

Chapter 4

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On the analysis of parliamentary
debates on immigration

Abstracts

This paper addresses the problem which discourse categories are relevant in a study of parliamentary debates about ethnic affairs in general, and about immigration in particular. It is argued that a selection of analytical categories first of all needs to be based on a theory of racism and anti-racism, and on the role of discourse in the reproduction of racism. Secondly, such a choice needs to be made relative to the specific genre and context of parliamentary debates, involving settings, participants, political and other actions, as well as aims and beliefs of participants. In this framework the various semantic and formal levels of discourse are systematically examined for those structures or devices that specifically express or influence beliefs about minorities or immigrants, or that contribute to the various social and political acts involved in the reproduction of political racism. For each of these discourse categories it is established what practical consequences their study would have in analyzing a vast corpus of parliamentary debates.

Der Artikel geht der Frage nach, welche Kategorien des Diskurses in einer Untersuchung von parlamentarischen Debatten über ethnische Fragen im allgemeinen und über Einwanderung im besonderen relevant sind. Es wird dahingehend argumentiert, daß eine Auswahl analytischer Kategorien erstens auf einer Theorie über Rassismus und Antirassismus sowie einer Theorie über die Rolle des Diskurses bei der Reproduktion von Rassismus fußen muß. Zweitens sollte eine solche Auswahl in Abhängigkeit vom spezifischen Genre und Kontext parlamentarischer Debatten getroffen werden, und das einschließlich der Settings, der Beteiligten, der politischen und anderer Handlungen sowie der Ziele und Überzeugungen der Beteiligten. Innerhalb dieses Rahmens werden die verschiedenen formalen und semantischen Ebenen des Diskurses systematisch auf jene Strukturen und Mittel hin untersucht, die ganz speziell Überzeugungen über Minderheiten oder ImmigrantInnen zum Ausdruck bringen oder beeinflussen oder die einen Beitrag zu den verschiedenen sozialen und politischen Handlungen leisten, die an der Reproduktion von politischem Rassismus beteiligt sind. Für jede dieser Kategorien des Diskurses wird festgestellt, welche praktischen Konsequenzen ihre Untersuchung im Rahmen der Analyse dieses riesigen Korpus parlamentarischer Debatten haben würde.

Cet article analyse la question suivante: quelles catégories de discours sont pertinentes

clans une étude de discours parlementaires portant sur des questions ethniques en général et sur l'immigration en particulier? L'argument est qu'une sélection de catégories analytiques doit premièrement se baser sur la théorie du racisme et de l'anti-racisme et sur le rôle du discours dans la reproduction du racisme. Deuxièmement, une telle sélection doit se réaliser en relation avec les genres spécifiques et le contexte parlementaire des débats, tout en incluant les settings, les participants, les actions politiques ou autres, autant que les convictions et objectifs des participants. Dans ce cadre, on recherche dans les différents niveaux formels et sémantiques de manière systématique les structures et moyens qui expriment ou influencent particulièrement les convictions au sujet des immigrants ou minorités, ou qui participent activement aux actions politiques et sociales, qui contribuent à la reproduction du racisme politique. Pour chacune de ces catégories de discours, on définit quelle serait la conséquence pratique de l'analyse dans le cadre d'une étude d'un vaste ensemble de débats parlementaires.

1. The problem

In this paper I examine some of the theoretical and practical issues that are relevant in the discourse analysis of parliamentary debates about ethnic affairs in general, and about immigration in particular.

Like other discourse genres parliamentary debates have many structures at several levels. Thus, we may examine such diverse discourse properties as intonation, word order, clause structure, sentence meanings, presuppositions, local coherence, global topics, lexical style, metaphors, overall organization, speech acts, turn allocation, interactional strategies, and many many more.

The question then is what structural categories to attend to within the framework of a research project with the usual limitations of time, funding and personnel. How to avoid getting lost in the jungle of a multitude of discursive structures and strategies, and how to make a reasoned choice of *relevant*, or at least *interesting*, discourse properties to be studied in detail?

"Relevance" is a contextual, and hence a relative notion. In our case, this means that the choice of categories for analysis depends on, for instance, the research questions, problems or aims of our research project. For the same reason, in discourse analysis there is not *one* method to analyze a text. It depends on what one wants to know, and why, and what theoretical instruments one has to relate text structures with the contextual aims one has.

