



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Resistance to metaphor in parliamentary debates

Renardel de Lavalette, K.Y.

DOI

[10.48273/LOT0591](https://doi.org/10.48273/LOT0591)

Publication date

2021

[Link to publication](#)

#### Citation for published version (APA):

Renardel de Lavalette, K. Y. (2021). *Resistance to metaphor in parliamentary debates*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam]. LOT. <https://doi.org/10.48273/LOT0591>

#### General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## Chapter 5

# The use of metaphor in clarifying argumentative discourse in British Public Bill Committee debates<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In this paper, we aim to explain how metaphors can be employed for clarificatory purposes in British parliamentary debates. These debates typically involve an exchange of arguments concerning complex issues, which more often than not may require clarification. In clarifying something complex, metaphors are often employed in which an unfamiliar and abstract concept is compared to a more familiar and concrete concept. Because the choice of metaphor affects how an issue is understood and reasoned about, discussants may wish to oppose such a metaphor to avoid biased conceptions or even misunderstandings of the issue under discussion. We present a number of cases in which metaphors used for clarificatory purposes are opposed in a British Public Bill Committee debate on the Digital Economy Bill. Our analyses uncover which metaphors are used for clarificatory purposes, to what extent these clarificatory metaphors contribute to furthering the resolution of a debate on the acceptability of legislative proposals, and what consequences opposing such metaphors may have on the continuation of the debate.

### 5.1 Introduction

Parliamentary debates typically involve an exchange of arguments concerning complex issues, such as the environment, taxation, welfare, and many more. To effectively scrutinise the acceptability of new policy and legislative proposals regarding these issues, it is vital to ensure that the argumentation advanced in parliamentary debates is clear and comprehensible to all discussion parties, including the general public. This often requires clarification, which can be achieved by comparing an unfamiliar and abstract concept, such as welfare, to a more familiar and concrete concept, such as the human body (Nerlich et al., 2011; Thibodeau et al., 2017).

---

<sup>1</sup> A slightly modified version of this paper has been submitted as: Renardel de Lavalette, K.Y., Andone, C., & Steen, G.J. The role of metaphor in clarifying argumentative discourse in British Public Bill Committee debates.

Various studies have also shown that metaphors can hinder understanding (e.g., Deignan et al., 2019; Mukherjee, 2010). They often put a particular perspective on the issue under discussion that foregrounds some aspects, while downplaying others (e.g., Grady, 2017; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The choice of one metaphor over another hence affects how an issue is understood and reasoned about, making salient some aspects but not others. As a result, other discussants may wish to oppose such a metaphor to avoid biased conceptions or even misunderstandings of the issue under discussion. Such opposition is to be expected in parliamentary debates even more so, as these debates are characterised by an antagonistic style.

An illustrative example can be found in a British Public Bill Committee (henceforth: PBC) debate on the Digital Economy Bill, occurring on 20 October, 2016. The discussion concerns an amendment in which it is proposed that the age-verification regulator should warn ancillary service providers when pornographic material is made available on the internet without an age-verification system in place. Some committee members do not fully understand the term 'ancillary service provider', whereas this is pertinent to forming an informed opinion on the acceptability of the amendment. To facilitate mutual comprehension of the term, committee member Thangam Debbonaire advances a metaphor in which she compares online pornographic content providers to cinemas:

(1) Thangam Debbonaire:  
[...] This discussion is helping me and perhaps all of us to come to some form of understanding. I have a little metaphor in mind. If a cinema was allowing children to see pornography, we would hold the ticket seller responsible, as well as the organisation running the cinema, but not the bus driver who drove the bus the child took to get to the cinema. Does that metaphor help?

Claire Perry:

It depends whether the bus driver was paid for by the cinema. That is the point [...]

The metaphor advanced by Debbonaire invites committee members to use their knowledge of visiting a cinema to better understand the services involved in providing online pornographic content. The cinema and the ticket seller represent ancillary service providers, and as such they would be held responsible for allowing children to see pornography. The bus driver is not considered to be an ancillary

service provider because he/she is assumed not to work for the cinema. Claire Perry opposes the metaphor as an accurate clarification of what ancillary services are by arguing that in a scenario in which the bus driver would be paid for by the cinema, he/she would be considered an ancillary service provider.

As this example shows, metaphors may be helpful conceptual devices in facilitating mutual comprehension between discussants, but they may also impede understanding and consequently obstruct a rational and well-informed continuation of the debate. In such cases, discussants may need to counter the use of a metaphor by argumentative criticisms. Yet despite the important role that metaphors for clarification may fulfil in the resolution of a difference of opinion in parliamentary debates, the ways in which they affect discussions has not been the focus of any research, let alone of research that focuses on the opposition to such metaphors.

It is the aim of this paper to explain how metaphors with a clarificatory function feature in British parliamentary debates to establish a shared understanding of the issue under discussion. We will analyse various cases in which metaphors used for clarificatory purposes are opposed in the British PBC debate on the Digital Economy Bill, occurring 20 October, 2016. We aim to uncover which metaphors are used for clarificatory purposes, to what extent these clarificatory metaphors contribute to furthering the resolution of a debate on the acceptability of legislative proposals in British PBC debates, and what consequences opposing such metaphors has on the continuation of the debate.

In the following section, we discuss our theoretical framework, including a brief characterisation of British PBC debates. Subsequently, we present detailed analyses of various cases in which metaphors used for clarificatory purposes are opposed in the PBC debate on the Digital Economy Bill of 20 October 2016. We conclude that metaphors and the opposition they elicit fulfil an important role in enabling a shared understanding of the ongoing argumentation between committee members.

