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Parliamentary heckling in the Austrian National Council

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Zwischenrufe aus dem Plenum gehören in Österreich zum Standardrepertoire parlamentarischer Kommunikation. Nicht selten finden die schillerndsten Einwürfe auch den Weg in die Medien und zeichnen dort ein bisweilen zweifelhaftes Bild der Streitkultur im Parlament. Doch woran entzündeten sich die Wortwechsel im Plenum? In einem ersten Schritt werden mit Hilfe des textanalytischen und empirisch-sozialwissenschaftlichen Instrumentariums jene Themen und Sachlagen erhoben, die besonders kritisch debattiert werden (van Dijk 1980; Früh 2004; Merten 1995). Da parteilich motivierte Reizwörter Auslöser für semantische Scharmützel sein können, wird in einem zweiten Schritt die Wirkung jener Wörter gemessen, um die ein semantischer Wettstreit in der Politik geführt wird (Klein 1991, 2005; Böke *et al.* 1996; Keller 1977). Zuletzt können Zwischenrufe als Teil spezifischer Gesprächsmuster aus Zug und Gegenzug betrachtet werden, daher wird in einem dritten Schritt nach spezifischen Gesprächsmustern in den kurzen Wortwechseln gesucht (Goffman 1955, 1986; Rehbein 1972). Als Datengrundlage dienen die stenographischen Protokolle von drei Sitzungstagen des österreichischen Nationalrats aus dem Jahr 2007. Die Ergebnisse der Analyse weisen dabei auf einen groben Regiefehler im politischen Schaustück des Parlaments hin, denn inszeniert wird weniger eine sachliche Debatte als vielmehr ein von gegenseitigem Misstrauen getragener Beziehungsstreit.

Stichwörter: Parlamentsdebatte, Zwischenrufe, Textlinguistik, Inhaltsanalyse, politische Semantik, korrektive Prozesse

1. Introduction

In modern democracies, political strategies are inextricably linked to communicative strategies (Hombach 1991): parties try to win public opinion over to their respective ideas, either by proposing new policies or by legitimizing political measures which have already been enacted, but need to be explained and justified (Dieckmann 1981). During the sittings of the Austrian National Council, opposing political views clash head-on, as each party aspires to present itself as favourably as possible to the media and to the voters, while at the same time trying to weaken its political opponents. Within the framework of the debates in the Austrian parliament, heckling is an illegitimate, yet common means of commenting on the (provocative) monologue of the speaker – even though the constant interruptions seem to contradict the basic notion of communicative fair play. Since the most offensive interjections, especially those that break with conventions of political correctness, are usually made public by the media, parliamentary debating habits appear to be inconsistent with the stereotypical image of parliament as a forum for the objective discussion of impending problems.

The latent public pleasure in ribald political interjections is reflected in several publications that have collected the funniest and most unusual statements within the parliamentary setting (among others: Kuhn 2003; Aubauer 2001) – thus presenting parliamentary debates as some sort of stand-up comedy. Linguistic contributions to the field of parliamentary heckling have focused on the categorization of parliamentary interjections (Burkhardt 2004; van der Valk 2000; Hitzler 1990), examined the dialogic structure of the exchanges between lectern and plenary (Zima *et al.* 2010; Shenav 2008; Kühn 1995), and reflected on the function of heckles within the social framework of the debates (Kipke 1995; Sebaldt 1995). The comparison of national heckling habits on the basis of various linguistic studies basically suggests different parliamentary debating cultures that range from highly competitive settings, as e.g. in Mexico (Carbó 1992), to almost uninterrupted parliamentary sessions, as e.g. in Switzerland (Steiner 2006).

In general, heckles can be defined as verbal back-channel behaviour by the listeners of monologic texts within spoken large-group communication (Burkhardt 2005: 92). Parliamentary interjections are therefore essentially reactive as they comment upon a preceding verbal or non-verbal contribution (see also Spranz-Fogasy 1986). In an effort to add to the existing research on heckling, the present analysis attempts to uncover the communicative prerequisites that lead to heckle and to assess their influence on the overall impression of parliament as a place for objective discussion (see also Stopfner 2013). In doing so, an interdisciplinary approach is applied: On the one hand, the paper draws on text linguistics, political semantics and conversation analysis, in order to describe the interdependencies between the micro- and macro-level of speech. On the other hand, quantitative tools from the social sciences are used to translate qualitative linguistic results into empirical data, thereby stressing the strong relationship between political science and political linguistics, from which both can profit.

