Text and context of parliamentary debates

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i. Introduction

It is customary to search for the defining properties of a genre in the structures of text or talk. The same is true for parliamentary debates. These do have some characteristic textual properties, such as some well-known politeness formulas used to address other rnembers of parliament (MPs), specific forms of political or adversarial impoliteness' (Harris 2001; Ilie 2001), and some other typical dialogical features. However, I shall argue in this paper that much of the genre theory of parliamentary debates should be formulated in tercos of properties of their *context*. In other words, rather than for instance by their topics, style or turn-taking, parliamentary debates are primarily (and rather trivially) defined by the fact that the people engaging in these debates are Members of Parliament (MPs), that the debates take place in the political institution of Parliament, and that the MPs are 'cloing politics' or cdoing legislation' among other contextual features.

The problem with this thesis is that there is a long tradition, going back to classical rhetoric, to describe the textual structures of political speeches, but that the theory of context in contemporary linguistics and discourse analysis is rather primitive, and barely allows for sophisticated analyses. The present paper therefore should be seen as merely a modest attempt to provide a 'contextual' approach to parliamentary discourse. I shall do that by first sketching in brief my current theory of context, and then apply it in a partial theory of parliamentary debates and in a description of some data from a debate held in the British House of Commons. For other properties of parliamentary debates, I must refer to other work in this book, other work by their authors, as well as to a previous paper of mine on parliamentary debates (Van Dijk 2000).

2. Earlier studies on context

Linguists and discourse analysts often speak about context, but a more or less explicit theory of context remains on the agenda. As is the case in psychology, most sociolinguistic accounts tend to examine such relationships in terms of simple co-variation or probability, instead of analyzing the precise nature and strategies of contextualization.

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Because Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) is undoubtedly the approach in linguistics that most often invokes the notion of context, we shall begin by commenting on their proposals (we hope to do so in more detail in a future book on context).

One may expect of a socially oriented, functional theory a particularly sophisticated theory of context, so our examination of the SFL concept of context will be particularly critical. Without an explicit theory of context, much of the basis of the SF approach to language would lack a firm foundation because the functions of language are precisely defined in terms of properties of such contexts.

Influenced by British anthropology and linguistics (Malinowski, Firth), systemic-functional linguistics distinguishes between the *context of situation* and the broader *context of culture,* which is seen as being related, at a higher level, rather to the language system or to genres. In the further discussion of the SF-notion of context we shall however ignore the notion `context of culture' because we are here focusing especially on the theoretical account of the more local, more direct situational environment of discourse (for detail, see e.g., Eggins 1994). It should be emphasized though that types of situation, as well as the system that governs these are of course related to fundamental cultural resources. The same is true for the relations between text and talk at the local level, and larger systems of intertextuality at the global level (see also Lemke 1995).

The main focus of SFL is on the context of situation, which is analyzed in terms of three main categories or parameters, briefly defined as follows:

a. field: ongoing activity, subject master
b. tenor: participant relations
c. mode: medium, and the role discourse plays in the ongoing activity.

For a more detailed discussion, see, e.g., Eggins (1994), Halliday (1978), Leckie-Tarry (1995), Martin (1992) and the contributions in Ghadessy (1999).

Some aspects of these notions had already been formulated in the 1960s in applied Iinguistics and Iinguistic stylistics (see, e.g., Gregory 1967; Spencer & Gregory 1964). However, a further historical study of the origin and originality of these notions in SFL is beyond the scope of this paper. In the last decades the notions are so closely associated with SFL that they should bear the theoretical responsibility for them, so that the critique we formulate below is not primarily directed at the uses of these notions in work of the stylistics of the 1960s.

Although the contexts of the three categories of context of situation as formulated in SFL are slightly different for different authors, the notions have not changed much in the last 30 years. Theoretically the notions are rather vague and heterogeneous, and it is striking that for a functional theory of language that aims to provide a 'social semiotic, context structures have not been explored more systematically and more explicitly in all these years. Not only are the terms (field, tenor, mode) hardly transparent, as to their intended meanings, but also the usual — informal — descriptions of their meanings are barely enlightening.

Also, several SF Iinguists are not always happy with them, although they usually maintain them; see also the discussion on these context categories in Martin (1985, 1992, 1999). Indeed, the brief critical discussion we provide here should not hide the fact that also within SFL there are many dissident voices about many aspects of classical SFL. That is, SFL does not offer a unitary, coherent theory but rather a collection of studies by scholars who originally have been inspired by the work of Halliday, and who still use some of the standard notions of SFL, but who otherwise have gone their own way, as is for example the case of such varied approaches as those of Jim Martin, Eija Ventola, Jay Lemke, Norman Fairclough and Theo van Leeuwen, among many others.

But let me return to the standard characterizations (definitions would probably be too strong a term) of the three dimensions of context in SFL.

'Field' is the term for the contextual category of (say) `ongoing social activity. This is a relatively clear description of an important aspect of the social situation that may be relevant for discourse. One may only wonder why the term 'Field' instead of simply 'Social Interaction' has been used for this contextual dimension. To complicate matters, however, Field is *also* used to refer to "subject matter", a notion that has Iittle to do with ongoing social activities, but **rather should be defined in terms of global semantic meanings (or macrostructures) of texts — and hence not of contexts.**

`Tenor' is a similarly strange term, but its intended contextual contents are fairly clear: participants, their relations and their roles. Apart from the somewhat obscure terminology, the only problem with this category in SFL is that it is often only participant relations that are being mentioned in its characterization, and not the other relevant social properties of participants, such as their group membership, let alone the important cognitive properties of participants such as their knowledge — a problem I shall critically deal with in some more detail below.

'Mode' as a term is slightly more comprehensible, but again it is a heterogeneous collection of contextual categories. It is usually described as "the role language is playing in the ongoing activity." For instance, language may be constitutive of such an activity or be only peripheral to it. But the notion is also routinely used to refer to the written or spoken 'mode' of discourse, or even to the distance (intimacy, etc.) of the speakers. Also rhetorical functions and purposes or even genres have been discussed in this category. In sum, Mode is a ragbag of heterogeneous notions, some of which do not belong in a theory of context at all (such as rhetorical properties of language), whereas others merely indicate the functional nature of language use or discourse, and should hence be explained by the joint categories of the context.

If we merely look at these few notions and their definitions, and ignore the broad linguistic implications diese have had in SFL, our conclusions about the theory of context in SFL would have to be quite critical:

- The contextual categories are not original (they are largely due to variation stylistics);
- The notions are theoretically unproductive and inert (they have barely changed in many years);
- They are rather vague (even SF linguists have variable definitions of the categories);
- They are heterogeneous (theoretically very different notions are described by these categories).

At the same time, there is very little inspiration from the many other approaches to context in linguistics and especially in anthropology, sociology or social psychology (see below), at least in the analysis of the context. There are relations with sociolinguistics (especially Bernstein's), sociology and critical discourse analysis, among other directions, but these do not primarily focus on the improvement of the theory of context.

In light of for instance what has been done in the ethnography of speaking and in the social psychology of episodes (see below) it is striking that SF for

so long has been content with a rather heterogeneous set oí very general and vague notions, without doing systematic research on the properties oí the social situation oí communicative events. Although they are occasionally mentioned as part oí one oí the three categories, one wonders why there is no systematic analysis oí, íor instance, such categories as social domain, setting, time, place or direction, oí the many institutional constraints on discourse.