In our case, then, the global aim is to understand some of the discursive mechanisms involved in the reproduction of racism, and the way racism is resisted, in contemporary Western Europe. More specifically, we want to

know how political discourse is involved in the enactment, confirmation or challenge of attitudes and ideologies about ethnic groups, ethnic relations, Or issues such as immigration and integration.

Discourse-analyzing parliamentary debates about immigration is the “method” by which we hope to obtain such insight. The choice of structures in such an analysis, thus, should not be an arbitrary application of discourse analysis, but must be based on theoretical and practical arguments that link discourse structures with our aim to understand political racism, anti-racism and “ethnic beliefs” (beliefs about ethnic groups, immigrants, refugees or ethnic affairs).

The aim of this paper is to formulate some of these arguments and thus to arrive at a practical instrument for the “qualitative” (discourse) analysis of parliamentary debates. That is, the categories chosen for analysis should be optimally relevant in reaching our overall goal: understanding racism and the role of politics and parliaments in its (re)production or challenge.

2. Theoretical framework

As suggested, the question of the relevance of analytical categories in a research project needs to be formulated within a theoretical framework. In our case, such a framework needs to spell out the relations between discourse and racism in general, and between parliamentary debates in Western Europe and European racism in particular. Because of space limitations, this paper will only summarize these relationships (for detail, see, e.g., Carbó 1995; Jäger 1992, Jäger et al. 1998, Reeves 1983, Wetherell & Potter 1992, Wodak et al. 1990, Van Dijk 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993).

2.1. Racism

Racism will here be defined as a system of social inequality in which ethnic minority groups are dominated by a white (European) majority on the basis of origin, ethnicity, or attributed “racial” characteristics. Dominance in this case implies abuse of ‘power, that is, illegitimate control over others, their actions or resources. Structural inequality involves limited access to material social resources, such as jobs, income or adequate housing, or symbolic social resources, such as knowledge, information, education, respect, or public discourse (media, scholarship, etc.).

At the local, interactional level, such inequality is implemented by everyday *discriminatory practices*, including discourse, engaged in by dominant majority group members. Besides this social dimension of racism, there is also an important *cognitive* one, namely the ways minorities and ethnic affairs are represented in personal mental models of ethnic events (i.e. events involving members of ethnic minority groups or immigrants), or in socially shared representations of the Others, such as prejudices, attitudes or racist ideologies.

2.2. Discourse and racism

One of the relationships between discourse and racism has been suggested already: Discourse is among the everyday social practices that may be discriminatory in its own right, for instance when dominant group members engage in outgroup derogation when interacting *with* members of minority groups.

On the other hand, intra-group discourse *about* resident minorities or new immigrants may similarly represent these others in a negative way, and thus lead to the reproduction of ethnic prejudices or ideologies. In other words, discourse may contribute both to interactional and to cognitive forms of problematization, marginalization and exclusion.

Parliamentary debates about ethnic affairs and immigration belong to this latter type of discourse. Analysis of such debates yields insights into the ways politicians not only (a) speak about minorities or immigrants, but indirectly also (b) about their social representations they share about the Others and (c) the possible effects of parliamentary debates on the representations of recipients, in this case (d) within a socio-political context of legislation and public opinion formation. In this theoretical framework, then, we need to analyze those discourse structures or “categories” that are typically involved in these social and cognitive functions of expressing or influencing “ethnic” representations.

Of course, inferences about mental representations expressed in, or affected by, discourse should take into account the *contextual* dimension of such debates, that is, the (political) setting, participants, actions and cognitions involved in legislation, as well as the representation of constituents and parties, interaction between parties, or engaging in opposition against the Government. Such formal contexts, and talk “on the record” may for instance restrain Members of Parliament (MPs) to say what they really think.

Some of this *contextualization* is *genre-specific* and hence characterizes parliamentary debates in general, such as formal address, controlled turn-allocation, strict time management, and the interaction between government party speakers and those of the opposition. Because these context properties essentially control “form”, they will be fairly independent of (in this case: ethnic) beliefs: MPs will speak like that on any topic.

Other forms of contextualization, however, are *topic-specific*, and may also be observed in other genres and contexts in which dominant group members speak about ethnic issues: impression management, disclaimers, mitigation, and a host of other discourse properties involved in “doing delicacy” when talking about such potentially controversial topics. In this case, beliefs and context are closely related, because what one believes about ethnic issues will also influence one’s contextual opinions about oneself as a dominant group member, as an MY, as well as about recipients who may have other beliefs.