2. Methodology

The analysis is based on the stenographic transcripts of the sittings available online on the Austrian parliament's website. From 35 sittings of the Austrian National Council in the year 2007, three sittings were chosen as relevant random sample based on an online software-program (www.randomizer.org): the 14th sitting on March 7th 2007, the 20th sitting on April 24th 2007 and the 28th sitting on July 5th 2007. The respective transcripts contain 685 pages within which 1271 parliamentary interruptions were found and analysed.

As social actors are not “performing one-thing-at-a-time”, but “perform many higher-level actions simultaneously by attending to them to different degrees” (Norris 2006: 402), the analysis is conceived as a multi-level framework based on four hypotheses: (1) certain kinds of debates favour heckles;

(2) statements which might cause political damage to a party will be interrupted; (3) party-specific manipulation of essential keywords can trigger off semantic skirmishes; (4) interjections are part of corrective sequences which root in the contribution of the speaker.

In order to discern those topics that are discussed most controversially, the analysis builds on van Dijk's (1980) hierarchy of text structure, distinguishing between the super-, macro- and mesostructure of the debates: The superstructure of the debates – which provides “global 'form' to the macrostructural 'content' (van Dijk 1980: V) – is given by the communicative regulations of the Austrian parliament's standing order (Parlamentsdirektion, 2009); the macrostructural content is preordained by the items on the parliamentary agenda; the relevant mesostructure is tied to the propositional level of the exchange between speaker and heckler. Furthermore, in an attempt to give quantitative substance to the linguistic results, the qualitative text analysis is enriched by means of empirical content analysis as proposed by Früh (2004) and Merten (1995). In order to translate text into data, macro- and mesostructural content is therefore not merely paraphrased, but subsumed under a limited number of thematic categories that can be counted and compared: Relevant categories on the macro-level are defined by the items on the agenda of the respective sitting; since speakers in parliament are confined to speak to the topic, mesostructural content can be categorized as either dealing with the policy issue at hand or the people, parties and institutions involved or finally as skipping to the meta-communicative level.

Following in the line of traditional semantics on political communication (Klein 1991, 2005; Böke *et al.* 1996; Keller 1977), the focus is then laid on political wording as a trigger for parliamentary heckling. Political wording has always been and still is one of the main areas of "Politolinguistik" (Burkhardt 1996: 75), i.e. political linguistics, as power over language is equated with power over words which is considered to be fundamental to power over people (Girnth 2002). Central to the understanding of political wording is the inherent ideological polysemy of certain words that are used by different political parties in line with their own semantic interpretation (Dieckmann 2005). In the horserace of political campaigning, parties quibble over central terms in order to give their ideas a basic head start in the mind of the electorate. According to Eroms (1996), politicians are therefore compelled to hackle over words – even more so, if they are provoked. Based on the idea that politicians will fight over important catchwords as they are a lead to political power, the analysis tries to offer evidence for the political struggle over words through parliamentary heckling, assuming that whenever speakers are actively interfering with the semantic content of a given word in their favour, they will be interrupted by the audience. In order to analyse the political quibble over words more systematically, the analysis adopts Klein's model of word manipulation (1991,

2005) which outlines the basic strategies which parties and politicians may use to interfere with the relevant political vocabulary: Politicians and/or parties can coin new terms; they can stress a certain aspect while neglecting others (i.e. party-specific predication); they can reinterpret central, yet old-fashioned catchwords; they can attribute positive or negative value to party-specific keywords or other relevant terms, and they can use (positive) associations to ensure their own position, while trying to give their opponent a dressing-down.

However, the basic concept of politics to favour one's own ideas while dismantling the opposing point of view violates the social norm of respecting the integrity of each other – i.e. runs counter to the rules of face-work (Goffman 1955, 1986; Brown & Levinson 2004). In this light, heckles can be considered as part of a corrective process in which the communicative behaviour of the speaker at the lectern constitutes the initial offensive move. According to Goffman (1986), interlocutors who are afraid of losing their face or are threatened by the face of others will defend their image while trying to end the conflict as such by initiating a corrective sequence. Brown and Levinson (2004: 61) elaborate on Goffman's face-concept and distinguish between positive and negative face: Positive face is defined as the interactants' "positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of)", while negative face is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition". In search for typical patterns within the speech-interjection sequences, the analysis combines Goffman's (1955, 1986) concept of corrective processes with Rehbein's (1972) categorization of reproach-justification sequences which identifies several subcategories of reproach: reproaches that identify a culprit (blame, suspect), reproaches that refer to a given situation (take offence), reproaches that comment on a given action (criticize) and finally reproaches that compare actions and/or situations with their context (reproach proper). Rehbein's subcategories were, however, complemented by adding a positive dimension, i.e. blame vs. appreciate, suspect vs. credit, take offence vs. approve, criticize vs. praise and reproach proper vs. emphasize.