The same is a íortiori true íor lack oí attention to the many types oí 'mental' aspects oí the social situation that are relevant íor text or talk, such as purposes or aims, and especially knowledge, a notion that is very seldom used in SF analyses oí context, at least not as a cognitive notion or as knowledge oí individual speakers (íor SFL, undoubtedly, knowledge is a social notion, in the sense that knowledge is — somehow — "in" or "oí" society, and not in the minds oí people).

In other words, the SF concept oí context is not only inadequate íor the reasons mentioned aboye, but it is also basically incomplete: very important categories are missing. The same is true íor reflections on the internal structures oí contexts.

And finally, despite the main claims oí a íunctional theory oí language, there is strictly speaking no explicit theoretical íramework that describes and explains how social structures oí contexts can aííect language or discourse structures, and vice versa. The relationship is merely postulated, but there is no explicit interface that shows how language users actually are able to adapt their discourse to their social environment. Like in much oí classical sociolinguistics, this relationship in SF is not an explanatory one, but a correlational, descriptive (probabilistic) one.

This is not surprising, because SFL has always rejected a cognitive approach to language in which such an interface should be íormulated. SFL developed in the tradition of British empiricism, and against a background oí behaviorist assumptions about "observability" as a crucial condition oí "objective" scholarship, as we can find in Malinowski and Firth (Firth 1968: 170), and later in Halliday's work (Halliday 1978:170). Such "mental" aspects as purposes or knowledge are thereíore as alien in the SF-descriptions oí context as meanings in the work oí Bloomfield. And without these and related notions, many aspects oí language use cannot properly be accounted íor. This oííicial position is again confirmed by Hasan (Hasan 1999:220), claiming that "the impetus íor speaking does not originate in the knowledge oí Ianguage", a claim that oí course hinges upon the interpretation oí the vague term "Ímpetus".

Although the SF-theory oí context is in my view quite disappointing, this does not mean that systemic Iinguistics has nothing to oííer to a context-

sensitive theory oí discourse. That is, its main `íunctional' contribution is not so much in the theory oí social situations, but rather in the ways social situations impinge on language, that is at the level oí what in SF-jargon is called `register,' or rather in the way register is related to grammar and properties oí discourse.

That is, the notion oí register itselí is quite vague, and íor some authors more or less the same as context (e.g., Martin 1992). The context categories oí SF described aboye are often also called register categories, but it seems more sensible to clearly distinguish between the Iinguistically relevant aspects oí social situations, that is contexts, on the one hand, and the totality oí Iinguistic options or possible variations that are related to these context íeatures, on the other hand, and reserve the term `register' íor the latter — thinking oí the possible choices Ianguage users have in a given situation. In other words, `register' (or `style') is rather the discursive-structural result oí the way language can vary as a function oí context structures or even more succinctly it may be defined as the trace oí the context in the text.

Thus, although SF in general describes Ianguage structures in terms oí their íunctions (oíten coníusingly called `meanings' in the SF tradition, already in Firth), and thus is able to relate Iinguistic structures in terms oí their social uses, the Iack oí explicitness oí the SF-notion oí context also carries over to its mappings or traces in talk or text. Thus, the context category oí field is usually associated with the `ideational' (meta-) íunction oí language, tenor with the `interpersonal' íunction, and mode with the 'textual' íunction oí Ianguage.

These general (meta) íunctions, however, are as vague, puzzling and heterogeneous as their contextual counterpart categories. Thus, what people are taiking about, and the current, ongoing activity, vaguely relate to the account oí experiences that are typically being denoted by the ideational íunction, but only very vaguely. Indeed, a news article, as well as many other discourse genres, is usually about events that have Iittle to do with the experiences of its participants, either oí journalists or oí newspaper readers or TV viewers.

More straightíorward is the relation between the context category oí tenor (participant relations) with the interpersonal íunction. However, one would in that case expect at least the integration oí a pragmatic theory oí speech acts or a theory oí conversational interaction, but as is the case íor many other theories and approaches oí discourse, these have not been integrated in the classical theory oí SFL — although Iater authors have provided some elements oí integration.

Perhaps most coníusing is how Mode categories are assumed to systematically Iink up with 'textual' functions — a strange notion at this level when

the very notion oí context precisely wants to account íor the íunctions oí `text' in the social situation. Probably, this is a remnant oí the typical sentence or clause-oriented basis oí SFL in grammar, where words, clauses and sentences also had a "textual" íunction (íor instance in relation to cohesion or coherence). In a theory oí discourse this does oí course hardly make sense, because it is the relations between context and whole texts — and their structures — that are at stake. In other words, the 'textual' íunction is a rather heterogeneous and inconsistent category in this line-up. Textual íunctions thus understood must be described in discourse theories, e.g. in semantics, and not in a `pragmatic' theory oí context.

Not only are the Ianguage íunctions based on the three context categories thus getting iníected by the same vagueness as their contextual counterparts, one may also, and again, wonder whether íundamental categories are not missing in this approach. Indeed, one may wonder whether there is no Iinguistic or discursive evidence íor the íollowing obvious (global) functions oí Ianguage variously proposed and used by many other linguists and discourse analysts, in a tradition that has roots in Jakobson's íamous article (Jakobson 1960):

a. Intra-personal íunctions (personal identity, personal opinions, etc.)
b. Emotional íunctions (expression oí íeelings, aííect)
c. Group íunctions (membership oí a group, group identity)
d. Intergroup íunctions (power, dominance and solidarity)
e. Cultural functions (general common ground, consensus, norms, values, etc.)
f. Esthetic íunctions (e.g., in Iiterature).

These `meanings' or íunctions are barely revolutionary, and appear in most work on the social or cultural íunctions oí language. Oí course, SF Iinguists also talk about them, maybe in other terms, but it is strange that the triple that organizes the SF concept oí context also must be reproduced in the SF concept oí register and language íunctions, thus leading to a strange, arbitrary reduction, and the neglect oí important aspects oí language use in the classical SF íramework. Again, this does not mean that there are no SF Iinguists who use other communicative functions, but somehow these do not seem to be integrated in the old íramework, which as we suggested aboye seems to be quite resistant to change and updating.

We shail not further detail our critique oí the SFL concept oí context, but only conclude that compared to other approaches, íor instance in ethnography and social psychology, the notion (developed by linguists) is theoreticaily ad hoc. Although on many topics there are significant variations among SFL

scholars, for instance in the work oí Martin (e.g., Martin 1985, 1992, 1999), Ventola (1995) and Lemke (e.g., Lemke 1995) when compared to the standard theory, there have as far as I know not been any serious alternative formulations for the theory oí the structures of context (see Ghadessy 1999).

As briefly suggested aboye, an important diíference with my own approach is that dominant SFL is explicitly anti-mentalist, a stance it shares with much of sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and discursive psychology, but not with cognitive anthropology. On various occasions Hailiday and others have emphasized that they do not need any 'mental' interface for the relations between social context and language use (see e.g., Firth 1968:170; Hailiday 1978:39). This is also the reason they reject Hymes' concept oí communicative

Instead of participants' knowledge oí the language, SFL theorists preíer to talk about the `potential' oí the system. How Ianguage users are able to acquire, use and change that `potential' is not further explained, at least not in cognitive terms. The nature or locus of that `potential' and how they magicaily control text and talk are not specified, as is also the case íor related notions such as `repertoire' in discursive psychology.

As we have seen, one oí the other theoretical problems of the rejection oí cognitive accounts is that there is no theoretical interíace between the language system or social language use, on the one hand, and actual text and talk of individual language users, on the other hand. Note that accounting íor the cognitive dimensions oí language use does not imply a *reduction* to individualism, but only the possibility to *also* explain personal variations oí language use. That is, we should not only account íor the social dimensions oí discourse, but also explain how and why all discourses are unique and individual, and that this `subjectivity' must also be built into the context. Moreover, because meanings, knowledge or understandings may be *socially shared,* mental descriptions may be *both* personal *and* social. We here touch upon one of the most resistant and problematic misunderstandings of virtually all 'social' approaches to Ianguage and discourse, namely that cognitive accounts are necessarily individualist and hence also anti-social.