2.3. Selection criteria

In order to be able to select relevant analytical categories, we may formulate a number of criteria in light of the theoretical framework summarized above. Thus, as we have seen, *relevance* of any of the discursive features relative to the contexts of production and reception, is the overall criterion, and defines the very notion of contextualization. Secondly, we need to focus on those discourse properties that express or imply the *opinions* of MI’s about minorities, refugees or immigration, especially those opinions (attitudes) that are shared by a *group* (dominant white ingroup, the own party, etc.) and are about Others as an outgroup. These discourse properties may characterize semantic “content” as well as stylistic, rhetorical or organizational “form” which may emphasize or de-emphasize meanings about Us and Them.

2.4 Organization of the description of the categories

For each of the categories proposed below, we first give a brief definition, then a summary of some of its contextual functions and their relevance for a study of parliamentary debates about immigration, followed by an indication of some typical discourse features that may be studied in such an analysis, and finally a practical hint about the ease, scope and applicability of the category. Of course, as in all forms of categorization, the boundaries of each category may be fuzzy, and categories will often overlap. Since the

literature of these various categories is vast, we shall not give specific bibliographical references (for introduction and further references see Van Dijk 1997).

3. *Semantic structures*

Discourse meaning is the core level for the expression of beliefs, such as personal and social knowledge, opinions, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values. Contextual constraints may especially influence variable structures of style and rhetoric, and even semantic structures. However, if we are able to disregard contextual constraints, e.g., by comparing what people say in different contexts, we may have a fairly good impression of what they believe. A semantic analysis will be crucial in such a study, and we therefore need to examine which semantic structures and strategies are especially relevant in discursively representing these beliefs, especially in the context of legislation and parliamentary debate.

3.1. Topics

If there is any discourse category that should be included in a study of text or talk about minorities, it is the category of topics. *Defined* as semantic macrostructures, they represent what speakers find most important, they regulate overall coherence of discourse, how discourse is planned and globally controlled and understood, and what is best remembered by the recipients. For discourse about ethnic minorities or ethnic events, topics define what speakers think or discursively display as the most important information or opinions about Us and Them.

In discourse, topics may be typically *expressed* (and hence studied) in announcements, summaries, headlines, conclusions and thematic sentences.

Practical analysis of topics is relatively easy for larger corpora, because they may simply be obtained by summarizing text or talk.

3.2. Local coherence

Discursive sequences of propositions are coherent if they refer to facts that are related according to the mental models of language users, or if propositions are related functionally, as is the case for Generalizations, Specifications, Examples, Contrast, Explanations, and so on.

In both cases, *ethnic* beliefs may be relevant for the establishment of local coherence, so that conversely, an analysis of coherence may reveal underlying ethnic opinions. For instance, biased conditions or consequences of ethnic events (such as immigration as a cause of unemployment) may be mentioned, so as to influence the models of recipients as part of their understanding and explanation of ethnic events. Similarly, functional relations may be relevant in a study of the relationships between personal models and (general) social representations, for instance how an event or action can be seen as a typical instance of a more general, prejudiced belief, or vice versa, how beliefs about events may be generalized to more general beliefs. Both operations are typical in prejudiced thought.

Local coherence is often (though not always) *signalled* by connectors of various syntactic categories, such as conjunctions (“and”, “because”, “although”) and adverbs (“so”, “therefore”, “moreover”, etc.).

Local coherence analysis may be *applied* especially in an analysis of selected fragments, and should be most relevant for the study of explanations of ethnic events, and how specific events are related to more general properties of the ethnic situation.

3.3. Implicitness

Discourse are “incomplete” and “implicit” in the sense that much information is not expressed, but only understood to be *implied* or *presupposed*. Theoretically this means that implicit information is part of the mental model of an event, but not part of the semantic representation of a discourse about such an event. Thus, information may not be expressed for contextual reasons of irrelevance (e.g., recipients already have the information). On the other hand, in our case *ethnic beliefs* may also remain implicit when their expression could lead to a negative impression of the speaker or the ingroup, for instance as being racist, or a positive impression of the outgroup. Implicit information may be inferred from the text in combination with old models (knowledge of specific events) or general socio-cultural models. Sometimes, implicit information, such as presuppositions, is indirectly signalled in the text, for instance by definite articles, that-clauses, or clause ordering.

