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Resistance to metaphor in parliamentary debates

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Chapter 2

“I did not say that the Government should be plundering anybody’s savings”. Resistance to metaphors expressing starting points in parliamentary debates¹

Abstract

This paper examines how politicians employ metaphors to express starting points in British parliamentary debates. Because these metaphors are conceptual tools that may have presuppositions and entailments that are not in line with the ideas and values of all discussion parties, political opponents can resist them by advancing argumentative criticisms. This paper aims to explore how different types of metaphor can be used to express starting points, and how various types of responses can be instrumental to achieving diverging outcomes in the discussion stage at which starting points are commonly decided. To this end, we present a number of case studies of resistance to metaphorically expressed starting points found in British Public Bill Committee debates. Our analysis reveals that metaphors can be important strategies in parliamentary debates when starting points are established between parties, and that resisting them seems to be a pertinent skill.

2.1 Introduction

In British parliamentary debates, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Lords are given the opportunity to discuss government policies and proposals for new legislation. In these debates, opposition parties fulfil their role of holding the Government to account, whereas the Government fulfils its duty to defend and justify its policies. Opposition parties hence criticise the Government by means of argumentation, while the Government is expected to defend itself against these criticisms and to counterattack the Opposition.

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Such argumentative exchanges in parliamentary debates are typically based on shared assumptions between discussion parties. These assumptions are known in argumentation theory as ‘starting points’, which either relate to the debate rules or to the concessions on the basis of which a standpoint will be defended (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 60). When discussion parties establish the starting points for a debate, they try to balance achieving clarity concerning these starting points with the aim to establish starting points that serve the discussant’s interests best (Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 44). Not uncommonly, metaphor and resistance to metaphor may come into play in such balancing attempts. Framing a starting point in metaphorical terms can introduce a perspective on the issue under discussion that is favourable to the speaker. Other discussants might want to resist such a metaphorically expressed starting point to create a point of departure that is more beneficial to them. It is the aim of this study to explore this phenomenon to shed more light on the intricacies of the language of politics from a new perspective, combining argumentation theory with metaphor theory in a new way.

A typical example can be found in a British Public Bill Committee (henceforth: PBC) debate on the Welfare Reform Bill. In this discussion regarding the Government’s proposal to impose a savings cap on universal credit, opposition member Stephen Timms accuses government member George Hollingbery of suggesting that the Government should plunder the people’s savings:

(1) Stephen Timms:

The hon. Gentleman may take the view that plundering people’s savings is the kind of thing that the Government must do in these difficult circumstances, but I do not agree with that. [...]

George Hollingbery:

I did not say that the Government should be plundering anybody’s savings. The Government are not taking money from people; they are not providing money in lieu. There is a distinct and very real difference. It is about asset allocation in difficult times.

Timms presents his accusation as if it is generally accepted – i.e., as a starting point for the debate – that the Government’s proposal can be considered an act of plundering. The verb ‘to plunder’ in this context is a metaphor: it describes introducing a savings cap on universal credit in terms of taking valuable things from a place with force (cf. Praggeljaz Group, 2007). By implying that imposing a savings

cap on universal credit involves taking money from people, Timms aims to establish a point of departure for the debate that is favourable to his standpoint that such a savings cap should not be imposed. This is not, however, in the interest of the Government, which is in fact in favour of the proposal.

Consequently, Hollingbery rejects having said that the Government should plunder the people's savings as a starting point for the debate. He highlights the difference between plundering, which involves taking money from people, and the Government's proposal, which involves not giving money to people, hence resisting the metaphor advanced by Timms to create a point of departure for the debate that is more in line with the Government's goal of justifying introducing a savings cap on universal credit.

Whereas metaphors can be helpful conceptualising devices enabling the understanding of typically abstract, novel concepts (i.e., target domains) in terms of more concrete, familiar concepts (i.e., source domains) (e.g., Gibbs, 2008; Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), our example shows that they may also be exploited as argumentative strategies by framing proposals for a starting point in a way that is favourable to the speaker. However, these metaphors may have presuppositions and entailments that are not in line with the interests and values of all discussion parties. They may therefore elicit overt resistance by means of argumentative criticisms. While resisting metaphors expressing starting points is of great importance for politicians to establish a well-informed, unambiguous point of departure for the debate and to avoid talking at cross-purposes, the exploitation of metaphors expressing starting points has not been the object of any systematic research, let alone of research focusing on the resistance to these metaphors.