3. Communicative regulation in the Austrian parliament

Contrary to common belief, parliamentary debates in Austria do not serve to convince the political opponent. In fact, the political measures discussed in the National Council have long been decided upon in the respective National Council committees before the parliamentary sitting even begins (Nick & Pelinka 1996). The sole purpose of the public debates in the Austrian parliament is to inform the citizens about the parties' views and respective line of argumentation (see also Kipke 1995).

In order to give every party a fair chance to speak to and be heard by the public (see also Shenav 2008), the members of parliament have to obey to the debating norms which are written down in the standing order of the Austrian parliament (Parlamentsdirektion, 2009): The issues which are to be discussed are fixed beforehand and put on the parliament's agenda; if speakers digress from the topic on the agenda, they are called to order and can ultimately lose their right to speak; the duration of the parliamentary speeches is fixed in advance and mainly depends on the size of the respective parliamentary group who is about to speak; the order in which the speakers are called to the lectern reflects the importance of the respective speaker and at the same time follows a pseudo-natural line of discussion alternating between pro and contra argumentation; direct replies to the speaker are only possible, if the statements are proved incorrect and need to be rectified.

As contributions at the lectern need to be applied for in advance, parliamentary heckling (together with applause, laughter or other non-verbal contributions) is basically the only way to comment directly upon what is being said at the lectern. Heckling is therefore first of all a communicative consequence of parliamentary debating norms. Table 1 provides an overview of the debates and items on the agenda of the three sittings which were analysed for the present study together with the number of interjections in relation to the duration of the respective debate.

The majority of the debates in the Austrian National Council deal with proposed government bills. Debates like these start off with the report of the respective National Council committee (e.g. report of the transport committee on the proposed change to the Motor Vehicles Act) which is then commented upon by the opposition. Different forms of debates include issues of point of order, short debates, urgent questions and question time.

Issues of point of order reflect on formal aspects of the debate at hand, they need not be supported and are dealt with immediately (Parlamentsdirektion, 2009). Motions of point of order most often concern the present speaker and decide whether his/her communicative behaviour at the lectern must be sanctioned or not. Since direct replies are officially not allowed even though the following decision influences the right to speak in public, the discussion between speaker, audience and the presiding President of the National Council is effected through heckles. During the debate on the point of order concerning the absence of Federal Minister Johannes Hahn – a debate which is characterized by unremitting heckling (21 interjections in 10 minutes) – the President of the National Council Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek who is actually in charge of keeping order is herself accused of violating parliamentary norms as can be seen in the following excerpt (1):

(1) *Präsidentin Dr. Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek* [Grüne]: [...] *Ich werde versuchen, mich jedenfalls in aller Striktheit an die Geschäftsordnung zu halten. Ich bitte nun trotzdem um Ruhe! – Das wird nachbesprochen.* (Abg. Steibl [ÖVP]: *Schwacher Vorsitz!*)

("President of the National Council Dr. Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek [Greens]: [...] In any case, I will try to adhere to the standing orders very strictly. Nevertheless, I would like to ask you now to be quiet! – We will talk about it later. (MP Steibl [Austrian People's Party]: Weak presidency!)" 14th sitting, 2007: 57)