Incidentally, SFL's positivism and anti-mentalism is inconsistent with the proposals of one oí its historical forerunners, defined as such by Malinowski, Firth and Halliday, namely German linguist Philip Wegener (1848-1916). This scholar is said to have provided the first íormulation of a theory oí situation, but it is interesting to note that, unlike in SF research, part oí this situation is íormulated by him in cognitive terms, such as the 'situation of recall, that is, what we *recall* now of what has been said before (which obviously is *not*

the same as what actuaily has been said beíore, that is, the co-text as it is traditionally defined).

Although Hailiday and other leading SF theorists explicitly reject any mentalist or individualist descriptions or explanations, and prefer to focus on the social reality' oí language use, some oí their key notions, such as meaning and functions, hardly refer to 'observable' events either. That is, a strictly positivist or behaviorist observational approach is inconsistent with a functional approach to language using terms such as meanings or meta-functions.

The same is true for the theory oí context. Already Firth, and later Halliday and others, stressed that we are not dealing with real social situations, but with abstractions, íor instance defined in terms oí what is *relevant* for language users. Similarly, notions such as language system, potentialities, levels of grammatical description, cohesion and other aspects oí discourse, are all non-observable, abstract, theoretical notions or rather the mental constructs of language users.

What usuaily happens in anti-mentalist theories of language and discourse (such as conversation analysis, discursive psychology etc.) is that cognitive notions come in through the backdoor. Thus, in spite oí their anti-mentalist (or perhaps rather non-mentalist) orientation, SFL theorists also speak oí belieí systems, value systems, appraisal systems and ideologies. They do so however in terms of their expression in language and discourse, rather than in more cognitive terms (see also Halliday & Matthiessen 1999).

The rejection oí fundamental cognitive notions, such as purposes or knowledge, among many others, is therefore in my view inconsistent with an empiricaily adequate theory of language, for which íorms of thought are no less 'real' than forms of action. The crucial point is that social meaning is not just social, but also mental, and this is not only the case íor cognitive analysts, but also íor language users themselves, íor whom meanings, knowledge belieís, opinions, attitudes and any other aspect of language understanding are things oí the mind. We shail argue below that the same is true íor their interpretations oí communicative events we call contexts.

2.2 Other approaches

Following the early work oí Dell Hymes and his SPEAKING model of context (Hymes 1962), ethnographic approaches have so far contributed much to our understanding of context (Auer & Di Luzio 1992; Duranti & Goodwin 1992; Gumperz 1982). The focus here is on the relevant structures of whole commu-

nicative events, and not just on the structures of text or talk as part oí such events, and such events also include a setting, participants, goals, etc.

Probably the most systematic work on context has been carried out in the social psychology oí language (Brown & Fraser 1979; Giles & Coupland 1991), following various approaches to the social psychology oí situations (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham 1981; Furnham & Argyle 1981; Forgas 1979, 1985). Thus, Brown and Fraser (1979: 35) present a situation schema consisting oí

such as Scene, consisting of Setting (Bystanders, Locale, Time) and Purpose (goals, tasks, topic) and Participants and their various properties and relationships. Wish and Kaplan (1977), using multidimensional scaling, identify five basic dimensions people use in the interpretation oí social situations: co-operative-competitive, intense-superficial, formal-informal, dominant-equal, and task oriented-non task-oriented (see also Forgas 1985; Giles & Coupland 1991). Note though that such dimensions are rather properties of one aspect of the social situation, namely properties oí, and relations between participants and their actions, and not a description of context structures as a whole.

Unlike linguistic approaches however, these social psychological approaches do not usually match assumed context/situation parameters with language or discourse structures, and that is of course the very point of a theory of context. That is, a theory oí context is not the same as a theory of social situation, but a special and important special case oí such a theory. Also, although these proposals come from psychology, they are not always related to mental representations (like models) oí social situations. That is, social situations by themselves can of course not directly influence language use or other social practices, but this is only possible through a cognitive interíace, which spells out how the social situation is interpreted, or in fact constructed, by participants.

3. Fragments of a theory of context

A fully-fledged theory of context is a complex, multidisciplinary theory of the structure oí social situations and communicative events and how their relevant properties are related to the structures and strategies of text and talk (for early — more formal, but rather reductive — íormulations oí this theory, see e.g., Van Dijk, 1972, 1977). I shall only highlight some oí the dimensions oí such a theory, and in this paper largely ignore the earlier research done on context in **linguistics, anthropology, and social psychology as referred to aboye. Despite this earlier work, we still lack a more or less explicit theory of context. Indeed, until today, there is not a single monograph on context.**

3.1 Contexts as mental models

The main thesis of my theory of context is that contexts should not be de-
fined in terms of some kind of social situation in which discourse takes place,
but rather as a mental representation, or *model,* constructed by the speech
participants *of* or *about* such a situation (for details, see Van Dijk 1999).
    Social situations as such, as well as their properties, cannot directly influ-
ence how people write, speak or understand talk or text. Gender, age, roles,
group membership or power of participants, among many other traditional
properties of the situation of communicative events, can be relevant for dis-
course only when participants attend to them, and construct them as such.
This observation is consistent with an ethnomethodological and discursiva
psychological approach to context. However, my proposal suggests that such
`constructs' are not just abstract or vaguely "in between" participants, but de-
fined in terms of mental models, and only thus able to function as the necessary
link between social situations and discourse.
    According to contemporary psychology, mental models are representations
of actions or events in Episodic Memory, which is part of Long Term Memory.
In Episodic Memory (sometimes also cailed Autobiographical Memory),

ways they interpret the events they read or hear about, witness or participate
in themselves. Thus, MPs debating about a recent ethnic conflict do so on the
basis of their personal interpretation of such a conflict, as represented in their
mental model of that conflict. Each MP will have his or her own mental model
(interpretation) of this conflict (for details of the notion of mental model,
see, e.g., Johnson-Laird 1983; Van Dijk & Kintsch 1993; Van Oostendorp &
Goldman 1999).
    Models are not only personal, but also have an important social dimen-
sion. What MPs construct also depends on their general, cultural knowledge
about conflicts and ethnic groups, as well as on their socially shared attitudes
and ideologies about such conflicts or ethnic groups. That is, mental models
of different people may sometimes be very much alike. However, despite these
social dimensions, each model as a whole is subjective and unique (for the cur-
rent communicative situation) because it necessarily also features the personal
experiences, opinions, or autobiographical associations oí MPs about such a
conflict.
    The same is true for mental models that participants construe of a very
special class of events, namely the communicative event in which they are
now taking part. These are also personal, and unique for each partícipant —

if only because of their different autobiographical experiences as well as the different current perspective and interests — and at the same time have a social dimension.

We may conceive of context models as explaining the crucial `pragmatic' notion oí *relevance:* They define what for the discourse participants is now relevant in the social situation (see also Sperber & Wilson 1986). Without a conception of the communicative event as represented by a context model, participants are unable to adequately contribute to ongoing discourse. They would be unable to produce and understand speech acts, would be unable to adapt topics, lexical items, style and rhetoric to the current social event, and they would not even be able to tell what the recipients already know, so that they do not even know what `content to express in the first place. Indeed, without context models, adequate, contextually sensitive discourse is impossible.