We will explore how different types of metaphor can be used to express starting points and demonstrate how different types of critical responses to these metaphors can be instrumental to achieving diverging outcomes in the debate. To this end, we first determine the argumentative moves that arguers can ideally make to establish starting points. These moves are outlined in a so-called 'dialectical profile' (Van Eemeren et al., 2007). Subsequently, we provide qualitative analyses of various cases taken from British PBC debates in which metaphorically expressed starting points are countered. To account for both the metaphorical properties, as well as the argumentative properties that are involved, we will use Steen's (2017) three-dimensional model of metaphor and Van Eemeren's (2018) pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation. By examining both the metaphorical aspects, as well as the argumentative aspects involved, a comprehensive account of resistance to metaphorically expressed starting points

will be provided, informing analysts of the forms and functions of metaphors expressing starting points and how they are resisted in parliamentary debates.

In the following section, we explain the institutional point of British PBC debates, and describe the roles that the different discussion parties fulfil in this type of debate. Section 2.3 describes our data and method. In section 2.4, we present the analyses of a number of cases in which metaphors expressing starting points are resisted in parliamentary debates.

2.2 British Public Bill Committee debates

In the UK, bills go through a number of set stages before both Houses agree on their final text. Each of these legislative stages fulfils a specific role in the process of scrutinising a bill. Committee stage is the third formal phase of the legislative process in the House of Commons, following the introduction of a bill at First Reading and a debate on its principles at Second Reading (UK Government Cabinet Office, 2015).

In PBC debates, a limited number of MPs is selected to scrutinise a bill in detail. More specifically, committee members examine each clause and schedule, debate amendments to clauses and schedules, and decide on the removal or insertion of new clauses and schedules (UK Government Cabinet Office, 2015). The central proposition under dispute in PBC debates is “[t]he clause should stand part of the Bill”. The Government, being responsible for introducing a bill, will typically assume a positive standpoint towards this proposition, and it is their duty to defend a bill against criticisms. Opposition parties, being institutionally expected to scrutinise the Government’s proposals for new legislation, will generally challenge the acceptability of a bill. Accordingly, they can either assume a negative standpoint towards the proposition at issue, or simply express doubt.

In addition to ‘clause-stand-part’ debates, amendments to clauses and schedules are also debated. These are typically tabled by opposition or backbench members, who will hence adopt a positive standpoint towards them. The Government is often reluctant to accept amendments in Committee (Thompson, 2013), and will accordingly adopt a negative standpoint towards them.

Since the proportion of members in PBC’s mirrors the political parties’ strengths in the House of Commons, there is always a government majority and the outcome of a debate will generally be in favour of the Government. Accordingly, clauses will usually stand part of the bill and amendments proposed by opposition and backbench members will typically not be accepted. It is hence not through voting on the acceptability of bills that the Opposition gets to control the Government but rather by means of argumentation, insofar as the Opposition

successfully convinces the electorate not to support the policies proposed by the Government and to present itself to the public as an alternative Government.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Data

The cases presented in this study are taken from the debates on the Welfare Reform Bill 2010-12 and the Education Bill 2010-11 at committee stage in the House of Commons. The materials have been retrieved from Hansard Online, which is the online version of the official report of all parliamentary debates in the UK, the printed Hansard archive. In our analyses we concentrate on three different cases, each uncovering different functions and effects of metaphors expressing starting points and the resistance against them.

2.3.2 Metaphor analysis

For the analysis of the metaphorical properties of the metaphors expressing starting points and the resistance they elicit, we employed the three-dimensional model of metaphor (Steen, 2011, 2017), in which three distinct dimensions of analysis are distinguished, namely language, thought, and communication.

First, we identified metaphor-related words that are used to express starting points by applying MIPVU (Metaphor Identification Procedure – Vrije Universiteit) (Steen et al., 2010; cf. Pragglejaz Group, 2007). This procedure sets out from the operational definition of metaphor as a “cross-domain mapping in thought” and identifies words as related to metaphor in thought by contrasting their contextual meaning with their basic meaning. The basic and contextual meaning are determined by a dictionary that is preferably usage-based. Following Steen et al. (2010), we used the online version of the MacMillan English Dictionary. The basic meaning of ‘to plunder’, used in the example in the Introduction, is “to take valuable things from a place using force, sometimes causing a lot of damage”. In the context of our example, however, ‘to plunder’ means “to take or use something that belongs to someone else in order to give yourself an advantage” (MacMillan), and is hence considered a metaphor-related word.

The MIPVU-procedure also allows for the identification of literally used words rendering metaphorical thought, as in the expression “teenage boys are like pigs”. Although the word ‘pigs’ in this example is not itself used metaphorically in the traditional sense of the word, there is still a cross-domain mapping involved in comparing teenage boys to pigs. In this way, the MIPVU-procedure does not only allow for identifying metaphor-related words, but also for specifying the type of metaphor that is used on a linguistic level (cf. Steen et al., 2010).