Item on the agenda	Number of interjections	Duration of the debate	Number of interjections per hour
Report of the Eurofighter committee	327	3h 50min	85,3
Urgent question: Censoring of files needed by the Eurofighter committee	241	2h 30min	96,4
Budget Act 2007 and Healthcare and Food Security Act	159	5h 30min	28,9
Urgent question: Lacking measures concerning the situation of women	93	2h 30min	37,2
Market Organisation Act, Agriculture Act	70	1h 35min	44,2
Provisional budget	51	1h 30min	34,0
Measures against binge drinking among minors	35	1h 55min	18,3
Short debate: Government's reply concerning the withdrawal from the Eurofighter contract	34	45min	45,3
Green Electricity Act	32	1h 15min	25,6
Short debate: Call for new elections	28	35min	48,0
Student Act and Student Union Act	26	1h	26,0
Question time: Women, media and public service	25	1h	25,0
Measures against cyber crime	23	1h 10min	19,7
Point of order: Absence of Federal Minister Hahn	21	10min	126,0
Animal Welfare Act and Animal Transport Act	14	1h 35min	8,8
Conditional release from detention	13	50 min	15,6
International rail transport, Koralm railway, ÖBB reform	11	50 min	13,2
Ban on imports for seal products	11	55 min	12,0
Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement	9	25min	21,6
Consular Fees Act	8	40min	12,0
Short debate: Government's reply concerning the share of women in the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra	8	40min	12,0
Disaster Fund Act and Flood Victim Compensation and Reconstruction Act	8	1h 10min	6,9
Point of order: Topical context within debate on Market Organisation Act	7	5min	84,0
Amnesty, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act	6	25min	14,4
Motor Vehicles Act	5	25min	12,0
Income Tax Act	4	15min	16,0
Carriage of Hazardous Goods Act	1	15min	4,0
Pesticides Act	1	25min	2,4
Total	1271	34h 10min	37,2

Table 1: Number of interjections per debate

Short debates are generally characterized by shorter speaking times and are confined to the discussion of written replies by the government, calls for new elections and motions for the appointment of temporary committees for parliamentary inquiries (Parlamentsdirektion, 2009) – which basically makes this form of debate a means for the opposition to put the government on the spot. The poignant controversy of oppositional motion and governmental defence is reflected in the frequency of parliamentary heckles: The short debate on the government's reply concerning the withdrawal from the Eurofighter contract and the short debate concerning the call for new elections are accompanied by a minimum average of about 45.3 interjections per hour.

Similarly, urgent questions can also be considered as a tool for oppositional parties to question the government about current events. But contrary to short debates, urgent questions provide ample time to extend on the given topic granting the responsible mover of the motion a maximum speaking time of twenty minutes (Parlamentsdirektion, 2009). During this prolonged speaking time, illegitimate interjections are the only means to parry the attacks by the speaker. The two urgent questions which were put forward by the opposition in the three analysed sittings actually rank among the most controversially discussed items on the agenda: the urgent question on the censoring of files for the Eurofighter committee counting an average of 96.4 interjections per hour and the urgent question on lacking measures concerning the situation of women counting an average of 37.2 interjections per hour.

Finally, during question time, a member of government has to answer the questions put forward by the members of parliament. Question time therefore offers an ideal stage for promoting as well as dismantling the government's positions. However, contrary to the urgent question on lacking measures concerning the situation of women, the topically related question time on women, media and public service only contains 25.0 interjections per hour. One reason for the decreased number of interjections can be found in the reduced time allotted to the speaker: Contributions at the lectern are limited to three minutes, thus providing less opportunity to interrupt. What is more, question time allows for additional questions in response to the answer given by the member of government queried, thereby constructing a more natural exchange of pros and cons which might also reduce the need for interjections.

4. Dealing with tricky topics

Taking a closer look at the topics on the agenda of the National Council in 2007 (cf. Table 1), two items take indisputably the lead as far as the number of interjections is concerned: the report of the Eurofighter committee with a total of 327 interjections and the urgent question dealing with the censoring of files needed by the Eurofighter committee with 241 interjections.

The acquisition of the Eurofighter jet by the old government consisting of the conservative Austrian People's Party and the right-wing Freedom party and the Alliance for the Future of Austria, respectively, had come under growing scrutiny in 2007 as the involved politicians were suspected of corruption. The committee was supposed to shed light on the political decision-making process, but eventually it did not do so due to coalitional constraints of the new government, consisting of the Austrian People's Party and the Social Democrats, the former oppositional party. The Eurofighter committee was a central topic for the opposition, as the parliamentary debates provided an ideal stage for gaining political ground, especially in view of the heightened media interest. Contrary to the politically delicate debates around the Eurofighter, a topic such as the ban on imports for seal products – which is unlikely to gain high media interest and has little to offer as far as party profile is concerned – is only met with 12.0 interruptions per hour, compared to 85.3 interjections per hour during the debate on the report of the Eurofighter committee.

