to comment on the ongoing discourse and on the current speaker's standpoint, but also to address the interlocutor, other fellow MPs, as well as a wider audience of overhearers. After identifying the categories and subcategories of directly/indirectly targeted addressees and audiences, they have been schematically represented in Figure 1.

By taking into consideration the correlation between parliamentary ritual procedures, rhetorical traditions and discourse styles, a typology of parliamentary participants has been set up in Table 2, which also specifies the participants' parliamentary roles and institutional identities.

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