

PARLIAMENTARY FOLLOW-UPS AS RHETORICAL QUESTIONING-ANSWERING STRATEGIES

CORNELIA ILIE

Strömstad Academy
cornelia.ilie@gmail.com

Keywords: *question, answer, follow-up, parliament, Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs).*

Cuvinte-cheie: *întrebare, răspuns, follow-up, parlament, Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs).*

1. INTRODUCTION

There is growing awareness about the role of parliamentary debates in articulating political motives and wills, scrutinising the government, and legitimising political action, which reflects the increased role of parliaments as dynamic institutional mechanisms of representative and deliberative democracy based on multi-party dialogue (Ilie 2016). Parliamentary dialogue is audience-oriented in that it is enacted by fellow parliamentarians before a wide (present and virtual) audience: it involves not only parliamentarians, but also members of the electorate, interest groups, the media and the public at large. Its impact on extra-parliamentary audiences is increasing, due to the widespread and effective use of multimedia and the internet, which enable and stimulate citizens' input and interactive participation in political deliberation (Axford and Huggins 2001; Baldwin 2005). The government-opposition confrontation is the engine of parliamentary democracy, and it affects the complex dynamics of parliamentary agenda-setting. Above all, the parliamentary control function, overseeing government's actions (Ameller 1964; Wiberg 1995), is a manifestation of the deliberative dimension of parliament as a debating assembly where a wide range of issues are dealt with systematically from different and opposite perspectives, and disputed between members according to well-established procedures and regulations (Ilie 2017).

As an institutional nexus of multi-party dialogue enacted through deliberation and debate, the distinctive feature of parliamentary interaction consists in the practice of questioning. Parliamentary questions serve as basic working tools used by parliamentarians to exert their main parliamentary role and responsibility in holding the government accountable (Ilie 2022a). According to Rogers and Walters (2006), parliamentary questions serve as "the best-known inquisitorial functions of Parliament" (2006: 311), while Sánchez de Dios and Wiberg (2012) describe

parliamentary questioning as “a game of control involving primarily the government and opposition parties” (2012: 97). One of the most significant instances of parliamentary control by questioning in the UK Parliament and other Westminster-type parliaments is the session called *Prime Minister’s Questions* (henceforth PMQs), which gives the Leader of the Opposition (LO) and other MPs the chance to address questions to the Prime Minister (PM). The PM is expected to reply, after which the questioning LO is entitled to ask *supplementary questions* either arising from the answer or introducing new topics. In discourse-analytical terms a supplementary question can fulfil one or more of the functions of a *follow-up question* or *follow-up comment*. Follow-ups are recurrent in parliamentary questioning and answering practices, where straightforward answers are seldom given and where questioning MPs are strongly motivated to insist on exposing and condemning any perceived transgressions or inconsistencies in government actions. In their turn, the responding PM also makes use of *follow-ups* in the form of reactive (justificatory, self-defensive, counterattacking, etc.) comments or counter-questions. The follow-ups provide evidence that both the LO and the PM are pursuing double agendas: on the one hand, an issue-oriented agenda with well-established political goals, and on the other, an audience-oriented agenda adjusted to presumed audience expectations (Ilie 2021).

While a follow-up is normally conditioned by preceding turns in a dialogue, and, in its turn, it helps to shape the scope, focus and/or content of subsequent uptakes and follow-ups, interactively co-constructed follow-ups display an enhanced argumentative or counter-argumentative potential since they not only highlight controversial aspects of the debated issues, but they also serve (explicitly or implicitly) to successively and/or repeatedly call into question the position of a political adversary, thereby undermining the latter’s authority and credibility. The aim of the present investigation is to identify and examine the discursive and argumentative functions of follow-ups occurring in PMQs of the UK Parliament. The main research questions to be pursued are the following: What recurrent follow-up patterns can be found in PMQs? How are follow-ups initiated and responded to in the ongoing parliamentary interaction? What impact do follow-ups have on subsequent uptakes, and on the power balance between questioning LO or other MP and responding PM?

2. PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONING PRACTICES

In the UK Parliament, as in other Westminster-type parliaments, PMQs are some of the most direct institutional mechanisms that enable the parliamentary opposition to hold the government to account and offer unique opportunities for the opposition to shift the political agenda. The questions asked by MPs may cover a wide range of topics, from issues of local interests to national and international policy concerns. While apparently requesting information, these questions actually constitute compelling strategies for addressing challenges to the government. Parliamentary questions are part of a strategic interaction in which the questioners

also attempt to reveal information that is advantageous to themselves (or to their party) while at the same time harmful to their political adversaries. By asking questions in parliament, the LO and especially MPs from opposition parties can raise unpleasant issues that the government is forced to react to (Wiberg and Koura 1994: 23).

In particular, PMQs attract a lot of attention due to quick-witted and spontaneous debates that provide parliamentarians, politicians, journalists, media representatives and the public at large with an open, lively and engaging political spectacle (Ilie 2003a). PMQs are notorious for their adversarial discourse, and the use of face-threatening acts (Bull and Wells 2012). The PM answers questions from MPs (back-benchers, the LO, and opposition leaders) in the House of Commons for half an hour every Wednesday from midday. During PMQs the parliamentary interaction consists in principle of questions and answers, which are often accompanied by interruptions, heckling, cheering, booing, name calling and laughter.

2.1. Supplementary questions

PMQs normally start with a routine question from an MP about the PM's engagements. This is known as an 'open question' and means that the MP can then ask a supplementary question on any subject, often one of current political significance. The LO then follows up on this or another topic and is permitted to ask a total of six questions. The leaders of the minor opposition parties are allowed two supplementary questions each. All other MPs are limited to one supplementary question each. After the first engagements question has been asked, all MPs who have tabled the same question are simply called by the Speaker to ask a supplementary question, which functions discursively as a follow-up question. In addition to questions from opposition MPs, the PM also receives some friendly and helpful questions (called *partisan questions*) from MPs belonging to the government party, which are asked not only to defend the government, but also to attack the opposition.

The scope for supplementaries is almost unlimited, since MPs are entitled then to ask any policy-related supplementary question on anything related to the PM's responsibilities. The PM is expected to answer all the questions on the spot, and this is why s/he will be extensively briefed by government departments in anticipation of likely subjects s/he could be asked about. The highlight of the half-hour is the head-to-head between the PM and the LO, which confirms the claim made by Rogers and Walters (2006) that the real conflict of PMQs is in the supplementaries.

2.2. Parliamentary follow-ups

To a large extent, supplementary questions function as *institutionalised follow-up questions* in the sense that they are discursively integrated and constitute a distinctive feature of parliamentary questioning practice in PMQs, where

questioning MPs are officially entitled to ask *follow-up questions* or make *follow-up statements* derived from preceding questions, answers or comments, just as responding MPs and the PM are equally entitled to do the same. PMQs constitute an institutional question-answer sub-genre with pre-allocated turn-taking according to the roles of questioner (the one asking the questions) and respondent (the one answering the questions), respectively. At the same time, they display a specific feature that distinguishes them from other institutional question-answer types of interactions: it is the fact that the questioning MP is not the one in charge of monitoring the interaction. In the UK House of Commons (as in other Westminster-type parliaments) it is the Speaker of the House who is the chief officer and highest authority, and who has full authority to make sure that MPs follow parliamentary rules during debates. The Speaker is in charge of chairing the debates and PMQs, and of monitoring speaker selection and turn assignment. This explains why questioning MPs and the responding PM are interacting on an equal footing during PMQs.

In several types of institutional dialogue question-response adjacency pairs are often followed by a third turn, i.e. a *follow-up*. An examination of several types of talk shows revealed that follow-ups have a repetitive or evaluative function (Ilie 1999): *repetitive follow-ups* normally convey the questioner's explicit confirmation or acknowledgement of the respondent's answer, whereas *evaluative follow-ups* provide tokens of personal assessment. According to Ilie (1999), there is a distinction between confirmation follow-ups that occur in talk shows and confirmation follow-ups that occur in courtroom interrogations. While in the former case the function of the follow-up is mostly phatic, confirming the questioner's receipt of information, there is usually an ulterior motive in the interrogator's follow-up of the defendant's answer, which is used as a way of pursuing a particular line of argumentation. The role of parliamentary follow-ups is comparable to that of courtroom follow-ups as in both cases the questioners have similar motivations for using follow-ups: (i) to pursue particular agendas by designing (explicitly or implicitly) argumentative questions; (ii) to elicit certain kinds of reaction or action from the answerer; (iii) to orient the line of questioning for the benefit of an overhearing audience. Regarding the role played by the audience, it is important to note that MPs participate in parliamentary interactions not only as speakers (i.e. addressers), but also as interlocutors (addressees) and audience members (listeners). Using the distinction made by Goffman (1974), parliamentary dialogue can be seen to involve *direct participants* (speakers and addressees directly involved in the dialogue, such as MPs asking and answering questions or follow-ups), *side-participants* (present, but not directly involved in the dialogue, such as listening MPs) and *overhearers* (passive observers, onlookers, such as TV viewers).

