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# The use of clarificatory metaphors in argumentative discourse in British Public Bill Committee debates

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**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.

**Keywords:** argumentation; clarification; explanation; metaphor; opposition; parliamentary debates

## 1 Introduction

Parliamentary debates typically involve an exchange of arguments concerning complex issues, such as taxation, welfare, and more. To effectively scrutinise the acceptability of new policy and legislative proposals regarding these issues, it is

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vital to ensure that the argumentation advanced in parliamentary debates is clear and comprehensible to all discussion parties, including the electorate. This often requires clarification, which can be achieved by comparing an unfamiliar and abstract concept, like welfare, to a more familiar and concrete concept, like the human body (Nerlich et al. 2011; Thibodeau et al. 2017).

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 an issue that foregrounds some aspects, while downplaying others (e.g., Grady 2017; Lakoff and 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. Consequently, other discussants may wish to oppose such metaphors 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 [...]

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. In reply, Claire Perry argues 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 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 provide our theoretical framework, including a characterisation of British PBC debates. Subsequently, we discuss our data and methodology. Then, we present detailed analyses of 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.

## 2 Literature review

British 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 bill 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 a bill, especially because there is no provision that requires to select members with relevant interest or expertise (Levy 2010). Additionally, Committees 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 metaphor, various aspects of an abstract and complicated issue are mapped onto familiar aspects of human life that are better 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 and Tomkins 2011).

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 and 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 and 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.

Discourse-analytical research into metaphor use has raised awareness of and demonstrated the various functions that metaphors may fulfil in conversational interaction, such as in classroom interaction, reconciliation talk, and politics (e.g. Cameron 2003, 2007; Charteris-Black 2004; Drew and Holt 1995; Levitt et al. 2000; Musolff 2004; Semino 2008). These studies have shown that people use metaphor to think (cognitive function), to explain (ideational function), to manage and structure talk, and to convey attitudes and values (affective function) (Cameron 2008: 197). The present study contributes to this body of research by focusing on the role of metaphorically expressed clarifications in discussions on legislative proposals that relate to and affect the argumentative moves made by the discussants. To analyse the ways in which clarificatory metaphors contribute to the resolution of the debate in PBCs, we use insights from deliberate metaphor theory (DMT) (Steen 2015, 2017) and the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (Van Eemeren 2018), complemented with insights on repair sequences from Conversation Analysis (Schegloff et al. 1977).

Before discussing these theoretical perspectives, 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. Explanation and clarification exchanges 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: 5). Specifically, the purpose of an explanation is to verbally transfer understanding from the speaker to the hearer (Walton 2007b: 1; Wierzbicka 1987: 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: 7).

The metaphorically expressed clarifications and explanations are here embedded in legislative debates, and relate to and affect the argumentative moves made by the discussants. To identify and analyse these metaphors we make use of DMT (Steen 2017). DMT extends conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), which mainly focuses on the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of metaphor, by also taking into account the communicative dimension of metaphor. 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. Reijnders 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. Analysing a metaphor's communicative dimension is of particular importance to this study, because in our analysis we focus on metaphors that are used to bring about understanding of a target domain by comparing it to some source domain.

To analyse how clarificatory metaphors contribute to the resolution of PBC debates, we make use of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, complemented with insights on repair sequences from Conversation Analysis. Within pragma-dialectics, argumentation is viewed as part of a critical discussion in which participants aim to resolve a difference of opinion on the merits (Van Eemeren 2018). A pragma-dialectical analysis requires that a discussion as it actually occurs is reconstructed in terms of a critical discussion, resulting in an analytic overview of the argumentative moves that the discussion parties make. With the ideal model of a critical discussion, the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation provides a conceptual tool for the analysis of argumentative discourse. It does not, however, offer the tools to analyse clarification exchanges. Therefore, we will complement our analyses with insights from the conversation-analytical characterisation of 'repair sequences', which allow for analysing the ways in which mutual understanding is achieved by making use of metaphors in PBC debates.

The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation and Conversation Analysis have differing aims and methods. Pragma-dialectics employs the theoretical model of a critical discussion to analyse and evaluate argumentative discourse.

Conversation Analysis attempts to describe the practices and organisation of social interaction and talk-in-interaction. For the purposes of our study, insights from these two perspectives can be fruitfully combined. The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation offers the tools and concepts to identify the standpoints and arguments to which the clarificatory metaphors under examination relate. The conversation-analytical insights into repair sequences enable us to analyse how mutual understanding of the ongoing argumentation between committee members is achieved by making use of metaphors and by resisting these metaphors. This way, our analysis demonstrates which misunderstandings between committee members arise, how metaphors are employed in an attempt at clarifying the ongoing argumentative discourse, to what kind of argumentative move the clarificatory metaphors relate, and the ways in which these metaphors are taken up by other discussants. As such, our analysis reveals how metaphorically expressed clarifications in PBC debates relate to and affect the argumentative moves made by the discussants.