Metaphorical expressions in language are considered to be reflections of underlying conceptual structures in thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In other words, we use metaphorical language because we often understand one thing in terms of another. The analysis of the conceptual dimension of a metaphor involves determining whether the metaphorical concepts that are being compared are part of a conventional mapping, i.e., fixed parts in the conceptual system, or novel, i.e., newly invented metaphors that are not part of conventional patterns of cross-domain thought (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005; Gentner & Bowdle, 2001; Steen, 2011).

We consider a metaphor to be conventional when the contextual meaning of a metaphorical expression can be found in a corpus-based users' dictionary, as is the case for the verb 'to plunder', which we just discussed. As for the word 'pig' in our previous example, the second definition given by the MacMillan English Dictionary Online refers to someone who behaves in an unpleasant way, and this word is hence also labelled as a conventional metaphor. When the contextual meaning of a metaphorical expression cannot be found in the dictionary, we consider it to be novel.

For communication we make a distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors. This distinction is based on the question whether or not distinct attention is required to the source domain as a separate referential aspect of the meaning of an utterance. If the answer is yes, then the metaphor functions as a metaphor in the communication between sender and receiver and is regarded as deliberate (Steen, 2017). If it is not, then it is classified as a non-deliberate metaphor.

To determine if a metaphor is deliberate, we applied the Deliberate Metaphor Identification Procedure (DMIP) (Reijnierse et al., 2018). The operational definition that this method starts out from is: "a metaphor is potentially deliberate when the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used" (Reijnierse et al., 2018, p. 136). For instance, the metaphor-related word 'pig' in our previous example is potentially deliberate because, as a direct metaphor, the source domain is part of the referential meaning of the utterance (cf. Reijnierse et al., 2018).

2.3.3 Argumentation analysis

In pragma-dialectics, argumentation is viewed as "a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint" (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 1). For the analysis of the argumentative properties of metaphorically expressed

starting points and the resistance they elicit, the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation offers several useful theoretical tools: the ideal model of a critical discussion (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984), and the dialectical profile of the so-called 'opening stage' of a discussion, specifying the argumentative moves that can be made in this discussion stage (Van Eemeren et al., 2007).

The ideal model of a critical discussion describes how argumentative discourse would be structured if it was solely aimed at resolving a difference of opinion. The model spells out four stages that are necessary to come to a resolution of a dispute by means of critically testing the standpoint at issue: the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage, and the concluding stage.

As an analytical tool, the model serves as a template against which argumentative discourse as it occurs in reality can be compared to uncover the organisation of the argumentation. More specifically, a pragma-dialectical analysis of argumentative discourse involves the reconstruction of an authentic argumentative exchange in terms of the ideal model of a critical discussion, revealing the argumentative function of the different contributions made in a discussion. In this study, we focus in particular on those contributions made by committee members that are part of the so-called 'opening stage', in which starting points for a discussion are commonly established.

To establish which expressions count as metaphorically expressed starting points and which types of responses meet the criteria of being a form of resistance to such a starting point, we use the conceptual tool of a dialectical profile of the opening stage. This profile specifies the sequential pattern of moves that two discussants in a discussion can make (Van Eemeren et al., 2007, p. 90). The moves are relevant to the goal of the opening stage to unambiguously establish the starting points for the discussion. Van Eemeren et al. (2007, p. 90) present the following outline of the dialectical profile of the opening stage:

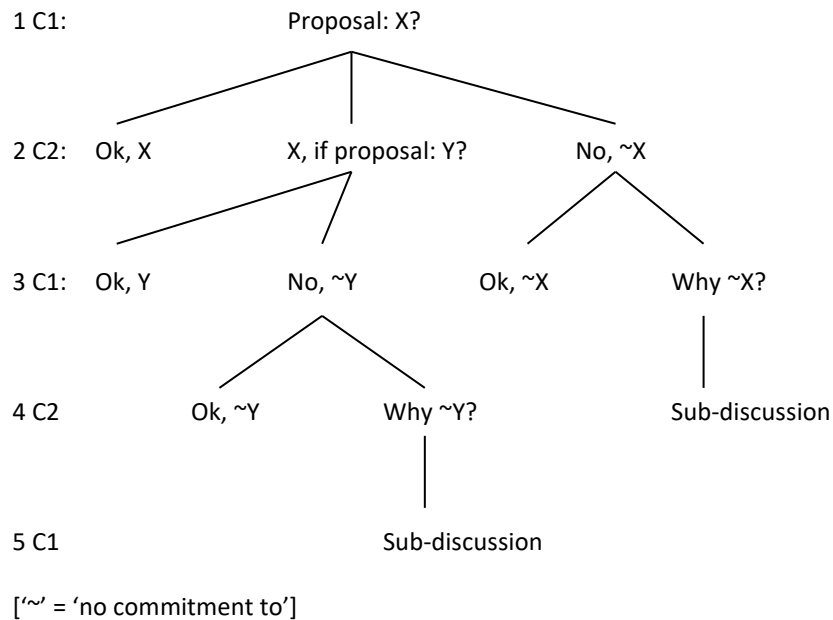


Figure 2.1 Dialectical core profile for establishing a starting point

A committee member (C1) can initiate the opening stage by suggesting to the other party that he/she should accept proposition X as a starting point for the discussion. The other discussion party (C2) can respond by accepting this proposal (OK, X), by conditionally accepting it (X, if proposal Y), or by rejecting it (No, ~X). In response to C2's proposal to accept X under the restriction of proposal Y, C1 can either accept (OK, Y) or reject (No, ~Y) the proposal. In case C1 rejects the proposal, C2 may respond by accepting the rejection (Ok, ~Y) or by questioning it (Why ~Y). When C2 rejects the proposal to regard proposal X as a starting point for the discussion, C1 can react by either accepting C2's rejection (OK, ~X) or by questioning C2's rejection (Why ~X).

Following the outlined sequential pattern of moves, five diverging outcomes in the opening stage can be obtained: proposal X is accepted as a starting point and the discussion stage ends (turn 2 and 4), proposal X is accepted under the restriction of proposal Y and the discussion stage ends (turn 3), proposal X is rejected as starting point and the discussion stage ends (turn 3), or the parties enter into a sub-discussion that centres around the issue whether or not to regard proposal X (turn 4) or the suggestion to restrict proposal X by proposal Y (turn 5) as a starting point. This outline indicates that there is one argumentative move that

an arguer can make in his/her reaction that we consider a form of resistance, namely the rejection of a proposed starting point.

2.4 Metaphors expressing starting points and the resistance against them

2.4.1 An explanatory metaphor resisted by critically extending it

The first example of resistance to a metaphorically expressed starting point has been selected from a debate on the Welfare Reform Bill, which took place on March 29, 2011. The issue under discussion is whether clause 1 should stand part of the bill. Before the Minister responsible for the bill, Chris Grayling, begins his actual argumentation in favour of the acceptability of the clause, he first instructs the Committee that the bill and the debate on the bill are about creating a framework for the new benefit system, not about filling in the details. To explain what he means, Grayling advances a metaphor in which he compares the bill and the debate on the bill to building a bookcase:

(2) Chris Grayling:

[...] Clause 1 is, effectively, the defining clause of the first part of the Bill, because it sets out provisions for the universal credit. It, and the following clause, creates the framework for the new benefit. For want of a better way of explaining it, they will create a bookcase on which we can lodge the books of the detail of the future benefit system.

The Bill and the debate are about building that bookcase. We will do our best to explain our initial intentions about what should be put on the shelves, but as the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, the debate is not about the detailed content of every single book. [...]

The direct figurative comparison between the bill and a bookcase advanced by Grayling is a novel metaphor. Since its contextual meaning cannot be found in a dictionary, we consider it as a newly invented example that is not part of any conventional pattern of mappings in the conceptual system. Additionally, we classify the metaphor as potentially deliberate because, as a direct and novel metaphor, the source domain - the bookcase - is a distinct referent in the utterance (Reijnierse et al., 2018). To understand Grayling's utterance, the committee members must actively compare the debate on the bill and building a bookcase. The metaphor hence plays a role as a metaphor in the on-going communication

between the discussants: it can legitimately be recognized, interpreted and appreciated as such.

As Grayling himself specifies, the alien perspective of building a bookcase is introduced to explain what he means by only discussing the framework of the new benefit system and not the details. Additionally, the idea of building a bookcase articulates Grayling's suggestion of excluding details from the debate better than the concept of a framework. The contextual meaning of 'framework' is "a set of principles or ideas that you use when you are forming your decisions and judgments" (MacMillan). This definition does not necessarily exclude the details, while the distinction made by Grayling between a bookcase and books does separate the details from the general framework. Note that 'framework' hence also functions metaphorically here, but non-deliberately and as conventional talk about the target domain.

Grayling uses the metaphor to propose that the interlocutors exclude the details of the bill as propositions on the basis of which the acceptability of the bill can be attacked or defended. We hence reconstruct Grayling's utterances as initiating the opening stage of the debate by suggesting to the Committee that the debate on the bill should be restricted to discussing the general framework of the bill, i.e. the bookcase, and not the details, i.e. the books. In this move, the bookcase and books count as metaphors in communication, but the framework does not.

As the protagonist of the standpoint that the bill is acceptable, Grayling aims to establish starting points serving best in defending this proposition. He tries to accomplish this by using the bookcase-metaphor for making a dissociation between discussing the general framework of the new welfare system, i.e. the bookcase, and discussing the details that will be specified in secondary legislation, i.e. the books. Following van Rees' (2009, p. 68) explanation of dissociation in argumentative discourse, the use of dissociation in the case at hand can be said to allow Grayling to achieve greater clarity and precision in defining the starting point for the debate: he can now make a distinction between the general framework of the new benefit system, which he considers central, and the details, which he considers peripheral. It also enables him to choose the starting point that serves him best in the defence of his standpoint. Restricting the debates on the bill to the general framework of the new welfare system, while excluding the details specified in secondary legislation, lowers the burden of proof for the Government: they only have to defend the acceptability of the general framework while deferring discussion of the details.