In other words, contexts are not 'out there, but <in here': They are mental constructs of participants; they are individually variable interpretations of the ongoing social situation. Thus, they may be biased, feature personal opinions, and for these reasons also embody the opinions of the participants as members of groups. Indeed, a feminist and male chauvinist in conversation are likely to have rather different context models, as do a liberal and a conservative, a professor and a student, and a doctor and a patient talking together. Indeed, biased or incomplete context models are the source of profound communicative and interactional conflicts.

In other words, just like mental models of events talked about, *also context models may be ideologically biased.* Thus, MPs not only may express biased beliefs *about* immigrants, but may also exhibit such beliefs in their interaction and discourse *with* immigrants or with MPs of other political parties.

It should be emphasized that context models are not static mental representations, but *dynamic structures.* They are ongoingly constructed, updated and reconstructed. They change with each change in (the interpretation) of the situation, if only because of the ongoing changes of discourse itself (one of the components of context). For instance, if nothing else, the discourse will dynamically change the knowledge the participants have about the knowledge of the other. But also the ongoing action, the participant roles, aims and other beliefs may change during interaction. That is, in all ongoing interaction and hence also in ongoing conversation, as well as during reading, language participants maintain a dynamically changing model that allows them to flexibly plan, understand, memorize and adapt their discourse to other participants and other aspects of the ongoing event.

Structures of context

As is the case for the cognitive theory of mental models of events, we can only guess what contexts (i.e. context models) look like. Like event models they represent events, so — in a structural account — they most likely feature a schema consisting such categories as Setting (Time, Location), Event/Action, Participants, and so on, as suggested aboye. In this case, the central event/action is discursive (and possibly concomitant with other actions), and the participants are participants of speech. But a more articulate theory of context features more than just these categories.

Thus, at a macro level oí situational understanding, *we* assume that people need to be aware of the global social *domain* in which they are speaking. Politicians in parliament know they are now <cloing' Politics, and teachers are aware they are involved in Education, as judges are aware they are in the area of Law. This general domain (as subjectively represented — and therefore sometimes misguided) will influence the contents of many of the lower level categories of the schema.

Similarly, participants in such domains, when speaking, also engage in *global actions,* such as legislation, teaching or doing justice. *Local actions* realize these global actions (such as criticizing the government, asking students about what they have learned, etc.). We see that as is also the case for a theory of discourse structures, we need a global (macro) and local (micro) level account of context.

Participants as we know may have (assume or construct) many different *roles,* and such roles may affect the production and comprehension of discourse. We assume that there are three basic types of role that are contextually relevant: communicative roles, interactional roles and social roles. Thus, participants obviously need to represent themselves and other participants as speakers/writers or recipients, as well as a complex range of other communicative roles, such as various production roles in institutional situations (for instance in the mass media: writers, editors, actual speakers, etc.) and recipient roles (reader, listener, overhearer, etc.). Interactional roles need to be represented in order to be able to account for various situational positions, such as friends and enemies, proponents and opponents — as is the case for speakers in parliament speaking in support of, or against government proposals. Social roles account for group membership, as defined for ínstance by ethnicity, gender, age, political affiliation or profession. Obviously these varíous role types may be combined: Someone taking part in a parliamentary debate may (right now) be speaker, take a stand as opponent of the government, be an MP, a woman, a conservative, and so on — each role differentiaily affecting discourse

structures. The same is true for the social *relations* between participants as group members, for instance in conversations between women and men.

Finally, contexts also have *cognitive* categories, such as the goals, knowledge and other beliefs of the participants. The goal-directedness of discourse is of course crucial to interpret the interactional functions of discourse, obviously at all levels.

The *knowledge* component is the very basis of a host of semantic and pragmatic properties of discourse, such as implications and presuppositions: The speaker must know what the recipient already knows in order to be able to decide what propositions of a mental model or of the social representations are known to the recipients. And recipients need to know the same about the speaker or writer in order to establish what is actually intended in implicit, indirect, ironic or other non-explicit forms of talk. In other words, people have mutual 'knowledge models' of each other's knowledge, and these models crucially control many of the discursive strategies of participants.

So far, this is merely a tentative taxonomy of probably relevant categories of contexts. Note that not all categories are always relevant: Participants in

variation of context modelling may be a function of earlier communicative experiences. Some speakers, in some situations, will construct a rather rich and extensive context model, whereas others may be rather sloppy or general in their interpretation of the context. Some will be socially more or less

gestures or body posture, for instance, as expressions of contextually relevant emotions, beliefs or goals.

An empirical theory of context also needs to specify which of the categories are general and perhaps universal, and which ones are culturally variable. Thus, in many cultures gender and age will usually be relevant in the production and comprehension of several discourse forms, whereas the length or the colour of the hair of speakers is not usually a relevant category. Such a theory also needs to spell out the relations between the categories: Some may be more relevant than others, thus suggesting a hierarchical structure for context models. The theory should be explicit about the actual effects of context model categories and contents on the selection of model information for meaning representations: What propositions may or must (not) be included? And finally, it should carefully specify what discourse forms, such as those of style, rhetoric, etc., are influenced by context features.

3.2 Parliamentary contexts

This brief account of virhat vire understand by context should be able to heip
us formulate fragments of a theory of parliamentary contexts as they are rou-
tinely and ongoingly constructed by MPs (for other studies of parliamentary
discourse and events, see, e.g., Bayley 1998, 1999; Carbó 1992, 1995; Ilie 1994,
1999, 2000, 2001; Miller 1997, 1998; Van Dijk 2000; Wodak & Van Dijk 2000).

   Although contexts are by definition personal and unique, vire also have seen
that they have important social (and political) dimensions: MPs share much oí
their knovirledge and beliefs about the contexts they construct, and also knovir
hovir other MPs define the current situation, for instance of a parliamentary
debate, in tercos of their ovirn mental models. They knovir, for instance, that
   virhatever the other politicians may say or claim, they represent themselves (and
other MPs) as members oí some political party, and hence as political friends or
opponents. Such avirareness, as represented in the mental model vire call context,
also may actually be ritually expressed or formulated, for instance virhen in the
British House of Commons MPs may address other MPs oí the same party as
`my honourable Friend' — even virhen in other social situations they may be
svirorn enemies.

   In other virords, also due to the socially shared nature of our knovirledge
about language, discourse and communication, and because of the routine na-
ture of everyday context building (a special case of making models oí our daily
experiences), MPs need not invent or build their context models from scratch.
Despite the variations of the social/political situation, as virell as the personally
different experiences of MPs, much of their personal models should consist
of a more or less fixed schema that can be applied novir and again in the in-
terpretation of each session of Parliament. This activation of a knovirn schema
is strategic, and similar to the activation of knovirledge about discourse gen-
res. Hovirever, such a ready-made schema can quickly be adapted to specific
circumstances.

   In light of the general theoretical remarks made aboye about contexts de-
fined as mental models oí communicative situations and events, and some
more informal remarks about parliamentary contexts, let us novir try to be-
come more systematic and deal in more detail virith the hypothetical categories
of the parliamentary context schema.

   To test such hypotheses directly, vire virould need cognitive methods to as-
sess the structure of mental models, but since these models generally involve
forms of discourse (induced in the laboratory), I shall assume that these con-
text categories may also be exhibited in parliamentary talk. This is not merely a

methodological decision, but a theoretical one: contexts are defined in terms of *relevance,* and hence vire must assume that its categories are constructed in such a viray that they monitor specific structures of discourse. This does not mean that context categories are alvirays explicitly formulated and attended to (as is the case for goals or knovirledge), but by definition they are needed to describe and explain at least some properties of discourse.