Practically, as with most local semantic structures, implicit information can only be studied for selected, brief fragments, since spelling out all possible but relevant implied propositions requires much knowledge of a situation. Contextual relevance can be established in this case by examining

the functions of leaving specific information implicit within the overall strategies of positive self-presentations and negative other-information. In other words: Whom does it serve when specific information is not expressed?

3.4. Semantic moves: Disclaimers

Quite typical in discourse about immigrants and minorities is the use of special semantic moves that implement the possible contradiction between positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, as is the case for well-known disclaimers such as the Apparent Denial (“I have nothing against X, but...”). These are essential moves in the management of the impression the recipients may have about the speaker. Other disclaimers are: Apparent Concession (“They are not all criminal, but...”), Apparent Empathy (“They have had lots of difficulties in their own country, but...”), Apparent Ignorance (“I don’t know, but...”), Apparent Excuse (“I am sorry, but...”), Reversal (Blaming the victim), and Transfer (“I have no problem with X, but my clients...”), and others.

Disclaimers are easy to study, also for relatively large collections of texts, because of their typical form, and the contrast between the propositions connected by the typical but-clause.

3.5. Specificity and completeness

One prominent way to manage meaning in discourse is to be more or less general vs. specific, or to provide more or less details at each of these levels of explicitness. These are both relative notions, and discourses may be more or less specific or complete depending on genre and context.

Thus, within the general strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, we may expect that Our good actions and properties, and Their bad ones will tend to be described in fairly specific terms and with more details, and conversely Our bad ones and Their good ones will tend to be described in abstract, overall terms, with few details. The contextual relevance of these strategies is to manipulate model construction: A more detailed mental model of an event will be better stored (more links with other information), and (hence) better memorized, and will thus have more influence on future interpretations of ethnic events.

Level and completeness analysis would in practice require detailed comparative study, e.g., by comparing discourses or passages about Us, with discourses of passages about Them.

3.6. Propositional structures

At the level of clauses and sentences in discourse, propositional structures may be relevant in an analysis of the structure of ethnic *situations*, *actions* or *events*, and of the *role of participants* in such events. For instance, whether such participants are primarily seen as responsible agents, or rather as patients (victims) of specific acts, also tells us something about the ways speakers represent ethnic events in their mental models. Such representations may in turn embody role assignment in more general social representations. Thus, racist discourse typically explains violence in terms of the responsible agency of minorities, whereas anti-racist discourse tends to blame the social circumstances. Below we shall examine the formal (syntactic) expression of such underlying variation of propositional structures. Similarly, we may here pay attention to the ways (ethnic) actors are included or excluded, whether they are specific, unspecific or general, identified or not, known or unknown.

Obviously, this kind of local analysis of propositional structures is only practically feasible for small fragments of parliamentary debates, especially for those passages in which different opinions exist about the roles of ingroup and outgroup participants, for instance in the explanation of problems, deviance or threat.

3.7. Other semantic structures, moves and strategies

Of the many other semantic properties of sentences and discourses, we may pay attention to the following relevant analytical categories:

Modalities (epistemic, deontic, etc.). For instance for the study of implicit norms of action, and the certainty people claim to have about ethnic actions and events.

Evidentiality. As is the case for most argumentative discourse, parliamentary discourse needs to spell out the “evidence” of beliefs or claims, especially the sources of beliefs. Information about ethnic minorities has various sources, which are partly signalled in parliamentary debates and other discourses, e.g (what is claimed to be), common sense “knowledge”, personal experience and observation, hearsay (everyday storytelling), the media, the courts, experts or scholarship, etc. Reference to each of these sources has variable implications for the credibility of the speaker. Often, evidentiality is a form of *intertextuality*.

Vagueness. Talking about delicate issues such as immigration and the

expression of possibly controversial opinions about ethnic groups typically calls for hedging and other forms of vagueness, as is true for implicitness. That is, vagueness characteristically functions as a form of impression management: protecting our own face (when being vague about racism for instance), and where possible being vague about the positive properties of the Others.

Contrast. A well-known semantic device (also in disclaimers) is to systematically establish a contrast between Us and Them, and Our (good) properties and actions, and Their bad ones, following the well-known general strategy This is also a category that may be studied in a rhetorical analysis.