The Opposition, however, does not want to restrict the discussion to the general framework of the new benefit system. It is institutionally expected to

scrutinise a bill in its entirety, including the Government's intentions with regard to the details specified in secondary legislation. The Opposition hence disagrees with Grayling that the details of the new benefit system should not be discussed. In rejecting Grayling's proposed starting point, opposition member Sheila Gilmore extends the bookcase-metaphor introduced by Grayling and uses the nature of the books it contains to advance a counter-proposal:

(3) Sheila Gilmore:

[...] The Minister, in opening – he may not have intended to imply this – seemed to suggest that creating a simple system in itself would make work pay. What will actually make work pay is a number of different items, of which benefit payments are part. So much depends on the detail. That is why it is difficult. The Minister described this as a bookcase. How useful and good that bookcase is depends on what is in it. It may be a lot of cartoon comics. It may be a set of classics. For most of us, it is a mixture of various things – if we have eclectic tastes. That is why so many of the witnesses and I feel that it is important to be clear about the detail here. [...]

In this fragment, Gilmore makes an explicit and direct comparison between the bill and a bookcase, temporarily moving the discourse into the referential domain of bookcases. This is hence also an instance of deliberate metaphor, and Gilmore even signals it as such by introducing the metaphor by stating “[t]he Minister described this as [...]”. As a deliberate metaphor, it again requires an active comparison between a bookcase and the bill, and functions as a metaphor in the interaction between the discussants. The uptake of the bookcase-metaphor by Gilmore can be considered an instance of what Cameron (2003, p. 116) calls “the conventionalisation of deliberate metaphor”. The novel metaphor introduced by Grayling begins a process of conventionalisation between the committee members by Gilmore's critical extension of it – acquiring shared implicit meaning. However, although the bookcase-metaphor becomes a shared, conventionalised referent between the committee members for the debate on the bill, Gilmore highlights different aspects of the source domain than Grayling does, ones that are more in line with her own particular argumentative interests. Based on the same metaphor, each party hence advances a different metaphorical narrative or so-called ‘metaphor scenario’ (Musolff, 2006) that best serves their own particular interests.

Following the outline of the dialectical profile of the opening stage, we interpret the use of this metaphor as an indirect rejection of Grayling's proposal to

focus only on the general framework of the new benefit system as a starting point by functioning as a counter-proposal. Gilmore extends the bookcase-metaphor first advanced by Grayling to argue that a bookcase is only worth as much as the books that are in it, i.e., that the acceptability of the bill can only be properly judged when considering the details. She hence proposes that both parts of the dissociation made by Grayling are to be discussed: the general framework of the new benefit system as well as the details.

At a later stage in the debate, Gilmore repeats her suggestion that the debate on the bill should be about the general framework of the bill and the details:

- (4) Sheila Gilmore:
[...] In looking at the Bill – people will expect us to vote on it and ultimately to decide whether it should be supported in its entirety – we will ask for detailed answers to such questions and we will be right to do so. That will be important for us, because otherwise we will be buying that empty bookcase, which is a difficult thing to sell to people.

In this fragment, Gilmore first explicitly refers to the expectation that the Opposition should scrutinise a bill in its entirety. She then uses the bookcase-metaphor and states that it is important for the Opposition to ask about the details because otherwise they “will be buying that empty bookcase, which is a difficult thing to sell to people”. Whereas Gilmore still explicitly introduced the concept of a bookcase in terms of which to understand the debate on the bill in the previous fragment, the metaphor is presented as an indirect metaphor in this turn. In other words, Gilmore uses the bookcase-metaphor to indirectly talk about the debate on the bill. This fragment is illustrative of a further conventionalisation of the bookcase-metaphor as a representation of the debate on the bill within the context of the debates on the Welfare Reform Bill.

Nonetheless, we still regard the metaphor as deliberate because of the striking interaction between source and target domain, causing a certain ambiguity between a literal or figurative reading of the utterance. The source domain scenario of buying and selling an empty bookcase in its own terms does not really make sense because people typically buy an empty bookcase, not one that is already filled with books. Complemented with input from the target domain, however, the utterance becomes understandable as communicating that trying to convince people of the acceptability of the new benefit system while the details have not been discussed would be difficult.