One of the many assumptions of a theory of mental models is that such models are (hierarchically) organized: important categories on top, and secondary categories lovirer in the hierarchical schema. In our analysis, vire shail first deal virith the respective categories, and then make assumptions on their ordering and organization in the model schema.

Micro and macro categories

Another form of organization pertains to the level of categorization. As vire have seen, some categories may be cailed macro categories because they are defined in more global societal structures, virhereas the more traditional situational categories of face-to-face interaction belong to the micro level of analysis and understanding. Note that it virould be a fallacy to assume, as is often the case in contemporary SFL, microsociological or ethnomethodological approaches, that the micro level oí situated action is more 'concrete' or more 'observable' than macro-structural categories. In our theory, as virell as in everyday experience and understanding, *both* leveis are constructs, and hence represented in mental models.

Thus, in parliamentary debates, global (societal) categories such as politics, parliament, legislation or political parties are no less <real, and no less attended to in conversation and interaction, than typical local level categories such as a parliamentary session, participants or their actions. The point is that the Iatter are alvirays defined in terms of the former: a debate is a parliamentary debate precisely because it is carried out as taking place in the institution of parliament, as part of legislation and as `doing politics. This understanding is not merely cognitive but is also multiply signaled in talk itself.

3.3 Parliamentary Context Categories

3.3.1 *Macro-level categories*

Domain.   As vire already suggested aboye, social situations are routinely understood and experienced as forming part of a larger social domain (see also the notion of 'field' in the virork of Bourdieu; see e.g., Bourdieu 1985). The content of the macro level category of a domain may virell be culturally variable, but

in many contemporary (post) industrial societies, such a segmentation of the social realm may feature domains such as politics, business, education, health care, justice, and so on. Institutions, social roles, professions, povirer relations, as well as social interaction and discourse, and many other societal structures at the macro and micro level of social analysis, tend to be related to such domains. It is here assumed that social actors, virhen engaging in talk or text, implicitly or explicitly attend to (their conception of) such social domains. References to such domains may especially be expected virhen things go virrong, virhen activities or discourses are perceived to cross domain boundaries, virhen professional competence is at stake, or virhen domains need to be defended against members of other domains.

Thus, I assume that Politics is one of such domains, and that the definition of Parliamentary Context categories involves such an overall category. Participants knovir and ongoingly shovir avirareness of participating in the political domain, and of 'cloing politics. Often, such participation in the domain is related to professional roles, such as those of politicians, but that is no condition. Students may be engaged in a political demonstration, and ín that case are avirare of `doing politics' rather than of `doing learning. In other virords, the global domain category is one of the overall categories that contribute to the definition of the situation, and hence to the definition of the status of its díscourses. The slogans shouted by students in a demonstration are thus political if the demonstration is defined as being engaged in virithin the political domain.

For sessions and debates in Parliament, there is in general little doubt about the overall domain. MPs are in general professional politicians, and their virork is generally defined as political and as belonging to the domain of Poli - tics, rather than that of Education or Health Care. Of course, individually or variously so because of ideologically differences, MPs may have different conceptions of virhat exactly politics is or implies, but it is likely that they share the oyeran category of Politics as the social domain that defines sessions of parliament. MPs may talk about education, health case or business, but such talk virould not be construed as being contextually constrained by the domains of Education, Health Care or Business. Indeed, virhen politicians make their decisions or organize their speeches in terms of personal business interests, they may be criticized or prosecuted for corruption — a typical example of (ilegal) domain crossing. Hovirever, domains may sometimes be closely related or even overlap. Thus, MPs are not only elected representatives but also legislators, and as such part of their activities belong to the domain of Justice or Law.

Global actions.   Global domains are characterized by global actions. Thus, virhatever MPs are actually doing in a parliamentary session, such as giving speeches, criticizing the government, or asking questions, all these actions are defined, for MPs themselves as virell as for other people, as engaging in the global acts of legislation or governing the country. Indeed, MPs are legislators. The ultimate point of their speeches or questions, is making or amending lavirs (as in the U. S. system), or discussing, amending and usually ratifying Bills (as proposed by the government) as in the U. K. system.

At this macro level of analysis (or of understanding and representing situations by participants), vire might also postulate other global actions. MPs not only legislate, but also engage in several other global acts oí the political domain:

- Representing their constituents
- Governing the country
- Criticizing the government
- Engaging in opposition
- Implementing party programs
- Making policy

Of course, besides these typical political acts, they also engage in more general social acts oí many kinds, such as:

- Making decisions
- Promoting themselves
- Reproducing (anti)racism
- Making money

All these global acts may take place concurrently, and may be realized by a single discursive act at the local level. That is, `doing politics' at the highest level of this domain representation may involve much more than just legislation, and self- and other designations of MPs as representatives, opposition, policy makers, etc. shovir that such global acts are part of their political identity. We shail assume that for each local discursive act, politicians are — or may be — avirare, of the global (political) significance or functionality of such acts. Questions may be asked on behalf oí constituents, and politicians can only do so virhen being avirare of their role as representatives or as members of the Opposition. And since such avirareness influences the properties of their speeches, vire assume that these global acts should be part oí the context model oí MPs. They are not just analytical inventions of political scientists or discourse analysts, but 'real' global acts in virhich participants consciously engage in virhen talking in parlia-

ment, and virhich guides their discourse, their understanding, their interaction, and also their mutual critique. Being a 'good' politician and professional may imply carrying out local actions as satisfactory manifestation of the global acts.

Institutional actors.   If global domaíns are the scenes of global actions, the logic of action requires there to be also global actors. That is, vire do not merely understand political debates as being defined in terms of MPs, but also as a confrontation between political parties, between government and opposition, and parliament as an institution that 'does' things also as an institution. We thus routinely hear that the Government has decided so and so, or that Parliament has blocked a government decision.

MPs are continuously avirare of their participation in global groups or institutions, rather than merely as unique individuals. Thus their discursive style may be unique, but despite such uniqueness, they alvirays also act as representatives of the parties, opposition, and so on.

3.3.2 Micro-level categories
Setting.   At the specific micro level of ongoing interaction, MPs construct their environment first of all in terms of the ubiquitous category of a temporal and spatial *setting.* Storytelling, nevirs reports and many other aspects of language and discourse, routinely express such a setting by initial categories oí time and space ("Yesterday, in the office....", "Paris, May 5, 2001", etc.).

Also in parliamentary debates MPs construct their context in terms of such a definitional environment. Indeed, parliamentary debates take place, also by lavir, in a well-defined space, Parliament, multiply indexed in their speeches as `here' or 'in this House' — expressions that may be ambiguous between global institutional deixis (here in the institution of Parliament) or local spatial deixís (in this building of parliament).

The temporal setting might be trivially defined as a specific date and day, routinely referred to by deictic expressions such as today, and made explicit as a date in the Acts or Proceedings of parliament. But further analysis may suggest that also temporal settings in parliamentary debates also have legal and political significance beyond a day or date. Indeed, parliamentary decisions or votes may be legally valid or invalid before or after a specific day and date.

Even more influential in parliamentary encounters is dock time. Such time is allocated to speakers by the Chair or by leaders of a debate, and scrupulously measured **and administrated. Continuous reference is made in parliamentary speeches to the minutes MPs dispone of, request, or allocate to each other. Time** of talk is thus one of **the most precious resources of MPs, and allocated under**

quite strict rules and strategies governed by power and other political criteria (hlce equal time allotted to government and opposition parties, etc.). Speakers are visibly and hearably aware of time constraints, and much of their talk is

summaries, or begging for some more time from the Chair. Transcripts of parliamentary debates routinely include regular references to the current time, as do Chairs virhen concluding a debate.