As has already been mentioned, a PMQs session normally starts with a routine question from an MP about the PM's engagements, which is known as an 'open question'. According to parliamentary rules, the respective MP is then entitled to ask a supplementary question on any subject, which functions as a follow-up question. An illustration is provided in the following excerpt:

- (1) Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 7 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Gordon Brown): I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute to the two British servicemen who have lost their lives in Afghanistan in the past week. [...] This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Sandra Osborne: May I add my condolences to all those who have lost their lives in the service of their country?

If he is re-elected, will the Prime Minister guarantee that he will not take £6 billion out of the economy?

The Prime Minister: The big issue is whether we can secure and assure the economic recovery. *To withdraw £6 billion from the recovery now would put jobs at risk, put businesses at risk and put our growth at risk. We cannot cut our way to recovery – but we could cut our way to double-dip recession. In 2011 we will use the rise in national insurance to guarantee that we fund our policing and our schooling,* and to make sure that the health services guarantees of cancer care and of being able to see a GP at weekends and in the evenings are kept. Those guarantees will be kept, because of the decisions that we make. (Hansard, 7 April 2010, col. 960-961)

The initial ('open') question asked by Sandra Osborne ("If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 7 April") is the invariable routine question about the PM's engagements for that day. After receiving the PM's answer about his forthcoming meetings for the day, Sandra Osborne also expresses her condolences before addressing the first supplementary, i.e. follow-up question, of this PMQs session: "If he is re-elected, will the PM guarantee that he will not take £6 billion out of the economy?" While it looks like a straightforward confirmation-eliciting question, this follow-up is actually asked with an ulterior motive. This motive may be interpreted in two different ways, depending on the MP's political affiliation and relationship to the PM. Thus, if the questioner were an Opposition MP, this follow-up question would sound like a face-threatening challenge urging the PM to call off £6 billion worth of cuts out of the economy. By choosing to ask this question, the MP would thereby assume the double role of opposition MP and member of the electorate. But in (1) the questioner is not an opposition MP, but a government (Labour) MP who resorts to a popular parliamentary practice of 'planting' a partisan, or government friendly question, i.e. a pre-arranged question meant to give the PM the opportunity to speak about a government-favourable issue. At the same time, she is assuming both the public role as an MP representing part of the electorate and the private role as member of the same electorate she represents. It is indeed significant that PM Gordon Brown takes this opportunity to reinforce his political position and uphold his accountability by providing a reassuring answer on behalf of the government rather than simply on his own behalf: "We cannot cut our way to recovery-but we could cut our way to double-dip recession"; "In 2011 we will use the rise in national insurance to guarantee that we fund ...".

3. QUESTION DESIGN AND PARLIAMENTARY GOALS

As was pointed out earlier, questions are used in verbal interaction not only to seek information, but also (and rather prevalently) to engender different interactional activities, some of which involve scrutinising or challenging what the respondent has said or done, evaluating the respondent's statements, opinions, and urging the respondent to act. In parliamentary interactions, questions are used for well-defined purposes, such as obtaining or recovering missing information, checking respondents' feedback and views on matters of common concern, challenging respondents' opinions or position-taking, directly or indirectly criticising respondents' verbal and non-verbal actions, or triggering respondents' commitment to some future line of action, as illustrated in (1) above.

3.1. Closed vs. open-ended questions

In PMQs the respondent's answering options are deliberately constrained by the higher or lower coerciveness of the question. *Closed questions*, also called 'polar questions' by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), are questions that elicit a 'yes' or 'no' answer (Quirk et al. 1972). They play a particularly important role since many MPs, like Sandra Osborne in (1), try to score points by asking strongly polarised questions that normally limit the PM's answers to either 'yes' or 'no'. This explains why the follow-up questions most frequently addressed by MPs during PMQs are designed as closed questions, as in (2) below.