Due to the communicative regulations in the Austrian National Council that force representatives to adhere to the given topic, speeches as well as heckles show recurring propositional patterns on the mesostructural level which can be subsumed under the following general categories: (1) Contributions in the Austrian parliament can deal with the given item on the agenda as a policy issue, e.g. describing the status quo or focussing on the consequences of a proposed bill; the speaker or heckler can furthermore reflect on those involved in the issue, either because they are affected by or responsible for the given situation and/or the measures proposed or taken; relevant protagonists can be categorised as (2) people such as individual politicians, (3) political parties or (4) institutions; finally, the speaker or heckler can also chose to switch to the meta-communicative level and (5) comment on a point of order or (6) ponder on the way politicians should or should not speak in parliament. The following table (table 2) relates the topic of the speaker to the topic of the respective heckler:

Speaker refers to ...	Heckler refers to ... (in percent of * interjections)					
	Policy	Person	Party	Institution	Point of order	Manner of speech
Policy (*296)	35.8	11.8	11.1	0.7	0.7	39.9
Person (*198)	5.6	42.9	8.6	0	2.5	40.4
Party (*183)	8.2	14.2	32.8	2.2	1.1	41.5
Manner of speech (*156)	4.5	25.0	4.5	0	3.2	62.8
Point of order (*62)	1.6	12.9	4.8	0	43.5	37.1
Institution (*46)	10.9	15.2	0	30.4	0	43.5

Table 2: Topic of speech and topic of respective heckle

On the mesostructural level, two main tendencies can be discerned: The heckler either follows the topical lead of the speaker (i.e. he/she grabs the conversational thread proposed by the speaker and adds to it), or he/she switches to the meta-communicative level, which actually seems to be a more appealing communicative move than discussing the given item on the agenda. In the following example (2), the speech deals with the Muslim headscarf which the speaker interprets in a way that is considered as *schwer bedenklich* ("highly questionable") by the heckler:

- (2) *Abg. Dr. Belakowitsch-Jenewein [FPÖ]: [...] Für uns ist das [Kopftuch] ein Symbol der Unterdrückung der Frau. (Beifall und Bravorufe bei der FPÖ.) Ein Symbol der Unterdrückung, das in einem Europa des 21. Jahrhunderts nichts mehr verloren hat. (Abg. Heinisch-Hosek [SPÖ]: Menschenrechtlich schwer bedenklich, was Sie da tun!)*
- ("MP Dr. Belakowitsch-Jenewein [Austrian Freedom Party]: [...] For us, it [headscarf] is a symbol of the suppression of women (Applause and cheers by the Austrian Freedom Party). It is a symbol of suppression that we don't need any longer in Europe in the 21st century. (MP Heinisch-Hosek [Social Democrats]: As far as human rights are concerned, what you are doing is highly questionable.)" 14th sitting, 2007: 98)

When hecklers comment on the way things are said in parliament, their points of criticism can again be categorized along the Gricean (1975) maxims of conversation, i.e. along the maxims of quality, manner, relation and quantity: All in all, 60.7 per cent of all meta-communicative interjections (n = 450 meta-communicative interjections) criticize the quality of the speech, i.e. the truthfulness of the speaker, and 28.0 per cent concern the manner in which the speaker presents his/her arguments, i.e. blaming the speaker to be obscure, not stating outright, what he/she actually has to say; 5.6 per cent refer to the maxim of relation, i.e. claiming the speaker's contribution to be relevant or irrelevant, and 2.7 per cent criticize the speaker in terms of the maxim of quantity, i.e. providing too much or too less information. 3.1 per cent deal with situational aspects such as the audibility of the speaker (e.g. *Schreien Sie nicht so!* "Don't scream!" 20th sitting, 2007: 150) or him/her reaching the limits of his/her speaking time (e.g. *Redezeit ist aus!* "Speaking time is over!" 28th sitting, 2007: 191). All in all, the impression given by the hecklers in the audience is that the speakers at the lectern are not as honest as they should be.

5. Semantic quibbles

As far as strategic word manipulation is concerned, the results show that devaluation (i.e. commenting negatively upon something or someone) is most vehemently opposed by the audience: In 48.3 per cent of all instances of a speaker interfering with political wording (n = 841 instances within debates), he/she is interrupted while depreciating something or someone.