Local actions.   The central defining act of a parliamentary session is undoubtedly the discursive act of a debate. Note though that a 'debate' itself is a higher level, complex discursive notion, which consists of a sequence of speeches of MPs, interventions by the chair, questions of MPs directed at cabinet ministers, interruptions, and so on. Such a debate may not only go on for hours, but sometimes stretch over various days, and various sessions. Formally opened and introduced by the Chair, the debate may be formally concluded by a vote, and a final word of closure by the Chair.

This observation first of all shows that also in the definition and understanding of context, the notions of macro vs. micro, or global vs. local, are gradual. That is, at the most specific local level of action description, an MP may ask a question (below the level of actions, we might even go down to the level of locutionary acts of uttering words or clauses), which may be part of her or his speech, virhich in turn is part of the complex debate. That is, the notion of ongoing' action or interaction is vague in that it can be defined at various linguistic, discursive, interactional and political Ievels . This also means that the contextualization of each aspect of taik in parliament may be multiply related to these different levels, referring or presupposing `these word' 'this question, <this speech' or `this debate, respectively. And since in one session of parliament various topics may be addressed, we may even assume a higher level unit consisting of several debates.

Although we have suggested that in the analysis of parliamentary debates the main focus will undoubtedly be on the discursive interaction defining a debate, it should be borne in mind that the contextual definition of local action in general is not limited to discursive action. Indeed, MPs 'do' a lot of things virhen speaking in parliament, and most of these things require definition in political terms.

Thus, we have seen aboye that at the global level of analysis and representation MPs are first of all engaged in legislation. And although the distance between a word, speech act or speech at the local level and legislation at the global level may be considerable, we must assume that at least occasionally

MPs are aware and show awareness of the functionality of their speech at these more global levels. Also the formality of parliamentary debates reminds MPs constantly of their 'lofty' task of legislators and representatives of the people. This overall, global or macro, organization also acts as a control at the local level. Although local goals of action may vary, the overall goal needs to be consistent with the global acts engaged in. Thus, a local question may be asked as a strategic move to criticize the government, and thus to attack a Bill proposed by the government, and such a move may be an excellent way to engage in opposition, and such opposition may be necessary as a responsible way to represent voters virhose interests may be curtailed by the law, and so on.

In other words, by talking, engaging in speech acts or in other discursive acts, MPs are typically also engaged in a considerable number of *political* acts. It is also for this reason that we need a context theory of parliamentary debates. Asking a question about (say) immigration is, as such, not a political act: many people in society in their respective situations may ask such questions. It is however the political functions of these acts (as part of legislation, governing, engaging in opposition, representing the people, etc.) that define a question as constitutive of a *parliamentary* debate.

Each of these local moves of global level political actions in parliament may be recognized and categorized as such by experts, that is, by MPs themselves. For instance, during question time in the British House of Commons, no speeches may be given and only questions may be asked. But through specific formulations ("Is the Minister aware that... ", etc.) indirect assertions and hence indirect little speeches, including points of critique may be formulated.

Participants.   One of the crucial categories of context models is of course Participants and their relevant properties. It is standard knowledge that many discourse structures vary as a function of the properties of the participants and their relations: pronouns, politeness phenomena, and so on.

In order to make these insights more explicit, I first propose to further analyze this category in terms of different kind of roles:

- Communicative roles (various producer and recipient roles)
- Interaction roles (friend, enemy, opponent, etc.)
- Social roles (e.g., based on gender, class, ethnicity, profession, organization, etc.).

Thus, the traditional speaker/recipient role distinction obviously controls the system of turn taking in parliament. There are however other `speaking' roles that overlap with membership and leadership in social groups or organizations.

That is, a speaker in parliament may be defined as 'speaker' of her or his party on a certain topic or issue, and may even be expected in that case to speak for someone else, and barely expressing personal opinions. Similarly, MPs are by definition `representatives' oí their constituencies, and may be heard as `speaking' for them. Similarly, the chair oí parliament is called the Speaker oí the House in the U. K. and USA. We also know that the person virho is the speaker oí a speech in parliament, need not necessarily be the one virho has conceived the speech, as is the case for many institutional speakers. These different identities or types of Speaking roles, some of virhich are properly political, control for instance the selection of pronouns. Thus, it is well-known that *we* is one of the most political of all pronouns, and variously reflects the identification or representation of the speaker as speaking for her or his party, as an MP speaking for all MPs, as a member of a nation, and so on.

Similar remarks hold for various Recipient categories. MPs first of all address other MPs, and such an identity in the Participant-Recipient subcategory controls many of the strategies of address, politeness and persuasion in parliamentary debates. But MPs know that they will also be (over)heard by journalists and (often through the media) by the voters and any group, organization or country for virhom the speech is relevant. This means that the recipient design moves in parliamentary debates all need to take into account such address directed to voters and others outside oí parliament. Indeed, there are rhetorical moves that allow *you* in such debate to refer to others than those directly addressed in a parliamentary debate, namely the MPs.

Secondly, participant categories are also defined by the very actions they accomplish. That is, it is crucial for the adversarial structures of party-based democracy that MPs are also categorized as representing and defending the Government or the Opposition. In the British House of Commons, members of the same party are routinely addressed as "Friends". We call these categories `interactional' because they may, like communicative categories, be wholly defined by the verbal interaction: one is an Opponent only virhen actually engaging in 'cloing opposition. Many of the properties of the debates, and not only speech acts and acts such as attacking and defending are controlled by these interactional roles.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, MPs may belong to, identify with, represent or defend the interests **of many different social categories, groups, institutions, or other units. They will speak also as Dutch or English, as men or women, as virhite or black, old or young, and so on, and by definition as MPs. These social and political categories control such characteristics as pronouns (such as** *Us* **vs.** *Them),* **and in general the broad strategy of positive ingroup**

description and negative outgroup descriptions so typical of any ideological discourse. This overall strategy may in turn control a host oí positive vs. negative local moves in the presentation of Us vs. Them, and in general the forms of identification with various social groups. Topic choice, at 'the global level, and actor descriptions, presuppositions, disclaimers, implications, level of description, at the local level, and many more semantic structures and moves are typical of this social identity assumed by or ascribed to MPs.

Cognition. Often neglected as a context category, because context has often been exclusively associated with the 'social situation, we finally must assume a major cognitive category. Indeed, the crucial notion of the Aims or Intentions of the speakers is oí course a cognitive category, namely a mental model represented in episodic memory. Both in production as well as in comprehension, thus, the aim each participants has of the interaction is fundamental, giving rise to a broad system oí functional choices. If the overall aim of an MP is to attack the Bill oí the current government, then this Aim controls the way the MP describes the Bill and those virho are responsible for it.

Perhaps most basic of a theory of context, however, is the notion of *knowledge. It* is crucial that MPs know or believe virhat the current knowledge is of the other speakers, so that they are able to select from their mental event models precisely that information that would be most relevant for the recipients. This is however a very difficult procedure, because sometimes knowledge must be repeated, sometimes only part of the information is provided, for instante in presupposition. Sometimes speakers do not keep track of the knowledge set oí their interlocutors, so that `gaps' may come to exist between virhat each of them takes for granted. Hence we need a strong knowledge component in the complex theory of context, because so many structures of discourse depend on them, such as presupposition, completeness, etc.

3.4 Example

As our example we shall analyze a few passages from a debate on Asylum Seekers held in the British House of Commons on March 5, 1997. Note that location and date are already various properties oí the context category of Setting. As to the participants of the context, this debate is initiated by Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Conservative MP of Billericay, later seconded by several other MPs of her party, and responded to by Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn.