## 5.2 British Public Bill Committee debates, clarifications, and metaphors

### 5.2.1 The need for clarifications in British Public Bill Committee debates

PBCs consider a bill in detail, clause by clause, and may propose amendments (Turpin and Tomkins, 2011). To effectively scrutinise a bill, a clear understanding of the background, objectives and workings of the clause or amendment under discussion is pertinent. However, since PBCs are ad-hoc, non-specialised committees that dissolve when a bill enters its next stage, committee members are

usually not particularly knowledgeable about the topic addressed in the bill under discussion, especially because there is no provision that requires to select members with relevant interest or expertise (Levy, 2010). Additionally, committee members often have limited time to prepare for committee stage because announcement of membership is given at short notice (Levy, 2010). Committee members hence may need to ask informative questions to ensure that they fully understand the issue under discussion and can meaningfully contribute to the debate.

To clarify the typically complicated issues debated in PBCs, metaphors are often employed. By using a metaphor, various aspects of an abstract and complicated issue are mapped onto familiar aspects of human life that are more readily understood (Musolff, 2004; Nerlich et al., 2011). This makes metaphor a useful clarificatory device that can be employed by committee members to facilitate mutual understanding, not only among themselves, but also between them and the general public, whom they also address. The latter is of great importance because PBC debates are not solely aimed at improving legislation, but also at appealing to the electorate and informing the people on the Government's legislative proposals (Finlayson, 2017; Turpin & Tomkins, 2011).

Such metaphorically expressed clarifications are, however, not always immediately accepted by all committee members. The main task of PBCs is to subject the Government's legislative proposals to public critical scrutiny (Turpin & Tomkins, 2011), meaning that opposition is at the core of PBC debates. Since metaphors typically reflect one's beliefs regarding the issue that is being explained (Koteyko & Atanasova, 2017), committee members can be expected to criticise an opponent's metaphors in an attempt to refute their opponent's standpoint and to promote their own positions regarding the issue under discussion.

### 5.2.2 Clarifications in argumentative discussions

To analyse the contribution of clarificatory metaphors to the resolution of the debate in British PBCs, we make use of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, complemented with insights on repair sequences from Conversation Analysis. Combining insights from these two theories allows for studying the sequential manner in which discussants align their contributions to the debate with each other, while also explaining this process of alignment in a systematic manner from a functional perspective (see also Van Rees, 1995, 2007). This way, we will be able to identify the standpoints adopted by the discussion parties, the arguments the discussants advance to defend their standpoint, and at which point in the debate clarification exchanges take place, without abstracting from the sequential development of the debate.

Before discussing the analysis of argumentative exchanges and repair sequences, we first need to elaborate on what clarifications are. We have used the term 'clarification' rather broadly to refer to the acts of clarifying and explaining. A distinction between the two appears necessary. Both explanation and clarification exchanges typically comprise at least two speech acts, a request and a response, which are embedded in a discussion in which a problem of understanding is encountered (Walton, 2007a). They are aimed at transferring understanding from one party to another party in a discussion. However, whereas explanations can be of any type of event, clarifications always relate to a prior move made by a discussion party (Walton, 2007a, p. 5). Specifically, the purpose of an explanation is to verbally transfer understanding from the speaker to the hearer (Walton, 2007b, p. 1; Wierzbicka, 1987, p. 296), while the purpose of a clarification is to help one discussant in a debate to understand an unclear or otherwise problematic utterance of the other party (Schlangen, 2004; Walton, 2007a, p. 7).

Metaphorically expressed clarifications and explanations are here embedded in discussions on legislative proposals, and relate to and affect the argumentative moves made by the discussants. For our analysis, we start from the pragma-dialectical definition of argumentation 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). This perspective on argumentation facilitates studying clarifications and explanations as part of an argumentative exchange in which committee members try to convince each other of the (un)acceptability of a bill.

Argumentation is advanced to serve the communicative purpose of bringing about the illocutionary effect of understanding and the interactional purpose of realising the perlocutionary effect of convincing. In order to obtain the perlocutionary effect of achieving acceptance, it is a prerequisite that the illocutionary effect occurs, namely that the listener understands the speaker's speech act (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984). Whenever discussants fail to understand one another, they may request a clarification or explanation to guarantee understanding of the performed speech act. The other discussant is then obliged to give the requested clarification or explanation. A discussant who doubts the clarity of his/her formulation may also offer a clarification or explanation on their own accord (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984).

The pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion distinguishes four discussion stages, each of which is aimed at a particular goal: in the confrontation stage it is established that there is a difference of opinion, in the opening stage the

procedural and material starting points are established, in the argumentation stage the arguments advanced in support of a standpoint are tested, and in the concluding stage the outcome of a discussion is determined (Van Eemeren, 2018). In PBC debates, committee members may request and provide explanations or clarifications at each of these stages, with the exception of the concluding stage, because the outcome of the debate in PBCs is determined by a vote and will therefore not result in any unclarity needing to be resolved.

As each of the various stages has its own goal, clarification and explanation exchanges will have different effects on the continuation of the debate. In response to a reformulation of a standpoint in the confrontation stage of a discussion, for example, the antagonist may cast doubt on the reformulated standpoint. The protagonist is subsequently required to advance arguments to justify the standpoint. In the opening stage, clarifications or explanations can resolve unclarity about discussion rules, while in the argumentation stage they can prevent a discussant from accepting or rejecting an argument without giving it due consideration (Van Eemeren et al., 2007, pp. 14-15).