Comparison. Similarly, and more generally, those who speak about the Others will routinely engage in comparing what They do with what We do (or would have done), a comparison of which the implication is usually positive for Us, and negative for Them. Apart from representing relations in models, these comparisons especially provide insight into underlying social representations of ingroups and outgroups.

Illustration. General statements about minorities tend to be illustrated by characteristic examples, or whole stories. Contextually, illustration enhances de credibility of speakers, and cognitively they signal relations between (general, abstract) social representations on the one hand, and mental models of specific events on the other. The converse (functional) relation is that of Generalization.

Intertextuality. Discourses typically do not come alone, but may be part of complex social and political debates, in which various sources (see Evidentiality), competing or alternative discourses, and other forms of text or talk are explicitly referred to for examples, evidence, opinions, ways of speaking and so on. 'This is also true for discourse about immigration and minorities, especially because most dominant group members have few direct experiences with the Others. Much of what they know or believe, is thus based on talk and text, and such discourse will often be integrated as a "link" in the current discourse, often as a credibility or knowledgeability device.

Perspective. Ingroup-outgroup conflicts typically involve different perspectives based on different mental models of events as well as on different social representations. Discourse about such events will thus show different, if not opposed points of view of majority speakers and minority speakers. This will show in different verbs, adverbs, pronouns, forms or group association, and so on.

3.8 Lexicalization

At the border of meaning and form, we may want to examine the lexicalization of underlying conceptual meanings. Few properties of discourse are as immediately revealing about ethnic opinions as the words being chosen to describe Them and Their actions and properties. Whether we call refugees “illegal” or “undocumented” when they have no papers, has obvious bearing on whether the Others are represented in a more or less negatively oriented mental model, or its underlying ethnic attitudes. Lexicalization analysis will thus be especially relevant in descriptions of other groups, that is, in identifying them, referring to them, and by describing their actions and properties.

Although this kind of analysis is local, it is relatively easy to do, also because part of it can be automated by making thesauri of debates with the computer.

3.9. Pronouns

Also at the border of syntax and semantics, the study of pronouns has often been shown to be relevant, especially also in the study of political discourse. Indeed, the opposition between *Us* and *Them*, has become prototypical of the polarization of (mental representations about) ingroups and outgroups. Also in parliamentary debates, thus, it is very useful to establish who exactly are being referred to when speakers use “We”. Given the possibly multiple social identities of speakers, the “ingroups” that may be denoted by “We” may range from “We, in the Western World”, and “We Dutch people”, to “We White Dutch people”, “We (all) here in parliament”, or “We of our party”.

As is the case for many other small and formal structures, pronouns are largely used more or less automatically. A study of their uses in principle may reveal the identification of the speaker with one or more “ingroups”.

3.10. Style

Together with the study of variable syntax and expression structures (see below), the study of lexical variation is usually carried out in what is traditionally called stylistics. Note though that variations of style are typically

defined and explained in contextual terms: Words or sentence order is studied as a function of properties of the context, such as setting, social situation, and social groups and relations (such as power). Especially relevant for our research project, style variation may be explained in terms of the opinions of speakers and the ways they want to influence those of the recipients. In a very broad sense, style may be defined as the set of those sentence and discourse structures that are potentially variable as a function of context. Differences of ethnic opinion are just one (important) source of such stylistic variation. Other variation in parliamentary debates is genre-dependent, and relates to the role, status, etc. of MPs, whether one is a part of the ruling government or the opposition.

4. Formal structures

4.1 Schemata

Schemata or superstructures globally organize discourses by a number of conventional functional categories, such as introductions, greetings, openings, conclusions, headlines or summaries. This is also true for parliamentary debates, which are formally opened and closed, and parliamentary speeches beginning with formally addressing the Chair or other MPs. As is the case for all formal structures, if schematic structures are conventional and obligatory they cannot directly express variable ethnic beliefs of speakers. However, they may be used in variable ways, for instance to emphasize or de-emphasize meanings or underlying beliefs, for instance by putting specific information in the beginning (or at the end), in headlines (or in the text), in the premises or in the conclusion. Such variations of emphasis may then be interpreted as signalling differences of importance or relevance of information. Similarly, actual text or talk may change the canonical order of a schema (for instance a conclusion at the beginning of a text), and thus highlight the information (belief) expressed in such text constituent.