In 25.0 per cent of all cases of word manipulation within (interrupted) speech, the heckler responds to party-specific predication, as speakers try to highlight certain aspects favourable to the party's line of thought while skipping those which might have been compatible with the opponents' point of view. In the following excerpt (3) the speaker of the Austrian Freedom Party tries to interpret the notorious alcohol consumption in right-wing fraternities as an aid to education:

- (3) *Abg. Zanger [FPÖ]: [...] Es gibt auch keine Trinkrituale bei uns [Burschenschaften], sondern bei uns passiert genau das: Der vernünftige Umgang mit Alkohol wird den Jugendlichen dort schon anerzogen. (Beifall bei der FPÖ. – Abg. Öllinger [Grüne]: Drum gibt's Freibier auf der Bude!)*

("MP Zanger [Austrian Freedom Party]: [...] We [i.e. fraternities] do not have drinking rituals either, but what happens is: Minors learn how to handle alcohol in a reasonable way (Applause from the Austrian Freedom Party. – MP Öllinger [Greens]: That's why they have free beer at their place!)" 28th sitting, 2007: 158)

Presenting something or someone in too good a light is also met with criticism: 23.8 per cent of all heckles can be seen as a reaction to positive evaluation, as exemplified in the following example (4):

- (4) *Abg. Mag. Stadler [FPÖ]: [...] Meine Damen und Herren! Hohes Haus! Das waren acht Monate gelebter Parlamentarismus, wie er in einer normalen westlichen Demokratie Usus ist. (Abg. Rädler [ÖVP]: Acht Monate Selbstdarstellung von Stadler!)*

("MP Mag. Stadler [Austrian Freedom Party]: [...] Ladies and gentlemen! High Chamber! These eight months have seen real-live parliamentarianism, as it is customary in normal Western democracies. (MP Rädler [Austrian People's Party]: Eight months of Stadler's self-portrayal!)" 28th sitting, 2007: 65)

But what does the speaker positively or negatively commented upon? Table 3 gives an overview of the basic word categories which were actively manipulated within speech and explicitly referred to in the following heckle:

Word category	Number of heckles with explicit reference to word categories within speech	Percentage of all heckles explicitly referring to word categories within speech
Pronoun	239	25.0%
Specialist term	165	17.3%
Everyday language	162	17.0%
Name	101	10.6%
Catchword	68	7.1%
Group of words	45	4.7%
Figure	38	4.0%
Other	137	14.3%
Total	955	100%

Table 3: Heckling in the wake of word manipulation within the contribution of the speaker

The results show that the explicit manipulation of central catchwords is far less controversial than initially expected: Catchwords are not so much in the centre

of the dispute as they are ammunition to manipulate other words by means of association, as can be seen in the following example (5) taken from the debate on the acquisition of the Eurofighter jet:

(5) *Abg. Dr. Pilz [Grüne]: [...] Es geht nicht um Kleinigkeiten, es geht um 2 Milliarden €! Wir stehen kurz davor, diese 2 Milliarden € aus dem Bundesbudget für ganz andere Investitionen in die Zukunft Österreichs zu retten. Wir können 2 Milliarden € retten für Klimaschutz, für Bildungspolitik, für die Finanzierung von Grundsicherung, für all das, das Sie beschwören, aber nicht finanzieren können. (Abg. Dr. Stummvoll [ÖVP]: Sicherheit brauchen wir nicht!)*

("MP Dr. Pilz [Greens]: [...] It is not about a small matter, it is about 2 thousand million euros! We are on the brink of saving 2 thousand million euros for the future of Austria. We can save 2 thousand million euros for climate protection, for education, for financing basic social security, for all those things that you come up with, but cannot finance. (MP Dr. Stummvoll [Austrian People's Party]: Security, we don't need that!)" 20th sitting, 2007: 136)

25.0 per cent of the words that stand at the centre of the strategic manipulation by the speaker and are commented upon by the parliamentary heckler are pronouns. Pronouns are thus the most disputed word category. They predominantly refer to people, parties and institutions that speakers want to evaluate – a communicative move which the heckler objects to. In the following example (6), the speaker of the Alliance for the Future of Austria contrasts the lacking merit of the new governmental party (i.e. the Social Democrats) referred to by the pronoun *Sie* ("you") with the achievements of the old government indicated by the pronoun *wir* ("we") in combination with the term of office *von 2000 bis 2006* ("from 2000 to 2006"):