To determine how explanations or clarifications exchanges affect the continuation of the debate at the discussion stage in which it occurs, we make use of the so-called 'dialectical profiles' developed by Van Eemeren et al. (2007). These profiles specify the sequential patterns of moves that discussants can make that are relevant to the goal of the discussion stage at issue. By determining at which point in the debate a clarification or explanation exchange takes place, the dialectical profile of that particular stage facilitates analysing the outcomes that can be achieved.

While the pragma-dialectical approach offers the tools to analyse the argumentation taking place in British PBC debates, it does not offer the tools to analyse the clarification exchanges themselves. Therefore, we will complement our analyses with insights from the conversation-analytical characterisation of so-called 'repair sequences' to analyse the ways in which mutual understanding is achieved by making use of metaphors in British PBC debates. In Conversation Analysis, 'repair' is considered a central mechanism by which people maintain mutual understanding in conversation (Schegloff, 1992). Repair organisation refers to a set of practices aimed at dealing with problems of hearing, speaking and understanding (Schegloff et al., 1977), of which the latter is the main interest of this study. Repair sequences typically consist of (a) a request for clarification, which initiates the repair sequence, (b) the clarification proper, and (c) the so-called 'trouble source' or 'repairable', which is the problematic utterance that requires clarification (Bolden, 2018, p. 143; Schegloff, 1992). The initiation of repair

suspends the ongoing course of action until the problem is dealt with and a clarification has been provided (Kendrick, 2015). The conversation-analytic perspective reveals the interactional production of metaphorically expressed clarifications, involving the possibility of acceptance, rejection, or elaboration of the metaphor.

### 5.2.3 A three-dimensional perspective on metaphor

To account for the properties of the metaphors used for explanatory or clarificatory purposes, we employ the three-dimensional model of metaphor (Steen, 2017). This model extends the cognitive-linguistic model of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which mainly focuses on the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of metaphor, by adding a third dimension, namely that of metaphor in communication.

On the linguistic dimension, analysts identify metaphorical expressions in language (cf. MIP; Pragglejaz Group, 2007; MIPVU; Steen et al., 2010) and examine their linguistic form, distinguishing between indirect and direct metaphors. The metaphorical meaning of an indirect metaphor arises out of a contrast between its contextual meaning (the target domain) and its basic meaning (the source domain), which is absent from the actual context - hence the term indirect metaphor (Steen et al., 2010). An example would be the word 'to come' in the sentence 'This discussion is helping me to come to some form of understanding'. While the basic meaning of 'to come' involves physical movement, its contextual meaning has to do with reaching a particular mental state (MacMillan). The contextual meaning can be contrasted with, and understood in comparison with the basic meaning, which means that the word 'to come' is metaphorical. Direct metaphors do not display such a difference between a contextual and a more basic meaning. They express a cross-domain mapping in the form of a direct, explicit comparison (Steen et al., 2010). To illustrate, in the example discussed in the Introduction, all words from "[i]f a cinema was allowing" to "to get to the cinema" are directly metaphorical. Debbonaire explicitly compares websites providing online pornographic content without age-verification services to cinemas allowing children to watch pornography, triggering a cross-domain mapping between two different domains.

Metaphorical expressions are considered to derive from metaphorical structures in thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). On the conceptual level a distinction is made between conventional and novel metaphors. Conventional metaphors are sets of fixed, stable mappings between two conceptual domains. Novel metaphors, by contrast, involve comparisons that do not belong to such



already existing conceptual mappings (Cameron & Deignan, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The comparison Debonnaire makes between online services and cinemas can be regarded as a conventional metaphor, because the physical world is conventionally used to structure our understanding of computers (Colburn & Shute, 2008).

In analysing the communicative dimension of metaphor, analysts differentiate between non-deliberate and deliberate metaphors. This distinction hinges on the question whether the source domain meaning of a metaphor plays a role in the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used (cf. Reijnierse et al., 2018). If it does, the metaphor is deliberate and functions as a metaphor in communication between language users. If it does not, the metaphor is non-deliberate and does not function as a metaphor in communication between language users. Debonnaire's metaphor is an example of a deliberate metaphor; she makes a direct comparison between online services and cinemas, and as such the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used. Analysing a metaphor's communicative dimension is of particular importance to this study, because in our analyses we focus on metaphors that are used to bring about understanding of a target domain by comparing it to some source domain.

### 5.3 Clarificatory and explanatory metaphors in British Public Bill Committee debates

Our cases are from the British PBC debate on the Digital Economy Bill of 20 October, 2016. We focus on this particular argumentative exchange because it is an extensive case study, comprising the use of several clarificatory and explanatory metaphors that are opposed in various ways. We retrieved the transcript of the debate from the online version of the official report of all parliamentary debates in the UK, Hansard Online. The transcripts have been edited by so-called 'Hansard reporters' to remove repetitions and obvious mistakes, without taking away from the meaning (Hansard (Official Report), n.d.).

In the debate, the Committee discusses a group of amendments aimed at putting a requirement on the age-verification regulator to impose fines when UK organisations provide online pornographic content without age-verification, and to issue an enforcement notice to foreign organisations making pornographic content available in the UK without age-verification. The amendments are tabled by government back bench member Claire Perry to probe the Minister on how he intends the enforcement process to be carried out, considering that most pornographic content providers are likely to be based outside the UK.

The Opposition supports the amendments because they believe that the amendments meet the objective of tackling overseas providers better than the original proposal from the Government. Among other reasons, the Opposition argues that if the age-verification regulator does not have the powers to effectively deal with foreign-based online pornography providers, there will be a danger that the responsible providers will install age-verification measures, pushing users that try to avoid these tools on to other pornography content providers. Consequently, the age-verification regulator would need to chase after those providers, which would in turn push users on to yet other providers, putting greater pressure on the enforcement authorities.