- (2) Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Prime Minister once notoriously promised "British jobs for British workers". *Can he confirm that the latest official figures, produced this morning, show that the number of UK-born private sector workers is several hundred thousand lower today than it was in 1997?*

The Prime Minister: Net migration to this country has been falling as a result of actions that we have been taking [...] The Conservatives' policy of a quota for immigration, without giving a number, would do great damage to British business. (Hansard, 7 April 2010, col. 969)

Taking into account the fierce parliamentary confrontation between the government and the opposition, it is hardly surprising that most of the follow-up questions addressed to the PM by opposition MPs, like the one addressed by Damian Green in (2), are closed or polar, questions with a strong bias towards a confirmation-giving answer. This is primarily motivated by the wish to enhance the positive image of one's own party by contrasting it with a negative image of the government and its policies. It is also motivated by the attempt to restrict the PM's answer to a minimal choice between 'yes' or 'no'.

The overall question design of parliamentary follow-ups in PMQs is meant to embarrass and/or challenge the PM to make uncomfortable, damaging or self-revealing declarations. A relevant illustration is provided in excerpt (2) above, where the Conservative MP's supplementary, by projecting a xenophobic

standpoint on immigration, seeks to challenge PM Gordon Brown into admitting his government's failure to secure "British jobs for British workers".

Open-ended questions, normally conveyed by *wh*-questions, are expected to allow for a wider range of possible answers and are therefore regarded as less coercive. Nevertheless, Brown (1987: 95), among other scholars, provides evidence for the fact that even an open-ended question like the 'why'-question can have a devastating effect if asked, for example, in a legal context in which the witness can hardly answer the question without self-incrimination. A similar effect can be noticed in the case of parliamentary follow-ups designed as *why*-questions, as in excerpts (5) and (6) below.

3.2. Standard vs. non-standard questions

From a pragmatic perspective, an important distinction needs to be made between *standard* and *non-standard questions* in terms of the following criteria: the appropriateness of their answers, the kinds of enacted speech acts, as well as the relation between their illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect (Ilie 2010). What we normally call 'questions', i.e., utterances that are syntactically interrogative sentences, are often perceived by language users as seeking a formal answer and/or information. Requiring or expecting an answer is often regarded as the basic and most common function of so-called *standard questions*. This is why answer-eliciting and information-eliciting questions are normally referred to as standard, or genuine, questions. However, it is not the case that all interrogatives fulfil this standard questioning function. Apart from informative answers, questions may elicit a wide range of responses, such as answers of confirmation, permission-granting, suggestion acceptance, etc., or no answers at all (e.g., a simple non-verbal token of approval or a meaningful gesture, for example), according to evidence provided in earlier studies (Kiefer 1988; Ilie 1994).

Questions that fulfil other functions than requesting information or explicit answers are normally included in the category of *non-standard questions* (Ilie 1999, 2015). For example, certain questions are used by speakers not to seek information, but to initiate various kinds of mutually relevant activities, such as signalling interpersonal collaboration or conflict, highlighting problematic issues, or voicing a challenge, an invitation, a reproach, a complaint, a warning, a threat, an objection, a protest or an accusation. The category of non-standard questions is comprised of a wide and diverse range of questions that occur in different settings and constitute the interaction framework of different kinds of (institutional, semi-institutional and non-institutional) encounters (Ilie 2001).

Some of the more argumentatively powerful non-standard questions are *rhetorical questions*, whose multifunctionality and discursive versatility has been examined in several institutional contexts (Petty *et al.* 1981; Meibauer 1986; Ilie 1994, 1995, 2022b). An integrative pragmatic and rhetorical approach to the study of questions and responses has been used by Ilie (1994, 2022b) to account for context-based varieties and functions of rhetorical questions, and to distinguish them from standard questions, on the one hand, and other non-standard questions

(such as echo questions, leading questions and hypothetical questions), on the other hand. An essential property of rhetorical questions is that they constitute a particular use, not a particular category of questions. According to this pragmatic approach, a rhetorical question can be described as having the illocutionary force of a question and the perlocutionary effect of a statement (Ilie 2009). This is particularly noticeable in the functioning of rhetorical questions as follow-ups (functioning as both questions and comments) during PMQs, as illustrated in excerpt (3) below.