Since schemata are global, they are relatively easy to study for larger collections of discourse – but it should be borne in mind that they are not as easily interpreted as meanings. Formal structures may have many different social, cultural or cognitive functions.

4.2. Argumentation

Parliamentary debates are typically argumentative. MPs express, defend and attack opinions and political positions. They argue for or against (further) restrictions on immigration or minority policies. Argumentation structures should therefore be a prominent object of analysis in the study of parliamentary debates. As suggested above, the purely formal structures of argumentation are not specific for ethnic issues. Speakers will argue in many similar ways, whether or not they take positions for or against refugees. Abstract categories, such as (various kinds of) premises and conclusions, warrants and backings, will occur in any argument.

Thus, both parties in an argument may engage in fallacies of many kinds, such as overgeneralization, playing on sentiments, begging the question, setting up straw men, focusing on undesirable consequences, citing authorities, or populism. Only the focus of the argumentation will be different: Some (mostly on the Right) will focus positively on Us, “our people” and what “our people” want, whereas others (often on the Left) may focus on the plight of refugees or minorities. The first orientation will be national and nationalist, the second rather international and universalist, e.g., when referring to human rights and international law and agreements. Both parties will call on general norms and values implicit in defending their position and attacking that of their opponents.

4.2.1. Topoi

More specific for each party in the debate are however the contents or arguments adduced to argue for or against immigration or specific minority policies. Although of a semantic nature, these contents may also be studied as part of argumentation itself, because they may typically be used as more or less “standard” arguments - as also typical descriptions of places and people may be characteristic parts of narration. Traditionally studied as *topoi* (or *loci communes*) they represent the common sense reasoning typical for specific issues. Also debates on immigration and ethnic affairs features such *topoi*, whether for or against restrictions of immigration or positions of minorities.

For instance immigration may be defined as a problem, as a financial burden, or as a threat to “our” welfare state or culture. Refugees may be categorized as economic or bogus, and accused of abusing our social services.

Refugees are typically said to come in large numbers, and although perhaps pitiful, “we” cannot let everybody in. Immigration may be described as bad for the immigrants themselves, because they will be confronted with unemployment and resentment. Therefore, they may be advised to stay in their own country and help to build this up, or to stay in the same region, so as to avoid culture shock. And if they manage to come in anyway, they may cause unemployment or cultural conflicts. In any case, they need to adapt themselves to “our” norms and values. For these and other reasons, our immigration policies must be strict on the one hand, but fair on the other, because we also have a long tradition of hospitality for “real” refugees and tolerance for foreigners. These and many other topoi may be found as standard arguments against immigration, integration or the multicultural society.

On the other hand, also the more liberal voice makes use of standard arguments, and focuses on the plight of oppressed, tortured or poor refugees, on minorities that have neither voice nor power and that are threatened by marginalization. Human rights are the basic norms and values that are used to evaluate any policy, as are legal obligations, international agreements and reputation, or historical examples (such as the Holocaust or what happened to the Jews fleeing Nazi Germany).

That is, although more internationally focused, both proponents and opponents of liberal immigration and minority policies, focus on what is good for the country. Anti-racist discourse however emphasizes symbolic values such as tolerance, a good international reputation and cultural diversity, whereas anti-immigrant discourse emphasizes the financial burden, the economic situation and cultural homogeneity. The first will orient to the international community, the second to the national community of “our own people”. And whereas the former are typically accused of racism and xenophobia, the latter are accused to be “lax” or “soft” on immigration.

Topoi are relatively easy to study in practice, precisely because they are standard and easily recognizable. Both locally and globally, they are typical for issue debates, especially in those countries where such debates, both inside and outside parliament, have become quite common, and positions and their arguments have become themselves stereotypical. Besides the overall contents of debates as represented by their topics, topoi are thus the most typical elements of the argumentative and persuasive nature of debates on immigration, integration and the multicultural society.