To illustrate this argument, opposition member Christian Matheson makes a comparison to the game 'whack-a-mole'. The metaphor is accepted by the Minister responsible for the bill, but he uses it to support an opposing standpoint.

(2) Christian Matheson:

Yes. I raised this with the gentleman from the British Board of Film Classification, I believe, and I questioned his assertion about the top 50 websites. He said that the process would not stop there but proceed to the next 50, but if those 50 content providers are constantly moving all over the place, it will be rather like a game of whack-a-mole. Unless we have a sufficiently large mallet to give the mole a whack early on— [Interruption.] This is a serious business, and if I am sounding a bit jocular, that is not meant to take away from the serious issue. If we do not have the tools to address those who are deliberately not complying, and those who do not wish to comply with the regulations that we are putting in place to protect our children, I fear that we will be chasing after them too much.

In this fragment, Matheson replies to a question in which he is asked whether he agrees that too many loopholes in the bill will push users that want to avoid age-verification tools onto more extreme or violent pornography. Matheson agrees with this, and refers to an exchange between himself and a representative of the British Board of Film Classification (henceforth: BBFC), taking on the role of the age-verification regulator, in which he asked the representative about the requirement that the regulator should target the top 50 providers. He explains that the BBFC replied that after having tackled the first 50 providers, they would proceed to investigating the next 50. Matheson argues that if the regulator does not have the right tools to tackle those websites that do not comply with the age-verification

measures the top 50 providers will constantly change, which will exhaust the regulator's time and resources. To explain this issue by making more salient and vivid that the regulator will be chasing after a constantly changing top 50 providers, Matheson employs a metaphor in which he makes a comparison to the game whack-a-mole.

Following the MIPVU-procedure (cf. Steen et al., 2010), all words from "a game of whack-a-mole" to "a whack early on" are identified as metaphor-related words. The metaphor is direct, as Matheson makes an explicit comparison between the regulator chasing the top 50 content providers and a game of whack-a-mole, which is also signalled by the so-called metaphor flag 'like'. The metaphor is conventional, as its contextual meaning can be found in the dictionary: "a situation in which repeated efforts to resolve a problem are frustrated by the problem reappearing in a different form" (MacMillan). As a direct metaphor, the metaphor is also deliberate, because the source domain, i.e., 'a game of whack-a-mole', is part of the referential meaning of the utterance (cf. Reijnierse et al., 2018). Matheson explicitly invites the Committee to understand the situation in which the top 50 pornography providers constantly changes, making it difficult for the regulator to target them, in terms of a game in which players have to hit toy moles that appear from different holes at random. He elaborates the metaphorical scenario further by saying "[u]nless we have a sufficiently large mallet to the mole a whack early on", but is interrupted before he can finish his sentence.<sup>2</sup> As a direct and deliberate metaphor, the comparison functions as an explanation of Matheson's argumentation.

Matheson's contribution to the debate is part of the argumentation stage, in which arguments are critically tested. In light of the dialectical profile of this stage, committee members can advance an argument to which the other discussion party can respond by accepting the argument, raising critical questions to test the argument's acceptability, or asking informative questions to enhance understanding (cf. Van Eemeren et al., 2007, p. 165). In the last case, the committee member that advanced the argument is required to provide the requested clarification or explanation. A committee member may also provide an explanation of the argument on his or her own initiative, as is the case in this fragment.

---

<sup>2</sup> From Matheson's reaction it seems that the interrupters accuse him of making a joke of a serious situation by making a comparison to a game of whack-a-mole. However, we do not know what exactly is said, and therefore do not analyse this particular response to the metaphor.

The metaphor employed by Matheson is explanatory, as opposed to argumentative, because it is not aimed at supporting the proposition that the regulator should have the right tools to tackle the non-complying providers of online pornography, but to explain the consequences of not providing the regulator with the right tools. More specifically, each committee member needs to be convinced that if the regulator does not have efficient enforcement powers, this will lead users to move to providers that do not comply with the age-verification measures, which, in turn, will lead to an ever-changing top 50 of online pornography providers that the regulator needs to chase, exhausting the regulator's time and resources. The metaphor does not offer anything to convince committee members of this line of argument, but it illustrates the point raised by Matheson.

It is customary in British PBC debates for the Minister responsible for the bill to respond to the points made about the amendments under discussion. Typically, the Government is reluctant to accept amendments at committee stage (Thompson, 2013), therefore, Hancock can be expected to refute the arguments made in support of the amendments. In his reply, Hancock accepts the whack-a-mole metaphor as an acceptable explanation, but reinterprets its significance for the question whether the amendments are acceptable. He argues that acknowledging that people on the internet move around, which makes it difficult for the regulator to target them, means that the Government should primarily deal with those providers that will comply with the age-verification measures once the bill is turned into law, which the bill does. As such, the whack-a-mole analogy is used to argue for the standpoint that the amendments are unacceptable.

The analysis of this exchange shows that a direct and deliberate metaphor is employed to explain the argument that not giving the regulator the right tools to tackle non-compliant content providers will result in a situation in which the regulator needs to chase an ever-changing top 50 of online pornography providers. While the metaphor is accepted by the opposing party as an acceptable explanation of the problem that it is difficult for the regulator to deal with online pornography content providers, this proposition is used to argue for an opposing standpoint, namely that the regulator should primarily deal with those providers that comply with the law. The metaphor in this example is hence used to illustrate two opposing lines of argument.