Just like Gilmore's previous turn, this utterance is again an indirect rejection of Grayling's suggestion to only discuss the general framework of the new benefit system, and a repetition of her counter-proposal to also discuss the details. In reaction to Gilmore's proposal, Grayling says the following:

- (5) Chris Grayling:
[...] The hon. Member for Edinburgh East [Sheila Gilmore] talked extensively about my bookcase, but it is not her job in Committee to give each detail of the books that are going to fill that bookcase. Our job is to create a framework for the future of our social security system. [...]

Like the previous case, the metaphor in this utterance is indirect. The reference that Grayling makes to "my bookcase" is assumed to be understandable to the Committee as the metaphor that he himself introduced to refer to debating the bill. This indicates that the metaphor has become a conventional representation between the discussants in this particular debate. Because the utterance "my bookcase" clearly refers to the metaphor introduced by Grayling to communicate about the debate on the bill as such, we regard it as a deliberate metaphor. The metaphor functions communicatively as a rejection of Gilmore's proposal to discuss the general framework of the bill, as well as the details.

By suggesting that he does not have the discretion to discuss the details of the bill, Grayling again refuses to take on the burden of proof for defending the acceptability of the details of the new benefit system. By presenting the situation as a factual state of affairs that is hard to question, Grayling rules out further argument about the matter. This case demonstrates how a politician can use a metaphor to propose a starting point to limit his/her argumentative responsibilities, and how such a metaphor can be resisted by critically extending the metaphor.

2.4.2 An ideological metaphor resisted by highlighting the differences between the compared concepts

The second example of resistance to a metaphorically expressed starting point also comes from a debate on the Welfare Reform Bill taking place on March 29, 2011, and served as the example in the introduction of this article. This debate concerns an amendment tabled by opposition member Stephen Timms, which is aimed at changing a clause that would allow for a savings cap on universal credit for people with jobs. According to Timms, such a savings cap should not be imposed because it would discourage people from saving, for instance, for buying property, paying

tuition fees for their children, etc. Government member George Hollingbery disagrees with Timms and argues that people with low incomes already receive support from the Government in those areas. He then proposes that the Government should determine its priorities and reallocate financial support when necessary. In response, Timms accuses Hollingbery of saying that he is in favour of “plundering people’s savings”. The exchange between Hollingbery and Timms runs as follows:

(6) George Hollingbery:

[...] He [Stephen Timms] has talked about tuition fees, buying a house and making deposits, and assisting others to go to university, but the Government are already helping in those areas. Government money is allocated to help with tuition fees, and during the Budget there was talk of enough money being provided for 20,000 people to buy a house. Is it not right that in these difficult financial times the Government have to sit back and examine their priorities, see where help is already provided and reallocate as necessary?

Stephen Timms:

The hon. Gentleman may take the view that plundering people’s savings is the kind of thing that the Government must do in these difficult circumstances, but I do not agree with that. I think savings should be protected. If he thinks that some people’s savings should be plundered, he should look elsewhere than the savings of those who are on the lowest incomes. Surely those savings above all should be protected.

In this example, Hollingbery initiates the opening stage by proposing to regard the proposition that the Government should determine its priorities and reallocate financial help when necessary as a starting point for the debate. The use of the expression “[is] it not right that” suggests that only a positive answer to the question is expected. This signifies that Hollingbery intends to use the expected affirmation to advance the proposition as an argument against Timms’ standpoint that there should not be a savings cap on universal credit for people who work. In reply, Timms rejects Hollingbery’s proposal by accusing Hollingbery of saying that the Government should ‘plunder the savings of people on low incomes’, and by then asserting that he does not agree with this. The proposition is put forward as if it is generally accepted, i.e., as a starting point for the debate, that imposing a savings cap on universal credit can be considered an act of plundering.

As noted in the introduction, the term ‘to plunder’ in this context is a metaphor; whereas in its basic sense it means “to take valuable things from a place using force, sometimes causing a lot of damage”, the contextual meaning is “to take or use something that belongs to someone else in order to give yourself an advantage” (MacMillan). Since its contextual meaning can be found in the dictionary, it is a conventional metaphor. We also regard the metaphor as non-deliberate, while the utterance is not only a metaphor but also an instance of hyperbole. By using the term ‘to plunder’ Timms sets up a straw man, i.e. he misrepresents Hollingbery’s words to make it easier to attack them, by exaggerating the scope of the Government’s bad intentions. While in reality Hollingbery proposes to think critically of where financial help is needed and reallocate when necessary, Timms alleges that Hollingbery is suggesting that the Government should take people’s money for its own advantage. Since the hyperbolic meaning of the utterance is already present in the contextual meaning of the metaphor, its basic meaning does not necessarily play a role in the referential meaning of the utterance, and we therefore consider it to be non-deliberate.