(6) *Abg. Dolinschek [BZÖ]: [...] Sie setzen sich sozusagen an den gedeckten Tisch, den wir von 2000 bis 2006 aufbereitet haben. (Abg. Broukal [SPÖ]: Sie machen das sicher besser!)*

("MP Dolinschek [Alliance for the Future of Austria]: [...] You are sitting down to a set table that we have prepared from 2000 to 2006. (MP Broukal [Social Democrats]: You are surely better at it!)" 20th sitting, 2007: 75)

Finally, a considerable number of specialist terms and elements of everyday language can be found at the core of the political quibble over words, each having a minimum share of 17.0 per cent. Specialist terms mainly concern parliamentary dealings and therefore figure frequently in meta-communicative interactions, e.g. *Geschäftsordnung* ("point of order") or *Antrag* ("motion"). The high share of everyday language reflects the basic nature of political vocabulary which is not as much specialist as it is oriented towards the common electorate.

6. Heckling as corrective process

Instances where the speaker's behaviour does not coincide with social norms and threatens the image of others (Brinker & Sager 2006) trigger off a corrective sequence that seeks to reinstall the communicative balance (Goffman 1986). Ideally, the offensive incident is pointed out by means of a

priming action in which the offended person challenges the speaker who then offers an apology which the offended interlocutor accepts – thus solving the conflict (Goffman 1986). However, two thirds of the spoken interjection sequences end with the first priming action, i.e. the speaker at the lectern does not respond to the interjection made by the audience. In these cases, parliamentary heckling can be considered as verbal backchannel behaviour mostly marking dissent.

In one third of all priming actions, i.e. heckles, the exchange evolves into a mini-dialogue between the speaker and the heckler. In order to describe the verbal exchange between lectern and plenum more closely, the analysis adapts Rehbein's (1972) categorization of reproach-justification sequences. Table 4 provides an overview of the most frequent speech acts by speakers and by hecklers:

Speech acts in speech followed by an interruption (N = 1276 speech acts)		Speech acts in first interjection (N = 991 speech acts)		Speech acts in speech as reaction to the interjection (N = 382 speech acts)	
reproach proper	13.6%	take offence	16.7%	reproach proper	10.5%
take offence	11.2%	criticize	8.1%	blame	9.2%
criticize	10.3%	ridicule	6.5%	take offence	7.3%
emphasize	7.1%	enquire	5.7%	criticize	7.3%
interpret	6.7%	blame	5.5%	justify	6.5%
blame	6.7%	object	4.4%	challenge	6.3%
suspect	6.1%	agree	4.3%	ridicule	6.3%
inform	5.3%	dismiss	3.9%	suspect	6.0%
approve	4.1%	correct	3.6%	emphasize	5.0%
praise	4.0%	reproach proper	3.6%	correct	2.9%
other	25.1%	other	37.6%	other	32.7%
Total	100%	Total	100%	Total	100%

Table 4: Most frequent speech acts in the contributions of speakers and hecklers

The spoken interjection sequences most often start off with a subcategory of reproach from the part of the speaker who utters a reproach proper (13.6 per cent), takes offence (11.2 per cent), criticizes (10.3 per cent) or even explicitly blames (6.7 per cent) or suspects (6.1 per cent) a certain party, politician and/or institution. Since reproaches in general reflect negatively on the opponent's image and may ultimately harm his/her reputation in the eyes of the electorate, they can be considered as face-threatening acts in view of the "public positive face" (Gruber 1993: 3) of the politician and his/her party. But also the vaingloriousness of the speaker can evoke the discontent of the audience: Contributions which emphasize that the measures taken or proposed are well suited in view of the given situation (7.1 per cent) or that openly praise certain actions (4.0 per cent) rank among the top ten speech acts that are followed by heckles.