## 3 Data and methodology

### 3.1 Data

Our cases are from the PBC debate on the Digital Economy Bill of 20 October, 2016. 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 ‘Hansard reporters’ to remove repetitions and obvious mistakes, without altering the meaning of what is said (Hansard (Official Report) n.d.).

In our analysis we focus on three instances of metaphors employed to clarify or explain a standpoint or argument that elicit opposition in various ways. The three exchanges under examination are excellent illustrations of the ways in which metaphors can be used for clarifying and explaining the ongoing argumentative discourse, and how such metaphors can be opposed by other discussion parties.

### 3.2 Identifying metaphors

To identify and analyse metaphors we made use of the Metaphor Identification Procedure – Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) (Steen et al. 2010) and the Deliberate Metaphor Identification Procedure (DMIP) (Reijnierse et al. 2018). We used MIPVU to find metaphorical words, and DMIP to determine if a metaphor is potentially deliberate.

MIPVU is a method developed for the systematic and reliable identification of metaphor-related words. It starts out from the operational definition of metaphor as ‘a cross-domain mapping in thought’, and identifies metaphorical words by contrasting their contextual meaning with their basic meaning. An example is the word ‘to come’ in the sentence ‘[t]his discussion is helping me to come to some form of understanding’. The basic meaning of ‘to come’ involves physical movement, whereas its contextual meaning has to do with reaching a particular mental state (*Macmillan dictionary*). As the contextual meaning can be contrasted with, and be understood in comparison with the basic meaning, ‘to come’ is here used metaphorically.

Additionally, MIPVU allows for identifying literally used words rendering metaphorical expressions, i.e. direct metaphors. Direct metaphors do not comprise a contrast between a word’s contextual and basic meanings, but involve direct language use about a source domain expressing an explicit comparison with a target domain. Example (1) discussed in the Introduction, in which websites providing online pornographic content are compared to cinemas, involves such a direct cross-domain mapping between two different domains (see Steen et al. (2010) for a more detailed description of how MIPVU is to be applied).

Subsequently, it is determined if a metaphor can be considered potentially deliberate. This decision is based on whether or not distinct attention to the source domain as a separate referential aspect of the meaning of an utterance is required (Steen 2017). DMIP takes the following operational definition of deliberate metaphor as a starting point: “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). Accordingly, it identifies potentially deliberate metaphors by determining whether the source domain of a metaphor-related word is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which the metaphor-related word is used. The metaphor in (1) is an example of deliberate metaphor; a direct comparison between online services and cinemas is made, meaning that the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used (see Reijnierse et al. (2018) for a more detailed description of how DMIP is to be applied).

### 3.3 Analysing clarification sequences embedded in argumentative discourse

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 and Grootendorst 2004: 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 and Grootendorst 1984). Whenever discussants fail to understand one another, they may request a clarification or explanation to guarantee understanding of the performed speech act. A discussant who doubts the clarity of his/her formulation may also offer a clarification or explanation on their own accord (Van Eemeren and 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 in 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: 14–15).

To determine how explanation or clarification 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.

To analyse the ways in which mutual understanding is achieved by employing metaphors in PBC debates, we use insights from the conversation-analytical characterisation of ‘repair sequences’. 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. Repairs can be classified as self-initiated when a repair is provided by a speaker without being requested to do so, or other-initiated when a repair is made in response to a request for repair, and as self-repair when the repair is made by the speaker itself, or other-repair when the repair is made by the speaker’s interlocutor. Repair sequences may consist of (a) a request for clarification, initiating 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: 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 by the addressee.

## 4 Data analysis

In the debate under examination, 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 backbench member Claire Perry to probe the Minister on how he intends the enforcement process to be carried out.

The Opposition supports the amendments because it believes 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 who 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.

(1) 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 who 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), which takes 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’. The metaphor 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 hit toy moles that randomly appear from different holes. He elaborates the metaphor further by saying “[u]nless we have a sufficiently large mallet to give the mole a whack early on”, but is interrupted before he can finish his sentence. Matheson’s reaction indicates that the interrupters accuse him of joking about a serious situation by introducing the whack-a-mole analogy. In reaction, Matheson seems to initiate an other-initiated self-repair; he abandons the metaphor and repeats and continues the explanation of his argument in non-metaphorical terms.

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 other discussants 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: 165). In the latter case, the committee member that advanced the argument is expected 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.

The metaphor employed by Matheson is considered an explanation, as opposed to an argument, because it is not aimed at supporting the standpoint that the regulator should have the right tools to tackle non-complying providers of online pornography, but to explain the consequences of not providing the regulator with the right tools. The metaphor illustrates the point raised by Matheson, but does not offer any support to Matheson's standpoint that the regulator needs more efficient enforcement powers. As an explanation, however, it puts a particular perspective on the issue under discussion that is in line with Matheson's standpoint that the regulator should have more efficient regulatory powers; the metaphor characterises the age-verification regulator chasing pornography websites without sufficient tools as impulsive and uncontrolled.