Argumentatively speaking, the use of the term ‘to plunder’ in this context can be regarded as an instance of what Zarefsky (2014, p. 133) calls a ‘persuasive definition’, which he defines as “a non-neutral characterization that conveys a positive or negative attitude about something in the course of naming it”. Following Zarefsky’s (2014) explanation of persuasive definitions, Timms’ use of ‘to plunder’ may be an implicit argument to view the Government’s savings cap as an act of taking away money from people on low incomes for the Government’s own advantage, which would clearly be immoral and hence undesirable. The argument, however, is never actually advanced, but presupposed in the definition that is put forward as if it was uncontroversial.

Furthermore, utilising Hollingbery’s words to set up a straw man enables Timms to avoid having to answer the challenge raised by Hollingbery whether the Government should not reallocate financial help when necessary. By reframing Hollingbery’s words and defining the act of imposing a savings cap on universal credit for people with a low-income job as plundering, Timms aims to create a point of departure for the debate that is advantageous to his standpoint that a savings cap on universal credit should not be imposed, without him having to present arguments in favour of this position.

In response to Timms’ accusation, Hollingbery denies having said anything of the sort:

(7) George Hollingbery:

I did not say that the Government should be plundering anybody's savings. The Government are not taking money from people; they are not providing money in lieu. There is a distinct and very real difference. It is about asset allocation in difficult times.

Hollingbery's denial is a rejection of the starting point proposed by Timms that Hollingbery had said that the Government should plunder the people's savings. To support his rejection, Hollingbery stresses the difference between plundering, which would involve taking money from people, and imposing a savings cap, which would involve not giving money to people. In making the differentiation, he seems to only refer to the target domain of the metaphor, suggesting that in the exchange between Timms and Hollingbery the source domain of the metaphor does indeed not play a role in the referential meaning of the utterance. By providing arguments to support his rejection, Hollingbery initiates a sub-discussion in which the proposition of whether or not imposing a savings cap on universal credit can be understood as an act of plundering becomes the issue under discussion. In doing so, he challenges Timms to defend his assertion that imposing a savings cap can be considered an act of plundering, and to explicate his arguments in favour of this proposition.

In the following turn, Timms argues that imposing a savings cap is about plundering the people's savings because people with savings above £16,000 will be required to spend their savings. By challenging Timms to give arguments for considering imposing a savings cap an act of plundering, Hollingbery leads the debate away from discussing the metaphor to focus again on the substantive arguments in favour of and against imposing a savings cap. The rejection of the metaphor altogether hence impedes further use of the metaphor. This case illustrates how a metaphor can be exploited to establish a politician's ideological commitments as a starting point for the debate, and how such a metaphor can be resisted by highlighting the differences between the compared concepts.

2.4.3 An ambiguous case of resistance to a metaphorically expressed starting point

The last example of resistance to a metaphorically expressed starting point has been selected from a PBC debate on the Education Bill, taking place on March 15, 2011. The discussion concerns an amendment advanced by the Opposition that would give the review panel the power to insist on the reinstatement of children that are wrongfully expelled from school. The Opposition thinks that the review

panel should have this power because without it, it will be ineffective. The Government, on the contrary, thinks that the review panel should not have this power because it would have an undermining effect on the authorities in the schools concerned. At a certain point in the debate, opposition member Mark Hendrick questions what the point is of creating an institution without the power to be effective:

(8) Mark Hendrick:

The figures show that the decision is reversed in some 10% of the cases – I think it is 60 from more than 600 cases – in which a child has asked to be reinstated. That shows that 90% of decisions made by head teachers are upheld in the existing system, so it is not a thing that prevails a great deal. We are talking about 60 cases. What is the point of creating a watchdog that does not have any teeth?

In the last sentence of this fragment, the terms ‘watchdog’ and ‘teeth’ are used metaphorically. The basic meaning of ‘watchdog’ is “a dog used for guarding a house or piece of property”, whereas its contextual meaning is “an organisation that works to stop people from doing illegal things in a particular area of business or society” (MacMillan). The basic meaning of ‘tooth’ is “one of the hard white objects inside your mouth that you use for biting and chewing food” (MacMillan). In this context, however, it means “the necessary power and authority to be effective or to make people obey you” (MacMillan). Both metaphors are indirect, conventional metaphors. We do regard the metaphors as potentially deliberate, however, because the two terms come from the same conceptual domain, forming one coherent picture. This way, the metaphors communicatively function as a pun that is only understood when also considering the source domains of the two terms.

As a superficial display of cleverness, the metaphors do not seem to play any crucial argumentative role. Argumentatively speaking, the metaphorically phrased sentence is a rhetorical question, indirectly asserting that there is no point in creating a review panel without the power to insist on the reinstatement of wrongfully expelled children. As Van Eemeren et al. (2007, p. 94) explain, rhetorical questions can function as indirect attributions of a starting point because their use indicates that the proposition implied in the question should be accepted by the other discussants. In other words, by advancing the metaphorically phrased rhetorical question Hendrick indirectly suggests that the proposition that the review panel will be ineffective without the power to insist on the reinstatement of

wrongfully expelled children has been or should be accepted as a common starting point by the Committee.