I shall focus on those properties oí discourse that are controlled by the hypothetical context models of the participants. A full analysis of the debate

(which lasted about one hour and a half) would require hundreds of pages, so I can only analyze some small fragments by way of illustration oí the theoretical framework presented aboye.

Note that a full context analysis would need to spell out that because their parties are political opponents, also Ms. Gorman and Jeremy Corbyn are political opponents, that the first is a woman and the second a man, that the MPs are party members and speakers of their party, that the Labour party is usually a bit more lenient on immigration that the Conservative Party, and so on. Finally, the cognitive dimension of the context as constructed in the models oí the participants involves the respective aims of the speakers (to persuade other MPs or the general public, etc.), as well as their knowledge, opinions and attitudes about immigration, immigrants, the U. K., and a host oí other relevant issues discussed in this debate. In order to understand Mrs. Gorman's intervention, we further need to know that the oyeran aim of this intervention is to defend tough immigration policies of the Conservative government, and to ward off an attempt by the Labour party to amend the current immigration law.

These rather global context properties define the debate from the outset, and become activated as soon as they are needed at the local level oí model execution.

I shall print all theoretical categories in bold, also those that have not yet been introduced aboye and therefore should be added to the theoretical framework. Words as spoken by the speaker and quoted in running text are printed in italics, and with smaller type, virhen presented as separate indented passages.

This is how Mrs. Gorman begins her speech as well as the virhole debate:

(1) Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I want to bring to the attention of the House the particular difficulties faced by the London boroughs because of the problems of asylum seekers.

Domain. Presupposed in this debate, but duly represented in the context models of the MPs is the oyeran domain in virhich the current debate and session of parliament is to be situated, namely that of politics. This contextual assignment is relevant for the production and comprehension of the speeches to be given, for instance as a condition for the activation and application of the right sort of knowledge, namely about politics, as well as to control the professional rights and duties of MPs, and other contextual categories that locally control many aspects of the form, meanings and functions of the speeches. Indeed, as acting professionals all MPs are aware that virhat they are doing by participating in this debate is `doing politics'.

Global action. Similarly, the context model needs to represent globally virhat kind of overall activity the current activity (speech, debate) is constituting, so that it has a broader aim and functionality, namely legislation. One of the specific aims of Mrs. Gorman is to defend government polic‹ and a restrictive immigration law that is being criticized by Labour. Such defense of current legislation and critique of proposals to change the law is a routine component of the overall political action of legitimization. Contextual knowledge about `what we are doing here' is thus crucial to make the current activities of the MPs meaningful and politically relevant. Moreover, legislation usually deals with current social problems, so that also semantically the reference of Mrs. Gorman to difficulties of boroughs and problems of (created by) asylum seekers can be understood, and as a legitimate concern of an MP, that is, as part of the overall parliamentary action of legislation.

Setting: Location. Implicit is also the knowledge about the Setting of the current debate, namely the British House of Commons (as explicitly signaled by Mrs. Gorman — see below). This may be a routine content of the Location category of the context models of MPs, but we still need to make this explicit in order to account for explicit deictic referential expressions *(the House,* or *here).* In the British House of Commons, such contextual knowledge about the current location is interestingly also presupposed in such expressions as 'the other place, referring to the House of Lords.

Setting: Time. Note also that Timing is important as a temporal aspect of Setting. The Hansard transcript explicitly signals starting time, and regularly does so for other moments. Speakers routinely refer to their lacking or running out of time, or argue that they have only a few minutes left, and that they therefore cannot `yield' to the other speaker.

Knowledge. As suggested aboye, another overall contextual constraint that needs to be highlighted from the start is the fundamental role of shared knowledge. Mrs. Gorman needs to have various types of knowledge, largely shared by the other MPs, and indeed, with many other people in the UK: general knowledge of the language and knowledge of asylum seekers and related topics of immigration, and more specific professional knowledge about how to proceed in such a debate, virhat her duties and rights are as an MP, and even more specifically the knowledge of Conservative MPs about the Labour Party and its attitudes about asylum seekers and immigration. Spelling out all this knowledge, just for this small fragment, let alone for all other fragments below, would require **many pages, and is outside the aims of this paper. I shall further regard the relation between general or political knowledge shared by MPs as being a condition for the meaningfulness and interpretability of this text, and hence as**

a problem for a semantic, rather than of a contextual analysis. Strictly speaking though, knowledge of participants is of course a contextual category. In other words, discourse meaning is, at least also indirectly, a function of context.

Relevant though is Mrs. Gorman's knowledge about the current communicative situation as it is represented in her context model. Note also the use of the definite articles *the, the House, the difficulties, the London boroughs,* and *the problems,* virhich also presuppose (political) knowledge about the current political situation around immigration and asylum seekers and its financial consequences. However, it is worth noting that such knowledge presuppositions maybe ideologically manipulated: The difficulties of the London boroughs and the problems of asylum seekers may exist only in the mind (situation model) of Mrs. Gorman. Others, with a different mental model of the current situation around asylum seekers, might well deny that the London boroughs have any (particular) difficulties, or that the asylum seekers are (causing) a problem.

Participant description/identification. In this (printed) Hansard version of the debate (which is not always identical with the spoken version), we first encounter an identification of the Speaker by her name, followed by the name of her constituency. That is, we here have (textual) expressions of Current Speaker, and of her Professional/Social Role as Member of Parliament and Representative. Note though that her role as MP need not be made explicit, because it is presupposed that all those present in parliament are MPs. In other words, there is much (social, political) knowledge shared by speaker and recipients that needs not be expressed, and that may be attended to only under specific conditions.

Participants: Communicative role: Current speaker. Turning now to the analysis of her speech, we find that the Current Speaker category is routinely expressed by the personal pronoun 1. Selection of the first person pronoun also politically signals that she is the person virho takes the initiative of the debate. Although speaking as a Conservative MP, and as such also representing her party, she here also speaks for herself, and not necessarily voices the opinion of her party. Indeed, later in the debate some of her party members will subtly take distance from virhat she says about asylum seekers.

Participants: Social role: MP. Apart from the description in the written Hansard version, and the usual introduction (or permission to speak) by the Speaker of Parliament, Mrs. Gorman's social (professional) role as MP is presupposed as shared knowledge of the participants. This means that in the context model of all participants the Social Role category of the current situation is filled by the profession of MP, attributed to Mrs. Gorman, as well as to all **others** present. Although not made explicit, however, the current passage

can only be understood virhen the relevant political knowledge is activated and applied to MPs, and hence also Mrs. Gorman. On that knowledge basis she feels not only entitled, but expected to speak about constituents or (other) citizens, as is the case here. That is, her expressed concern is a routine manifestation of her contextual role as MP.

Action. Mrs. Gorman uses a performative verb *(to bring to the attention of)* to refer to her own ongoing communicative act, and thus makes part of the very context explicit. Note that usually speakers simply say virhat they have to say, without making their affirmative speech acts explicit. Combined with the self-descriptive volition verb *to wish* such a formulation expresses both a formal and a polite register, virhich is itself controlled by the Institution (part oí the Setting category).

Recipients. As subcategory of the Participant-Communicative Role subcat- egory, Recipients is filled by the expression *the House,* virhich is intended and understood (on the basis of shared political Knowledge, analyzed aboye) as metonymically standing for `the (British) House of Commons' or parliament, and more specifically here (all) its present members, as (primary) Addressees. There is no textual trace here of possible other (secondary) addressees, such as her constituents, the media or the public at large. Note also that the definite article *the* presupposes shared knowledge of the recipients about virhich House is meant, trivially so as part of the contextual knowledge of the (one and only) louse' they are members of.