- (3) Mr. Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LibDem): [...] Today, he and he – the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition – are trying to fool people that they are serious about political reform, but last week we had yet more proof that that is not true. Here, in the minutes of the Hayden Phillips cross-party talks on party funding, in black and white, we see the Labour party protecting their trade union paymasters and the Conservatives protecting their paymaster in Belize. *Who do they think that they are kidding? After they sabotaged that deal, why should anyone trust a single word that they have to say on political reform?*

The Prime Minister (Gordon Brown): There is one person who prevented the Liberal and Labour proposal from being agreed by the Conservative party. The Conservatives withdrew from the talks, and the reason why is one name: Lord Ashcroft. That was the reason- [Interruption.] (Hansard, 7 April 2010, col. 965)

In (3) Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, addresses his first supplementary to the then PM Gordon Brown. Formally, Nick Clegg's last two utterances are perceived as questions since they are formulated as interrogatives, they occur in a questioner's slot within the framework of PMQs, and they are uttered with the purpose of eliciting a response from the PM. Hence, they have the illocutionary force of a question but, at the same time, they function as direct challenges. In the same turn, Clegg's immediately preceding sentences, which provide explicitly negative evaluations of the LO's supplementaries ("he and he – the PM and the LO – are trying to fool people, but last week we had yet more proof that that is not true"), are strongly argumentative and can be looked upon as answers provided in anticipation of the final two questions. They enable the rhetorical interpretation of the last two questions:

- (3') Q': *Who do they think that they are kidding?*
 Message*: 'They [the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition] cannot possibly think that they can be fooling anyone'.
 (3'') Q'': *After they sabotaged that deal, why should anyone trust a single word that they have to say on political reform?*
 Message**: 'There is no reason why anyone should trust a single word that they have to say on political reform'.

In the context of this PMQs, the two rhetorical questions above fulfil multiple functions: as questions addressed to the PM (displaying the illocutionary force of

questions), as strong accusations addressed to the PM, targeting both the PM and the LO, and as action appeals indirectly addressed to a wider audience (eliciting a potential perlocutionary effect normally associated with statements). The justificatory and defensive uptake in the PM's response (before he is interrupted) provides evidence that Nick Clegg's supplementary questions have indeed been interpreted as challenges and accusations, expressing a critical standpoint in a very challenging way. This confirms the findings of previous studies (Ilie 2009), according to which the multifunctional nature of rhetorical questions (as challenges, protests, disagreements, accusations, ironical remarks, etc.) is context-based and participant-shaped. Based on the respondent's (i.e. the PM's) reaction and response, it is reasonable to conclude that they are meant to be heard as questions and understood as statements.

4. FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF PARLIAMENTARY FOLLOW-UPS IN PMQs

As has already been mentioned, question-answer interactions represent the default adjacency pairs in the turn-taking structure of several parliamentary subgenres. But, as illustrated above, the parliamentary follow-up turn-taking in PMQs may display a two-part (*Question-Response*), three-part (*Question-Response-Follow-up*), or four-part structure (*Question-Response-Follow-up-Response*). The term "follow-up" used in the present analysis with regard to parliamentary question-answer turn-taking structure was adopted from the model updated by Coulthard and Brazil (1979), who amended the term 'feedback' to 'follow-up': IRF (*Initiation-Response-Follow-up*).

Unlike the IRE (Initiation-Response-Follow-up) turn-taking structure identified in classroom interaction that serves primarily pedagogical goals, the parliamentary practice of performing follow-ups as supplementaries during PMQs displays exchanges of adversarial, challenging, and often mutually accusatory, replies between the LO and opposition MPs, on the one hand, and the PM, on the other (Harris 2001; Pérez de Ayala 2001; Ilie 2010). Many of the questions convey intentional and explicitly face-threatening acts and this kind of systematic impoliteness is not only sanctioned but is actually rewarded in accordance with the expectations of MPs involved in an adversarial and confrontational political event.

Important insights about the power balance between dialogue participants have been provided by the observations made by Mishler (1975) regarding the strategy of *counter-questioning* in primary school classroom interaction. He pointed out that the questioner's 'reserved right to talk again' may become an exercise in social power:

[...] to ask a question in response to a question is an act of counter-control and may require either that there be a 'true' differential in social power where the respondent has more real authority, or, at a minimum, that there be equality between the speakers (1975: 106).