The Minister responsible for the bill, Nick Gibb, disagrees with Hendrick:

(9) Nick Gibb:

It does have teeth. Those 60 cases have a devastating effect on the schools involved [...]

The review panel has teeth. It can quash a decision, and it can ask and require a governing body to reconsider a decision [...]

The panel may also change things such as the record of the pupil who has been excluded [...] The panel has teeth and can make robust decisions when it comes to unreasonable behaviour by a school, like any panel or any court.

In rejecting the suggestion that the review panel does not have the power to be effective by claiming that, on the contrary, it actually does, Gibb reproduces the metaphorical term 'teeth'. The metaphor, afforded by Hendrick's introduction of the term, is indirect, and conventional. It is, however, ambiguous whether Gibb's repetition of the metaphor is deliberate or not. In order to understand Gibb's utterance, the source domain referent of the metaphor is not necessarily required. Yet, the repetition of the term is rather notable and may therefore draw attention to the source domain referent of the metaphor. In Gibb's critical reaction to Hendrick's metaphorically expressed starting point, it is not the metaphor itself that is resisted, but rather the non-metaphorical propositional content of the utterance that the review panel does not have the power to be effective.

2.5 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how politicians exploit different types of metaphor to express starting points and how various types of resistance to such metaphors can be instrumental to achieving diverging outcomes in parliamentary debates. Our analyses of three different cases in which metaphors expressing starting points are resisted in British PBC debates have demonstrated different functions and effects of the metaphors expressing starting points and the resistance against them.

The investigation of the metaphorical and argumentative properties of the metaphors expressing starting points in parliamentary debates reveals that they are powerful and important argumentative tools exploited by politicians to create a point of departure for the debate that is in their best interest. As shown by case 1, metaphors can be used to (re)negotiate the argumentative roles and

responsibilities assumed by the different discussion parties. The metaphor in case 2 illustrates how metaphors can be employed to communicate and establish a politician's ideological commitments as starting points for the debate. Case 3 is a demonstration of a metaphorically expressed starting point in which the metaphor itself does not necessarily fulfil an argumentative role, but rather seems to be a superficial display of cleverness.

We also demonstrated the importance for politicians to counter metaphors expressing starting points to establish a point of departure for the debate that is more in line with their own particular goals and interests, and how this can be done in various ways. The metaphor in case 1 is critically extended to advance a counterproposal for a starting point that is more beneficial to the adversary. This shows that politicians with opposing and mutually exclusive standpoints and goals can employ the same metaphor in an attempt to establish a point of departure that is in their own best interest. Case 2 demonstrates how a politician can also resist a metaphor by highlighting the differences between the two compared concepts, thereby impeding further use of the metaphor in the ongoing debate. In case 3 the opponent rejects the metaphorically expressed starting point by repeating the metaphorical term used for expressing the original starting point. In this case, it is not the metaphor that is resisted, but rather the non-propositional content of the metaphorically expressed starting point.

Our results demonstrate that metaphors are important argumentative strategies in parliamentary debates, enabling politicians to establish a point of departure for the debate, both with regard to their argumentative roles and responsibilities as well as their ideological commitments, that is in their best interest. Resisting such metaphors by advancing counter-argumentative moves is pertinent for establishing a well-informed and unambiguous point of departure for the debate and to further a fruitful discussion concerning the acceptability of the proposal under discussion.

Whilst our examination of different cases of resistance to metaphorically expressed starting points has uncovered important ways in which metaphors can be strategically exploited in debates, it does not constitute a comprehensive account of all possible strategies, nor of all the ways in which these metaphors can be resisted. Future research could study larger amounts of data to draw more reliable conclusions on the issue under consideration and to further investigate the roles and effects of metaphors expressing starting points and the various forms of resistance against them. Additionally, we have focused on British parliamentary debates, in which a two-party system encourages an adversarial style of debate that is highly ritualised (Ilie, 2003, 2010). It could therefore be interesting to

investigate the differences and commonalities in the forms and functions of resistance to metaphors expressing starting points in other parliamentary systems. One last point of consideration is that this study is concerned with political discourse and the results are therefore not necessarily representative of other types of discourse. Consequently, it would be interesting to study the argumentative role of metaphors and the possible resistance against them in different domains. This would enable certain conclusions about whether the types of metaphor and argumentative resistance against them differs per domain.

To conclude, our empirical investigation of metaphors has shown that they are important strategies in parliamentary debates when starting points are established between parties. Also, resisting them seems to be a pertinent skill for politicians. It is therefore imperative to further develop our understanding of metaphor as an argumentative tool as well as to investigate the various possibilities for resistance to these metaphors and their effects.

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