In sum, parliamentary hecklers for the most part react to some form of face-threatening act by the speaker and try to initiate a corrective sequence: 16.7 per cent of the speech acts from the audience are instances of explicitly taking offence either in what the speaker has to say or in the way he/she says it, as the following example (7) illustrates:

(7) *Abg. Mag. Ikrath [ÖVP]: [...] Ich sage Ihnen noch etwas – auch daran ist Ihre Fraktion beteiligt –: Wenn wir das Bankgeheimnis, das keinen Durchbruchstatbestand für einen parlamentarischen Untersuchungsausschuss darstellt – oder? Geben Sie mir da recht? (Abg. Sburny [Grüne]: Das ist ein fürchterlicher Unsinn, was Sie da sagen! Das ist reine Hetze, was Sie betreiben!)*

("MP Mag. Ikrath [Austrian People's Party]: [...] And I tell you this – that's also something your parliamentary group is taking part in – : If confidentiality in banking cannot be broken by a parliamentary committee – right? Do you agree with me? (MP Sburny [Greens]: What you are saying is complete nonsense! You are propagating mere rabble-rousing propaganda!)" 20th sitting, 2007: 162)

Since face-threatening acts are a violation against the (supposedly) cooperative basis of the debate, the reproach by the heckler expects a redeeming action by the speaker. However, when faced with parliamentary heckling, the speaker at the lectern does not adhere to the common reproach-sequence, as he/she justifies him/herself only in 6.5 per cent of all cases and he/she also almost never apologizes (0.5 per cent). Instead, the speaker is likely to reproach (10.5 per cent), blame (9.2 per cent), take offence (7.3 per cent) or criticize (7.3 per cent) others, especially the heckler, thereby aggravating the conflict even more.

Although reproaches in all their different shapes (i.e. blame, take offence, reproach proper etc.) have to be considered counter-productive, since they hinder the free consent of all parties involved (Kopperschmidt 1975), they are evidently a common feature within the spoken interaction sequences, because they are a means to defend one's interests in the face of negative actions, opinions or competing interests (Fritz & Hundsnurscher 1975). If heckling is to be considered as corrective process, the prototypical sequence has to be adapted to the conversational prerequisites of political debates, which can be subsumed under the following leitmotiv: Present your own position favorably while claiming the adversary's to be insupportable (Klein 1996)! Under normal circumstances, speakers will avoid face-threatening acts as conversational pitfalls in the first place; in politics, however, the aggressive use of face-work is common ground and making points the ultimate goal.

7. Conclusion

According to Kopperschmidt (1975), social action is essentially cooperative, i.e. based on the mutual agreement on a common goal of those involved. Following his line of thought, dissent is to be considered as an impediment for achieving this agreement. Ideally, the task of the members of parliament is to

convince their political opponents through persuasive argumentation thus dissolving the inherent dissent (Kopperschmidt 1975). Debates in the Austrian National Council are, however, only stage-managed as an idealized discussion: They pretend to be a dialogic argument to attain a mutual consent, while in fact they are a forum for political parties to win over public opinion. That is why topics which represent a threat to one party and, at the same time, a political opportunity for another are debated most controversially, i.e. are accompanied by unremitting heckling. What is more, the controversy between speaker and audience does not revolve around a party-specific catchword, but centres on the evaluation of people, parties and institutions. As a rule, criticism from the part of the audience is seldom met with a justification and is almost never followed by an apology, but is parried with some kind of reproach which makes the communicative conflict even worse. Because of the preference for reproach-reproach sequences, parliamentary disputes between lectern and audience resemble common arguments (Schwitalla 1987) rather than objective discussions of relevant matters. All in all, it seems as if the aspect of relation and face is more important in the Austrian parliament than the aspect of information (Watzlawick *et al.* 1974).

According to Sarcinelli (1990), political controversies are central to democratic systems as they do not aim at the assimilation of conflicting interests, but seek to provide a mutually accepted pathway to fight out political differences in a well-ordered and civilized way on the grounds of minimal consent. The facts are, of course, different, as political self-portrayal keeps the upper-hand as the dominant intention behind public political communication (Volmert 1989). In the vicinity of the spoken interjection sequences, the flaw within the staging of the debates in parliament becomes evident: What is seen on the parliamentary stage is not so much an objective discussion of important matters within a debate rooted in mutual respect which the electorate stereotypically expects; the members of parliament moreover act out a highly subjective personal argument with the sole aim of trying to hit where it hurts. In view of the constant and omnipresent political quarrelling made public through the media, politics however forfeits its function as point of reference (Walter & Lühmann 2010) and subsequently its credibility. Yet, the more people lack in trust for the democratic system and its protagonists, the less they are willing to excuse personal cuts (Decker 2000), which due to the Economic crises have become almost inevitable. In the long run, the legitimacy of the political system can thus lose its footing (Decker 2000) – leaving ample space for political groups eager to fill the void with simple answers and a strong leading hand.

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