The results of his findings have been confirmed by studies conducted in other institutional settings, such as courtroom interaction, where, for obvious reasons, there are few instances of counter-questioning by defendants (Harris 1989), as well as parliamentary debates, where, in fact, parliamentarians are not only challenging each other and seeking to undermine each other's line of argumentation by counter-questions in follow-ups, but they are actually calling into question each other's credibility and accountability (Ilie 2012). In addition to engaging in daily ritual debates, MPs take advantage of institutional questioning practices like PMQs to ask supplementaries as follow-ups in which they expose, challenge and criticise the government's and the PM's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. In his turn, the PM is also taking advantage of this opportunity to launch counter-questions addressed to the LO and opposition MPs.

Consequently, an analysis of parliamentary follow-ups not only offers insights into the operating mechanisms and impact of MPs' question-answer practices, but it also reveals significant details about the political role-positioning, interpersonal and confrontational interactions between opposition and government MPs. At the same time, it is important to point out that PMQs display not only exchanges of challenging, adversarial and accusatory follow-ups between opposition MPs and government MPs, but also friendly and cooperative questions addressed to the PM by MPs belonging to the government party (Ilie 2003b).

Follow-up questions asked by MPs during PMQs can be short and to the point, but they often are part of longer interventions where they are prefaced by challenging or accusatory speech acts, as will be illustrated in the next examples. Follow-ups provide an opportunity for MPs to demonstrate enough authority and power in order to influence and shift the political agenda of debates in parliament. Above all, the MPs' speech acts in follow-ups, such as protests, challenges, accusations and counter-accusations, can be seen as political acts performed against or in support of the government.

Reporting on the results of a 2002 questionnaire on parliamentary questions analysed by the Procedure Committee, Rogers and Walters (2006) point out that the MPs' responses confirmed that, apart from the purpose of eliciting information (often about constituency matters), parliamentary questions are mainly used to get the government's position on the record, to put pressure on ministers, to make a constituency point, to examine an issue in depth and to help with the local campaign. Particularly significant was the following testimony about PMQs made by one MP: "It is one of the few areas where, as a back-bench MP, you can have a direct impact" (2006: 335).

In order to get a better understanding of the institutional mechanisms and the strategies of asking and answering parliamentary follow-ups, a pragmatic and discourse-analytical study has been carried out on data from a parliamentary corpus including transcripts of the performance of follow-ups performed by the LO David Cameron (Leader of the Conservative Party) and the then PM Gordon Brown during PMQs on 7 April 2010 (which marked Gordon Brown's last PMQs of that parliament). Excerpt (4) below displays Cameron's first supplementary question to the PM.

- (4) Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): [...] As this is the last Prime Minister's questions of this Parliament, it is the last chance for this Prime Minister to show that he is accountable for the decisions that he has made. *Will he start by admitting* that when British forces were sent into Helmand, they did not have sufficient helicopters to protect themselves and get the job done?

The Prime Minister [Gordon Brown, Lab]: *I do not accept* that in any operation to which we sent our troops our commanding officers gave wrong advice; they told us that they were properly equipped. Every time, in every operation, we ask our commanding officers, "Are we able to do this operation?" and our commanding officers have said yes, they can. So I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that we have done our best to equip our troops, and we will continue to do so. It is right that I take full responsibility, but I take the advice of our commanding officers, and the advice of our commanding officers is very clear. (Hansard, 7 April 2010, col. 961)