The next example demonstrates how a metaphor can also be used to clarify a standpoint in the confrontation stage of a discussion. In this second case, the debate concerns a group of two amendments and one proposal for a new clause, in which three propositions are advanced for discussion:

- (1) the age-verification regulator should be required to notify payment and ancillary service providers that a person is making adult material available on the internet to persons in the UK without age-verification;
- (2) the age-verification regulator should be required to issue guidance about the services that it determines are enabling or facilitating the making available of pornographic or prohibited content;
- (3) payment and ancillary service providers should be required to block payment or cease services made to pornography websites that do not offer age-verification after having received a notice of non-compliance.

The amendments are tabled by government backbench member Claire Perry to clarify and strengthen the enforcement process exercised by the age-verification regulator over websites making pornographic content available to people in the UK. Perry raises various concerns regarding the clause that the amendments aim to change. First, she argues that it is unclear when the regulator will inform payment and ancillary service providers that a contravention is happening, and whether pornography websites will have enough time to respond to the regulator's intervention before the payment and ancillary services are involved. Second, she asserts that there does not appear to be a requirement for the regulator to inform payment and ancillary service providers of a contravention, while this should be mandatory. Before being able to address the third issue, however, Perry is interrupted by opposition member Thangam Debbonaire, who requests Perry to clarify the term 'ancillary service provider', and whether it includes Internet Service Providers (henceforth: ISPs). In other words, Debbonaire interrupts Perry's argumentation by initiating a repair sequence.

After it has been clarified that in the amendments the term 'ancillary service provider' includes ISPs, opposition member Christian Matheson intervenes to ask whether ancillary service providers also include businesses such as telecoms providers, thereby initiating a second repair sequence. In reply, Perry does not offer a conclusive answer, wanting to leave it to the Minister to specify what types of businesses are included in the definition. In an attempt to give the requested clarification, Debbonaire advances a metaphor in which she compares pornography websites to cinemas, which, in turn, is rejected as an accurate clarification by Perry.

- (3) Christian Matheson:

I share some of the hon. Lady's uncertainty—I was going to say confusion, but it is not—about the terminology. Would the definition include, for example, telecoms providers over whose networks the services are provided?

In this fragment, Matheson initiates a second repair sequence by asking whether ancillary service providers also include businesses such as telecoms providers. The term ‘ancillary service provider’ is part of the propositions under discussion mentioned before. It is pertinent for committee members to understand the term to adopt an informed standpoint regarding these propositions. Consequently, we reconstruct this repair sequence as part of the confrontation stage, in which it is established that there is a difference of opinion. Taking into account the relevant moves from the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage (Andone, 2013, p. 25; Van Eemeren et al., 2007, p. 26), tabling the amendments can be seen as advancing a standpoint. Matheson’s question whether the term ‘ancillary service provider’ includes businesses such as telecoms providers is a clarification request regarding part of the propositions advanced by Perry. In reply to such a request, Perry is required to provide the requested clarification, after which the other discussion parties can adopt a positive or negative standpoint towards the propositions under discussion, or express doubt about it.

(4) Claire Perry:

I am perhaps going to let the Minister spell that out exactly. The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point: we all know now that access to internet services is often done entirely over a mobile network. I can again give some comfort on this issue. The BBFC, which is an excellent choice, has worked for many years with the mobile service providers—a witness gave evidence to this effect—so they already offer a blocking service based on the BBFC’s definition of 18-plus and 18-minus material. It is essentially an opt-in service. Someone has to say that they are under 18 and checks are carried out. The providers already offer the service, and it seems to work reasonably effectively.

I apologise for inadvertently misleading the Committee — perhaps it reflects some of the confusion in the wording—and I want to be very clear about who we are trying to capture with the amendments. We would all support the idea of spreading the net as widely as possible in ensuring the right behaviour, but it is important to make clear that ISPs are to be expected and legally mandated to carry out the same checks.

Another point I wanted to make with amendment 79 was to ask the regulator to issue guidance on the sort of businesses that will be considered to be ancillary services. The reason for putting that in the Bill is that, as we debated extensively in earlier sittings, the world changes. We had very good debates about why 10 megabits per second might not be

appropriate in a couple of years' time and why the USO as originally construed was laughably small. We all try to do the right thing, but of course the world changes. The reference by the hon. Member for City of Chester to Whac-A-Mole was interesting. What will the consequences be of implementing the Bill? We are a very substantial revenue stream for many websites, and new service models might arise. Someone might be scrutinising the letter of the law and thinking, "We are not captured by this, so we are not captured by these regulations". Asking for the regulator to issue guidance on the types of businesses that will be considered to be ancillary services could future-proof some of the Bill.

Perry does not give the requested clarification. She indicates that she would like the Minister to respond to Matheson's question. Instead, she informs the Committee that telecoms providers already comply with the BBFC's age-verification requirements. She then raises the third point she wants to address with her amendments, namely that the regulator should issue guidance on the types of businesses that are considered ancillary service providers to future-proof the bill.<sup>3</sup> Perry hence resumes her argumentation in support of the amendments.

At this point, Perry is again interrupted.

(5) Thangam Debbonaire:

I am grateful for the hon. Lady again allowing me to intervene. I apologise for interrupting her sentence; that was not my intention. I am pleased to see her amendments. This discussion is helping me and perhaps all of us to come to some form of understanding. I have a little metaphor in mind. If a cinema was allowing children to see pornography, we would hold the ticket seller responsible, as well as the organisation running the cinema, but not the bus driver who drove the bus the child took to get to the cinema. Does that metaphor help?