4.3. Sentence Syntax

What has been said above about formal structures in general also applies to sentence syntax: word order, clause relations, phrase hierarchies, and so on. Many of these are obligatory and hence not contextually variable. Generally speaking, as is the case for other formal structures, specific syntactic structures may contribute to emphasizing or de-emphasizing underlying meanings. This may for instance occur by putting information “up front”, that is by topicalization, cleft sentences, and so on. Similarly, as is well known, nominalizations and passive sentences may be used to background or hide responsible agency. In our case, thus, negative agency of immigrants may be highlighted, and that of majority group members or institutions played down or obfuscated. Thus, the prominence of specific syntactic categories may signal the importance of several syntactic roles.

It should not come as a surprise that detailed syntactic analysis of word order, phrase and clause structure, and sentence connections is not the kind of study that is possible for large text corpora. It should selectively be used for the study of smaller discourse fragments, especially those in which ingroup and outgroup members are in conflict or have different roles, as well as for the study of foregrounding and backgrounding, or the analysis of presuppositions.

4.4. Sound structures and nonverbal interaction

It has already been suggested that at the level of sound structures and non-verbal expression, there are many devices that regulate the prominence of different fragments of a discourse, and hence indirectly emphasize or de-emphasize meanings. MPs may speak loudly or slowly, may applaud, gesticulate or look furious, and obviously all these non-verbal activities will greatly influence the ways recipients interpret speeches as well as “read” the contextual properties of the speaker (intentions, goals, emotions, etc.). We shall not further discuss these properties here since we have no video and audio recordings of the debates we analyze.

4.5. Rhetoric

The concept of “rhetoric” is used here in a limited and specific sense in order to refer to (generally optional) structures at various levels of discourse

that result from special operations, such as those of repetition, permutation, substitution and deletion, classically known as “figurae”. ‘They regulate specific forms of comprehension, for instance in persuasion, that is, in discourses aiming at influencing opinions, such as parliamentary debates.

Especially those at the semantic level (metaphor, simile, irony, hyperbole, euphemism, litotes, etc.) are relevant for our analysis, because they manipulate meaning and the expression and formation of mental models of ethnic events and social representations of ingroup and outgroup.

Thus, immigration may thus be metaphorically described as an invasion, a flood, or a plague, whereas refugees typically represented as coming in tides or as armies. And whereas the negative characteristics of the outgroup will tend to be expressed in hyperboles, those of the ingroup will usually be expressed in euphemisms. Since they occur only occasionally and are easy identifiable, such rhetorical devices may also be studied for large stretches of debates. Relevant in this case is especially their functional role in the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

4.6. Interaction

Parliamentary debates not only embody meaning and not only have multiple forms, but are also forms of social and political interaction. Indeed, a speech in parliament may directly “do racism” or “do anti-racism” as a social act. Which of the multiple (forms of) social action accomplished during or with such speeches are specific relevant for our analysis? Several of them, such as impression management, have already been discussed above: Speakers will try to make sure that the recipients do not see them as racist, intolerant or undemocratic.

On the other hand, within the overall act of legislation, MPs must make decisions also on immigration or minority policy, and if they want to restrict the power or resources of refugees or minorities, they will tend to engage in a series of acts that attribute negative properties to the outgroup: Accusation, derogation, defamation, slander, insults, slurs, and so on, though often in an indirect or mitigated way in order to avoid counter-accusations of racism or intolerance. Indeed, when accused that way, they will typically deny, reject, ridicule or otherwise evade such accusations. Similarly, MPs may want to curb alleged negative acts of the outgroup, first by complaints and protests, but also by threats and warnings. In other words, there is a large set of social and political actions MPs may engage in, both locally and globally, when

speaking in parliament. Most relevant for our analysis are those acts that presuppose positions of power (threats, warnings) or related social relations and the management of opinions of recipients about the outgroups (accusation, defamation, derogation).

These local and global acts may finally be studied as functional moves in overall *macrostrategies*, such as the now familiar strategy of positive self-presentation (impression management) and negative other-presentation (derogation). At a broader, socio-political level, speeches may contribute to the problematization, marginalization and exclusion of the Others. By invoking the “will of the people”, they may strive for political consensus about immigration, and thus at the same time also influence public opinion.

As an institution of political power, parliament and its members typically also engage in acts of legitimation, namely, of its own existence (as democratically representing “the people”), and of its own policies and legislation. That is, they have to show, first, that their political acts (such as restricting immigration) are consistent with prevalent norms, values, national and international laws, and international principles of human rights. Secondly, they have to legitimate themselves as representatives of the people, and hence as those who make decisions at the highest level. And thirdly, their very discourses need to be legitimated as warranted interventions in the social debate, and as particularly credible, true and authoritative (Martín Rojo/Van Dijk 1997).