It is customary in 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). Accordingly, Matt Hancock can be expected to refute the arguments supporting 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 who 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.

Matt Hancock:

I think the whack-a-mole analogy inadvertently made the point, which is that when we are trying to deal with a problem on the internet, where people can move about, we can deal with the mainstream of the problem, which comes from reliable providers of adult material, who are already engaged and want to ensure they comply with the law. In future, once this measure becomes law, refusing to put age verification on adult material will be illegal, so we will be dealing with illegal activity. That will mean that the vast majority of people will comply with the law, and we heard that very clearly in the evidence session.

The analysis of this exchange shows that a 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 who 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; and
- (3) payment and ancillary service providers should be required to block payments 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 the government backbench member Claire Perry to clarify and strengthen the enforcement process exercised by the age-verification regulator over the websites making pornographic content available to people in the UK. Perry raises various concerns regarding the clause that the amendments aim to change. Before being able to address all issues, however, Matheson intervenes to ask Perry to clarify whether the term ‘ancillary service provider’ includes businesses such as telecoms providers, thereby initiating a repair sequence:

- (2) 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?

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: 25; Van Eemeren et al. 2007: 26), tabling the amendments can be seen as advancing a standpoint. Matheson's question whether 'ancillary service provider' includes businesses such as telecoms providers is a clarification request regarding part of the propositions advanced by Perry. The conventions governing parliamentary debates impose the provision of a clarification, after which the other discussion parties can adopt a positive or negative standpoint towards the propositions under discussion, or express doubt about it. However, Perry does not give the requested clarification. She indicates that she would like the Minister to respond to Matheson's question, and informs the Committee that telecoms providers already comply with the BBFC's age-verification requirements. She then raises another 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. Perry hence resumes her argumentation in support of the amendments:

Claire Perry:

I am perhaps going to let the Minister spell that out exactly. [...] 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. [...] 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. [...] 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.

At this point, Perry is again interrupted. In an attempt to give the requested clarification, Debbonaire advances a metaphor in which she compares pornography websites to cinemas:

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?

In this fragment, Debonnaire invites committee members to use their knowledge of visiting a cinema to enhance their understanding of the online services involved in providing online pornographic content. Debonnaire even explicitly instructs the Committee that the metaphorical comparison 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, Debonnaire poses the question “[d]oes that metaphor help”, which could be interpreted in two ways: as a request for 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 partly accepts the metaphor as an accurate clarification, but also highlights that when the cinema would be paying the bus driver, the bus driver would be considered responsible for allowing a child to see pornography:

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.

By only partially accepting the metaphor and then elaborating it, Perry provides a further clarification of the term ‘ancillary service provider’. She subsequently uses the premise that a bus driver could be paid for by a cinema as an argument 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, Debonnaire attempts to give the requested clarification by advancing a metaphor in which she compares online content providers to cinemas. Perry’s response to the metaphor reveals that she believes that Debonnaire does not fully comprehend the term. By extending the metaphor, Perry initiates what Schegloff (1992) calls a ‘third-position repair’, repairing the perceived lack of understanding exhibited by Debonnaire 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 response to the metaphor fulfils several functions at the same time. It partly accepts the metaphor as an acceptable clarification of the term ‘ancillary service provider’, but specifies that the metaphor does not hold when a bus driver would be paid for by a cinema. 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. Debbonaire questions the extent to which they are responsible for providing online pornographic content to minors. In the ensuing discussion about search engines, two different metaphors are advanced, each highlighting different characteristics of search engines that are considered relevant to determining their responsibility. The government backbench member Nigel Huddleston compares search engines to a library, whereas Debbonaire compares them to a sign.

(3) 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 this fragment, Huddleston responds to a reassurance given by Perry 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 work, he compares them to a library index. 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: 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 specifies the way in which 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”.

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 search engines playing an active role in providing online pornographic content.

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:

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”.

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 frame search engines in such a way as to promote one standpoint, while criticising an opposing standpoint.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

Combining insights from metaphor theory, the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation and notions on repair sequences from Conversation Analysis, this study

contributes to the development of metaphor theories based on manifestations in actual (argumentative) discourse. Its main contribution lies in demonstrating the important role played by metaphors used for clarificatory/explanatory purposes and the opposition to such metaphors in furthering a shared understanding of the ongoing argumentation between discussion parties in parliamentary 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 and explanatory metaphors are opposed reveal the intricate ways in which these exchanges are interwoven with the ongoing argumentation in PBC debates.

The detailed analysis of three cases of clarificatory and explanatory metaphors demonstrate that metaphors can be a helpful tool for politicians to facilitate mutual understanding of standpoints and arguments. The metaphors in cases (1) and (3) show that the 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.

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 specified further in order to avoid misunderstandings of the proposition under discussion. In this case, the metaphor is further elaborated to 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.

This study does not constitute a comprehensive account of all 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 ways in which such metaphors can be opposed. To further examine the role of clarificatory and explanatory metaphors in parliamentary debates, more data should 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 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 findings 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.

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