Debbonaire intervenes on Perry in an attempt to give the requested clarification of the term 'ancillary service provider'. She does so by advancing a metaphor in which she compares pornography providers to cinemas. Following MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010), all words from "[i]f a cinema" to "get to the cinema" are identified as direct metaphor-related words, as an explicit comparison is made between online

---

<sup>3</sup> Note that Perry refers to the whack-a-mole metaphor advanced by Matheson earlier to address the fact that as a consequence of the bill new business models might arise that are not covered by the regulations.

services providing pornographic content without age-verification and cinemas that allow children to see pornography. The metaphor is conventional, because the physical world is an often-used source domain for talking and thinking about the online world. The metaphor is also deliberate, because the source domain – a cinema allowing children to see pornography – is explicitly present in the referential meaning of the utterance. In other words, an alien perspective on the issue is introduced that invites committee members to use their knowledge of visiting a cinema to enhance their understanding of the online services that are involved in providing online pornographic content. Debbonaire even explicitly instructs the Committee that the metaphor is aimed at facilitating a shared understanding of the term ‘ancillary service provider’ by saying that “[t]his discussion is helping me and perhaps all of us to come to some form of understanding. I have a little metaphor in mind”.

In ending her turn, Debbonaire poses the question “[d]oes that metaphor help”, which could be interpreted in two ways: as a request for a confirmation of the committee members’ understanding of the offered clarification, or as a request for confirmation on whether she has rightly understood the term and given an accurate clarification. In response, Perry implicitly rejects part of the metaphor by arguing that the bus driver could have been paid for by the cinema, in which case he/she would be considered to be responsible for allowing a child to see pornography.

(6) Claire Perry:

It depends whether the bus driver was paid for by the cinema. That is the point. Businesses pop up. There might be a bespoke Odeon cinema. My point is that we need to ensure that the regulator has as much flexibility as possible to respond to changing definitions. The current definition of an ancillary service provider is quite clear, although I would like the Minister to clarify it, but my amendment would try to future-proof the definition.

As Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, p. 90) explain, whenever a discussant calls into question a statement from the other party in the principal discussion, a so-called ‘sub-discussion’ arises. This means that in this particular case, Perry enters into a sub-discussion by criticising part of the metaphor advanced by Debbonaire, in which the acceptability of the comparison becomes the proposition under discussion. Based on the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage, Debbonaire’s move can be understood as advancing the standpoint that the metaphor is an acceptable clarification of the term ‘ancillary service provider’.



Perry's critical response is an implicitly advanced opposite standpoint: the comparison is an unacceptable clarification of the term 'ancillary service provider'. To support her implicit negative standpoint, Perry advances the argument that bus drivers could be paid for by the cinema, in which case they would be considered to be responsible for allowing a child to see pornography in a cinema.

The argument that bus drivers could be paid for by the cinema is part of the argumentation stage. Based on the dialectical profile of this discussion stage, we interpret the fact that the committee members do not explicitly respond to Perry's argument that a bus driver could be paid for by a cinema as an indication that they understood and accepted the argument. Perry subsequently uses the premise that a bus driver could be paid for by a cinema as an argument in the principal discussion, as well, to support the standpoint that the regulator should issue guidance on the type of businesses that are considered to be ancillary service providers.

From a conversation-analytical perspective, the repair sequence under examination concerns the trouble source 'ancillary service provider'. The repair sequence is initiated by Matheson, who asks whether the term 'ancillary service provider' includes businesses such as telecoms providers. After Perry fails to give a satisfactory clarification, Debbonaire attempts to give the requested clarification by advancing a metaphor in which she compares online content providers to cinemas. However, Perry's response to the metaphor reveals that she believes that Debbonaire does not fully comprehend the term. By critically extending the metaphor, Perry initiates what Schegloff (1992) calls a 'third-position repair', repairing the perceived misunderstanding exhibited by Debbonaire in using the metaphor, hence furthering a shared understanding of the term 'ancillary service provider'.

To summarise, the metaphor is aimed at furthering mutual comprehension between committee members regarding the types of businesses that are considered to be ancillary service providers. The critical response to the metaphor fulfils several functions at the same time. It implicitly refutes the standpoint that the metaphor is an acceptable clarification of the term 'ancillary service provider' and supports the opposite standpoint that the metaphor is an unacceptable clarification of the term 'ancillary service provider' in the subdiscussion. It is also used to support the standpoint that the regulator should issue guidance on the types of businesses that are considered to be ancillary service providers in the principal discussion. Lastly, it reveals that Perry believes that Debbonaire did not fully understand the term 'ancillary service provider', and

by repairing the perceived misunderstanding it furthers a shared understanding of the term ‘ancillary service provider’ between committee members.

Following Perry’s critical reaction to the bus driver metaphor, the topic of the discussion shifts to search engines. Debonnaire questions to what extent they are responsible for providing online pornographic content to minors. In reply, Perry explains that the Government has already made efforts for search engines to not return any materials to certain combinations of search terms, based on guidelines provided by the BBFC regarding what is legal and what is not. In the ensuing discussion about search engines, two different metaphors are advanced, each highlighting different characteristics of search engines that are considered to be relevant in determining their responsibility. Government back bench member Nigel Huddleston compares search engines to a library, whereas Debonnaire compares search engines to a sign.

(7) Nigel Huddleston:

I should probably declare that prior to becoming an MP, I worked at Google. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is where it becomes complex? A search engine, to use another analogy, is a bit like a library. The books are still on the shelves, but the search engine is like the library index: it can be removed and changed, but the content is still there. That is why we need to do much more than just removing things from the search engine: the content is still there, and people can find alternative ways to get to it. We must do much more.

In response to Perry’s reassurance that the Government already works with search engines to ensure that no materials are returned to certain combinations of search terms, Huddleston argues that not returning materials is not enough, because the content still exists and people can find other ways to access it. To explain how search engines works, he compares them to a library index.