These many forms of social action and interaction at the same time have their specific functions in the political process. When speaking about immigration, MPs at the same time engage in making policy, legislating, governing the country, or in proposing, defending or criticizing a Bill or government decisions, actions or policies.

As is true for discourse forms and meanings, also the *formal structures of interaction* do not, as such, have immediate contextual relevance. Turn taking and allocation are formally regulated in parliament, and this is so for any issue being debated. The same is true for openings and closings, false starts, hesitations and repairs, interruptions, heckling, applauding, jeering and shouting, applause and laughter.

At some points, however, such interactional activities may be related to meaning, opinion and context. For instance, interruptions, heckling and applause are markers of agreement and disagreement, and hence with matching own opinions (say about immigration) with those of current speakers. In an analysis, thus, such dialogue properties may be focused on

to reconstruct ideological and political position, party alignment, “doing opposition”, and so on. False starts and hesitations may be typical for the expression of controversial opinions and positions, as also the case in everyday conversations, when dominant group speakers often hesitate or show other, forms of disfluency when naming or describing minorities. In other words, the analysis of formal properties of action and interaction in parliamentary speeches and debates, may show social, political and cognitive “positions” of MPs, such as their ingroup membership, their political power, their political role and position (e.g. as members of government or opposition parties), and finally their ethnic opinions and social representations.

At the overall level of parliamentary debates, it is practically feasible to study more or less global acts, but for a more local analysis, only small fragments may be studied. Unfortunately, the form of the transcript as published in official records of parliamentary debates, is not such that many non-verbal and detailed verbal structures (such as hesitations or false starts) can be studied.

5. Conclusions

The main problem addressed in this paper was how to make a reasoned selection of analytical categories for the study of parliamentary debates. It was argued first, that such a decision always needs to be made within the framework of a theory, the kind of questions asked, and the goals set within a specific research project. In our case, the theoretical framework pertains to the role of parliamentary debates in the (re)production of racism and anti-racism in Western European societies. Racism was conceptualized as system of ethnic or “racial” inequality consisting of two interlocking sub-systems, one social and the other cognitive. The social dimension consists of discriminatory acts and interaction, including text and talk itself. The cognitive dimension is vital because it sustains these social actions, namely through mental models of ethnic events, as well as by shared social representations (beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, norms, values) about social groups and social relations. The social and cognitive sub-systems of racism are interconnected because these mental models and representations are crucially acquired, confirmed or changed by the social discourse practice of discourse.

Parliamentary debates on ethnic issues, thus, should be studied in such a theoretical framework. That is, first of all, as complex structures of social and political action and interaction at various levels of analysis, they may be analyzed in terms of the enactment of discrimination (or anti-discrimination), for instance by excluding, marginalizing or problematizing immigrants or minorities. Since they do so by setting policy and by legislating at the highest level, such enactments of group conflict at the same time imply the exercise of power and ethnic dominance as it defines the system of racial inequality and racism. Any property of discourse that contributes locally to the successful accomplishment of these actions may thus be seen as a manifestation of ethnic dominance – or as a means to challenge it.

On the other hand, parliamentary discourse is contextually relevant because it helps shape the minds of recipients, both other MPs, as well as other (elite) groups and institutions (such as the media) and the public at large. At all levels of text structure, we may thus examine not only how MPs express or enact ethnic prejudice, but also how they are geared towards the “mind control” of the recipients, from preferred mental models of specific events to more general social representations about Us and the Others. We have seen how especially the semantic properties of discourse are relevant in the expression or manipulation of ethnic opinions. At the same time, formal structures may enhance the cognitive and social effectiveness of these meanings by emphasizing or de-emphasizing them. They may influence the organization of information in memory, for instance the overall structure of mental models, or the relations between mental models and attitudes or ideologies.

Although at all these levels, many structures of expression, form, meaning, and action are involved in the political enactment of racism and anti-racism, as well as in influencing social cognition underlying such racism and its reproduction, some appear more typical and more interesting than others. Some categories of analysis can only be practically applied in the study of small fragments of debates (such as syntactic structure, local coherence or local interaction), whereas others may be applied also to whole debates or collections of debates (such as topics, overall schemata and topoi).

6. References

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