We see that the rather informal contextual analysis of even a small fragment already marshals a rather extensive theoretical framework, of virhich several elements (such as all relevant knowledge of the participants) is not yet fully specified in order to explain all discursive structures of this fragment (such as the plausibility of the expression *caused by* as linking difficulties of boroughs with problems of asylum seekers).

The next passage of Mrs. Gorman's speech runs as follows:

> (2) There are, of course, asylum seekers and asylum seekers. I entirely sup-
> port the policy of the Government to help genuine asylum seekers, but
> to discourage the growing number of people from abroad who come to
> Britain on holiday, as students or in some other capacity and, virhen the
> time comes for them to leave, declare themselves to be in need of asylum.

Knowledge. With a well-known rhetorical trick of the apparent tautology (usu- ally expressed with special intonation, not represented in the transcript), Mrs. Gorman right from the start begins the ideological categorization between `good' and `**bad**' asylum seekers, one of the implications of such a tautol-

ogy. Much of such an analysis needs to be provided by a semantic description though. Contextually interesting however is the use oí *of course.* This marker of obviousness signals not only presupposed knowledge, but also that such knowledge is or should be widely shared by everyone. Knowledge (or rather an opinion) about virhat is or should be known is typically contextual, and thus relevant here: it is Mrs. Gorman's opinion. This evaluation of the obviousness of the categorization of asylum seekers as good and bad is driven by an underlying anti-immigration ideology virhich overall tends to assign negative properties to immigrants, as is indeed the case throughout Mrs. Gorman's speech.

Participants: Interaction role. Mrs. Gorman's speech has many communicative, social, political and interactional functions, some of virhich explicitly formulated by the speaker herself. That Conservative MPs support the policies of a Conservative government is obvious, and as such is a belief that needs not to be formulated, because everyone (at least in the House of Commons) knows that. In this case, however, Mrs. Gorman does more than merely assert the obvious. By explicitly supporting Government policy she not only signals her role as MP (see aboye) and not only her role as MP virho is member of a party in power, but also her interactional role in the current debate, namely as supporting the government. Since the policy of the government is formulated in positive terms *(help genuine asylum seekers),* her support is at the same time a form of praise for such government policy — and hence the expression oí an (indirect) speech act. As member of the government party and as a supporter of such (good) immigration policy, she thereby also implicitly evaluates herself as positive, a well known conversational move.

Action. Most of the rest of this passage is an expression of Mrs. Gorman's (conservatively biased) mental model oí the current situation of asylum seekers. Analysis of such a biased expression (such as the description of asylum seekers and their actions) is the task of a critical discourse semantics. But Mrs. Gorman is also politically *doing* something right now, and such actions are of course relevant in the interpretation of the current (political, social) situation, both by herself, as well as by the other MPs. Most explicit is the use of the performative verb *to support,* virhich enacts the political act of accepting and defending government policy. At the same time, she is starting to soy negative things about asylum seekers, and this implies the enactment of various speech acts (such as accusation) and other social actions, such as spreading negative opinions about immigrants, a well-known type of elite discrimination and racism. Note that the euphemism used here *(discourage)* further contributes to the positive self-image of the speaker and the institution (government) she hereby identifies with. Policing and other actions against immigrants are usu-

ally much harsher than merely a form of discouragement. In other words, this verb is an expression of the global strategy oí positive self-presentation, virhereas the earlier part is a contribution to negative other-presentation.

Mrs. Gorman continues as follows:

> (3) The matter was adequately dealt with by the Social Security Committee report on benefit for asylum seekers, virhich was an all-party document that pointed out that it was costing about £200 million a year for those people, many of virhom could reasonably be called economic migrants and some of whom are just benefit seekers on holiday, to remain in Britain. It is wrong that ratepayers in the London area should bear an undue proportion of the burden of expenditure that those people are causing.
> I understand that many people want to come to Britain to work, but there is a procedure virhereby people can legitimately become part of our community. People virho come as economic migrants are sidestepping that.

The third and final example from this speech, immediately following the previous ones, again largely expresses the biased mental situation model Mrs. Gorman has oí current immigration of refugees. Note only the following features that are (also) under control oí the context model of the speaker:

a. the use oí evaluative *adequately,* signaling an **opinion** of the speaker, and hence a property of the context;

b. **knowledge** of and reference to the Social Security Committee as a participant in the situation, and more specifically as an authority;

c. the reference to the all-party document of the SSC, signaling a political **consensus** on matters of immigration, a powerful move of persuasion;

d. the use of the demonstrative *those* in *those people is* a well-known example of taking ethnic, racial or class distance, and to foster the polarization between Us and Them, virhich is also something relevant for the context, namely an expression oí the ideology of the speaker.

e. the expression *may reasonably be called economic refugees* not only has obvious semantic dimensions that need be cut, but also a pragmatic/contextual one: affirmation of the reasonable character of the speaker and her reference group (her part), virhich is part of the overall strategy of positive self presentation. This and the later reference to the `benefit seekers' is also a contribution to the overail strategy of negative other-presentation.

f. Mrs. Gorman not only attacks refugees and supports government policy, but she also engages in virhat she is elected for: representing the voters. Thus, in the brief passage *It is wrong that British ratepayers...* she presup-

poses first that British ratepayers do indeed pay for refugees, negatively evaluates this as bad and a problem that needs to be addressed. In other words, in political terms, she is defending the interests of the British property owners.

g. Finally, this passage exhibas a disclaimer, namely the disclaimer of Apparent Empathy *(I understand.. . but. ..),* virhich appears to contribute to positive Self-presentation, but is a move that contributes to the negative presentation of Others. Apart from being part oí a semantic strategy, this move apparently also has contextual dimensions, namely virhen implying (or suggesting with the audience) a positive opinion oí the speaker.

In these examples we see that the semantics and context description of discourse intermingle. Negative other-description in racist discourse like this is a common dimension of its meaning. However, such a strategy of negative other-presentation is usually combined with a strategy of positive self-presentation, and such a positive opinion about Self or the own group, is of course an important part of the context model of most speakers. At the same time, in this case, the speaker signals her political allegiance, her party solidarity, and her social identity as a member of the dominant virhite majority in the U. K.

We also see that in such an informal `contextual' analysis, the description of contextualization cues involves many context categories, such as

- overall domain (we are dealing with politics here),
- Global action (we are engaged in legislation),
- Setting (we are here in Parliament, today),
- Current action (I am now giving a speech as part of a parliamentary debate),
- Participants

—Communicative roles: Speakers, Recipients;
—Interactional role: Supporter of Government;
—Social/political role/identity: MP, Conservative, woman, virhite British, etc.

— Positive self presentation

- Goals: defend government, attack Labour, discredit refugees
- Knowledge: general: on immigrants, financial issues; political: on legislation, policies, etc.

These categories are not neatly separated in their manifestation in the text. Often they remain implicit, and only indirectly control discursive properties (such

as negative descriptions at the semantic level), or the vast amount of knowledge presupposed and shared by participants, especially also in institutional settings.

In our theory of context this does not mean that such context categories are not relevant, and hence need not be part of the analysis. Participants need not always explicitly attend to, orient towards or express (contents of) contextual categories. Contextual relevance may also be implicit, for instance virhen it explains the choice of specific words, the absence of specific descriptions, the choice of topic, the selection of the information of mental models of events, the speech acts of the participants, and so on. An explicit theory of Context should make the details of these interactional and cognitive strategies more explicit.

Acknowledgements

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