Following MIPVU, all words from “a library” to “the content is still there” are identified as direct metaphors, making an explicit comparison between search engines and libraries. As this metaphor involves a comparison between the online world (i.e., search engines) and the physical world (i.e., libraries), we consider it to be conventional. As a direct metaphor, the metaphor is also deliberate. By asserting that search engines are “a bit like a library”, Huddleston instructs the Committee to set up a cross-domain mapping between a search engine and a library. As Lundmark and Lymer (2016, p. 713) argue, the mitigation “a bit” may be used in the case of comparisons because of the “necessarily imperfect nature of

the analogy". Specifically, the mitigation 'a bit' emphasises that search engines are not the same as libraries, but rather share some similarities. Huddleston also specifies in which way he considers the two domains as relevantly similar, saying: "The books are still on the shelves, but the search engine is like the library index: it can be removed and changed, but the content is still there". Because the metaphor is presented as a direct metaphor and hence requires an online comparison between a source and a target domain, it can function as an explanation of how search engines work.

After explaining that search engines can be understood in terms of a library index, Huddleston uses the premise that while search engines can be altered so that they do not return pornographic content, the content still exists and can be accessed in different ways to argue that the Government must go beyond taking measures for search engines to not return results. As the metaphor functions to explain an argument, we regard it as part of the argumentation stage of the discussion. While Huddleston does not explicitly state what he thinks that the Government should do, his comparison to a library index seems to indicate that he sees search engines as a tool for people to find and access pornographic content, without it playing an active role in providing online pornographic content.

(8) Thangam Debbonaire:

We need to keep hold of the search engine issue for a moment, because search engines are part of the process. To restate the bus driver analogy, a search engine is also like a sign saying to adults, and children, "You can go here to see pornography".

Debbonaire does not accept that search engines are merely a tool used to find and access online pornographic content. She argues that they are part of the process of providing pornographic content, and therefore require further discussion. To support this assertion, Debbonaire argues that search engines direct people to the websites where they can access pornographic content. In putting forward the argument, she advances a metaphor in which she compares search engines to a sign.

Following MIPVU, the words from "a sign saying" to "to see pornography" are analysed as direct metaphor-related words, as indicated by the metaphor flag 'like', which means that an explicit comparison is made between search engines and a sign. As websites are commonly understood in terms of places that can be visited, the metaphor is conventional. The metaphor is deliberate because a direct comparison is made between search engines and a sign, and as such it can

functions as an explanation of how search engines are part of the process of making online pornographic content available to people.

Comparing search engines to a sign highlights different characteristics of search engines than those emphasised by comparing them to a library index. In the comparison between search engines and a library index, search engines are characterised as a tool that can be used to find online information that already exists. Alternatively, the comparison between search engines and a sign emphasises that search engines direct people to websites that offer pornographic content, granting a more active role to search engines in the process of providing online pornographic content than the library metaphor. The two competing metaphors hence frame search engines in such a way as to promote one standpoint, while criticising an opposing standpoint.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Metaphors used for clarificatory and explanatory purposes and the opposition to such metaphors enable a shared understanding of the issue under discussion between committee members in British PBC debates. Such mutual understanding is pertinent for a rational continuation of the debate, as understanding is a prerequisite for achieving acceptance of a discussant's argumentation. Our analyses of the various cases in which clarificatory or explanatory metaphors are opposed reveal the intricate ways in which these exchanges are interwoven with the ongoing argumentation in British PBC debates.

The detailed analyses of three cases of clarificatory and explanatory metaphors demonstrate that metaphors can be a helpful tool for politicians to facilitate mutual understanding of the advanced argumentation. The metaphors in cases 1 and 3 show that discussants can use a metaphor to explain an argument, and that such metaphors typically highlight features that reflect a discussant's beliefs about the issue under discussion. This way, choosing one metaphor over another can help in defending a proposal, while criticising others. Case 2 illustrates that metaphors can also be used to clarify a proposition that is not fully understood by all discussants. By enabling understanding, such clarificatory metaphors help politicians to adopt an informed standpoint towards the proposition at issue.

We demonstrated that a metaphor's interactional importance depends on the responses it elicits from other discussion parties, as a metaphor can be accepted, challenged or elaborated by other discussants in subsequent turns. The response to the metaphor discussed in case 1 shows that an opponent can accept a metaphor as an accurate explanation, but use it to defend the opposite standpoint. Case 2 illustrates that a metaphor can be rejected as an acceptable clarification in

order to avoid misunderstandings of the proposition under discussion. In this case, the rejection serves to further enhance the Committee's mutual understanding of the issue under discussion. The analysis of case 3 demonstrates that competing metaphors can be advanced that highlight different features of the issue under discussion in order to defend one standpoint, while criticising an opposing standpoint.

Our analyses reveal that metaphors and the critical responses they elicit play an important role in furthering a shared understanding of the ongoing argumentation between committee members. This study does not constitute a comprehensive account of all the possible ways in which metaphors can be used to clarify or explain the various argumentative moves advanced by committee members at the different discussion stages. Nor does it highlight all the ways in which such metaphors can be opposed. To further examine the role of clarificatory and explanatory metaphors in British parliamentary debates, more data needs to be examined. Additionally, our analysis of the responses that metaphors elicit in the argumentative interaction between committee members does not reveal how the metaphors resonate with the general public. We explained that an important goal of British PBC debates is to appeal to the electorate and inform them on legislative proposals. It would therefore be fruitful to examine the ways in which metaphors are understood and appreciated by the general public.

This paper provides the first empirical investigation of the ways in which metaphors and the opposition they elicit enable a shared understanding of the ongoing argumentation in British PBC debates. The results can be used to increase our understanding of the various roles and functions that metaphors fulfil in parliamentary debates, and of the effects that opposing such metaphors has on the continuation of the debate.

## References

- Andone, C. (2013). *Argumentation in political interviews: Analyzing and evaluating responses to accusations of inconsistency*. John Benjamins.
- Boldon, G. B. (2018). Speaking 'out-of-turn': Epistemics in action in other-initiated repair. *Discourse Studies*, 20(1), 142-162.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461445617734346>
- Cameron, L., & Deignan, A. (2006). The emergence of metaphor in discourse. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(4), 671-690.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml032>
- Colburn, T. R., & Gary M. S. (2008). Metaphor in computer science. *Journal of Applied Logic*, 6(4), 526-533. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jal.2008.09.005>
- Deignan, A., Semino, E., & Paul, S. (2019). Metaphors of climate science in three genres: Research articles, educational texts, and secondary school student talk. *Applied Linguistics*, 40(2), 379-403.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx035>
- Eemeren, F. H. van. (2018). *Argumentation theory: A pragma-dialectical perspective*. Springer.
- Eemeren, F. H. van, & Grootendorst, R. (1984). *Speech acts in argumentative discussions: A theoretical model for the analysis of discussions directed towards solving conflicts of opinion*. Foris Publications.
- Eemeren, F. H. van, & Grootendorst, R. (2004). *A systematic theory of argumentation: The pragma-dialectical approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Eemeren, F. H. van, Houtlosser, P., & Snoeck Henkemans, A. F. (2007). *Argumentative indicators in discourse: A pragma-dialectical study*. Springer.
- Finlayson, A. (2017). "What is the point of parliamentary debate?" Deliberation, oratory, opposition and spectacle in the British House of Commons. *Redescriptions*, 20(1), 11-31. <http://doi.org/10.7227/R.20.1.2>
- Grady, J. (2017). Using metaphor to influence public perceptions and policy. In E. Semino & S. Demjén (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language* (pp. 443-454). Routledge.
- Hansard (Official Report)* (n.d.). UK Parliament. Retrieved May 6, 2017, from <http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/hansard-official-report/>
- Kendrick, K. H. (2015). Other-initiated repair in English. *Open Linguistics*, 1(open issue), 164-190. <https://doi.org/10.2478/opli-2014-0009>

- Koteyko, N., & Atanasova, D. (2017). Metaphor and the representation of scientific issues. In E. Semino & S. Demjén (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language* (pp. 296-308). Routledge.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levy, J. (2010). Public Bill Committees: An assessment scrutiny sought; scrutiny gained. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 63(3), 534-544.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsp050>
- Lundmark, S., & Lymer, G. (2016). Analogies in interaction: practical reasoning and participatory design. *Text & Talk*, 36(6), 705-731.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2016-0031>
- Macmillan English Dictionary Online. Retrieved March 20, 2019, from <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>
- Mukherjee, S. (2010). *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*. HarperCollins.
- Musolff, A. (2004). *Metaphor and political discourse: Analogical reasoning in debates about Europe*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Nerlich, B., Evans, V., & Koteyko, N. (2011). Low carbon diet: Reducing the complexities of climate change to human scale. *Language and Cognition*, 3(1), 45-82. <https://doi.org/10.1515/langcog.2011.003>
- Pragglejaz Group. (2007). MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 22(1), 1-39.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480709336752>
- Rees, M. A. van (1995). Analysing and evaluating problem-solving discussions. *Argumentation*, 9, 343-362. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00721965>
- Rees, M. A. van (2007). Discourse analysis and argumentation theory: the case of television talk. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(8), 1454-1463.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2007.04.005>
- Reijnierse, W. G., Burgers, C., Krennmayr, T., & Steen, G. J. (2018). DMIP: A method for identifying potentially deliberate metaphor in language use. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 2(2), 129-147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41701-017-0026-7>
- Schegloff, E. A. (1992). Repair after next turn: The last structurally provided defense of intersubjectivity in conversation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(5), 1295-1345. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2781417>
- Schegloff, E. A., Jefferson, G., & Sacks, H. (1977). The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation. *Language*, 53, 361-382.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/413107>
- Schlangen, D. (2004). Causes and strategies for requesting clarification in dialogue. *Proceedings of the 5th SIGdial workshop on discourse and dialogue at HLT-*

- NAACL 2004. Association for Computational Linguistics.  
<https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W04-2325>
- Steen, G. J. (2017). Attention to metaphor: Where embodied cognition and social interaction can meet, but may not often do so. In B. Hampe (Ed.), *Embodied cognition and multimodal discourse* (pp. 279-296). Cambridge University Press.
- Steen, G. J., Dorst, A. G., Herrmann, J. B., Kaal, A., Krennmayr, T., & Pasma, T. (2010). *A method for linguistic metaphor identification: From MIP to MIPVU*. John Benjamins.
- Thibodeau, P. H., Crow, L., & Flusberg, S. J. (2017). The metaphor police: A case study of the role of metaphor in explanation. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 24, 1375-1386. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-016-1192-5>
- Thompson, L. (2013). More of the same or a period of change? The impact of bill committees in the twenty-first century House of Commons. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 66(3), 459-479. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gss016>
- Turpin, C. & Tomkins, A. (2011). *British Government and the Constitution* (7th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Walton, D. (2007a). The speech act of clarification in a dialogue model. *Studies in Communication Sciences: Journal of the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research*, 7(2), 165-197.
- Walton, D. (2007b). Dialogical models of explanations. In *Proceedings of the International Explanation-Aware Computing (ExaCt) Workshop 2007*, pp. 1-9.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1987). *English speech act verbs: A semantic dictionary*. Academic Press.