Cameron's statement – "it is the last chance for this Prime Minister to show that he is accountable" – which prefaces his first supplementary question is meant to deliberately introduce doubts about the PM's accountability, or rather lack of it, thus setting the scene for subsequent challenging follow-up questions. At issue is the PM's accountability regarding his decisions to provide the British troops in Afghanistan with the necessary quantity of equipment (in particular the number and quality of helicopters). Cameron's closed (yes-no) question "Will he start by admitting that [...] they [the British forces] did not have sufficient helicopters [...]?" amounts to requesting a confirmation from PM Brown about a state of facts that he was not given the chance to express an assessment about. The question is loaded because it is formulated so as to suggest a "yes" answer favoured by the questioner and potentially damaging for the respondent. The questioner treats as an established fact the proposition 'the British forces did not have sufficient helicopters', a view obviously supported by Cameron, but refuted by Brown. On Walton's approach, "a question is said to be loaded where the respondent is not committed to a presupposition of the question" (1997: 18). According to him, a proposition is a presupposition of a question if and only if the respondent becomes committed to that proposition when s/he gives any direct answer to the question. The concept of presupposition adopted here is defined, on Walton's approach, with reference to the commitments of the questioner and the respondent as dialogue participants. Irrespective of whether he answers 'yes' or 'no', the PM is trapped by Cameron's question: in either case he becomes committed to the proposition 'the British forces did not have sufficient helicopters', which is contrary to his position and line of argumentation. As has been pointed out by Walton, a loaded question contains a bias or spin towards one side of some controversial issue because it contains propositions that are implicitly presupposed by the question. The implicit presupposition is treated as an established fact and thereby its illocutionary force is meant to challenge, accuse, and embarrass the PM. Since it puts pressure on the respondent, it is a rhetorical strategy frequently used by MPs in supplementaries addressed to the PM.

Moreover, such loaded questions are argumentatively fallacious in the sense that they often combine several presuppositions, which amounts to combining several questions in one, i.e. the fallacy of many questions (Walton 1981). A classic example is “Have you stopped abusing your spouse?” No matter which of the two answers (‘yes’ or ‘no’) the respondent gives, s/he concedes engaging or having engaged in spousal abuse. By treating the negative assumptions about the PM’s past action as shared knowledge, the LO manages to add an allegedly assumed answer to a question that was never asked. The question “Will he start by admitting [X]?” presupposes that the PM is already committed to the validity of [X], which is certainly not the case. Not surprisingly, the latter’s reaction consists in a strong refutation and direct denial of the implied presupposition in Cameron’s question: “I do not accept ...”. Obviously, Brown’s response can hardly be regarded as a genuine answer, just as Cameron’s follow-up can hardly be regarded as a genuine information-eliciting question. What Cameron is actually doing is to embarrass and challenge PM Brown by criticising and calling into question his past actions and decisions. In order to reinforce his position and enhance his credibility, Brown reacts by refuting the presuppositions that underlie the LO’s strong accusations: “we have done our best to equip our troops”; “we will continue to do so”; “It is right that I take full responsibility, but I take the advice of our commanding officers”.

Cameron is obviously dissatisfied with the PM’s answer and since he is entitled, as LO, to ask several follow-up questions, he takes advantage of this opportunity to rephrase and reiterate the follow-up question, as illustrated in excerpt (5) below.

- (5) Mr. Cameron: That answer sums up this premiership. The Prime Minister takes no responsibility and always blames somebody else. *Why can he not just admit something that everybody knows to be true – that there were not enough helicopters?* Let us listen to Colonel Stuart Tootal, former commander of 3 Para. He said: “repeated demands for more helicopters fell on deaf ears. It increased risk for my paratroopers, but”, as he put it, “the decision-makers” – yes, the Ministers – “were not the ones driving into combat when we should have been flying in.” The Foreign Office Minister that the Prime Minister appointed, Lord Malloch-Brown, said as late as last year: “We definitely don’t have enough helicopters.” Presumably, the Prime Minister is going to tell us that all those people were just deceived.

The Prime Minister: We have increased the number of helicopters in Afghanistan. We have increased the flying time by more than 100 per cent. I think that the right hon. Gentleman should recognise that the Merlins were adapted and are now in Afghanistan. He should also recognise that the Chinooks were also adapted, so that they, too, can be in Afghanistan. He should recognise that we have other helicopters in Afghanistan that are working, and we are part of an international operation in Afghanistan, where we share equipment with our coalition partners. I have to say to him that the amount of money spent in

Afghanistan now is £5 billion a year; that is 1,000 extra vehicles, and twice the number of flying time hours for our helicopters. I think that he should accept that our troops, for the operations that they are asked to undertake, have been given the equipment that they need. That is the right position. (Hansard, 7 April 2010, col. 961-962)

As in excerpt (4) above, Cameron prefaces his follow-up question with argumentative statements, but in (5) his statements provide metadiscursive evaluations of the PM's answer to his first follow-up question. The first statement ("That answer sums up this premiership") conveys a negative metadiscursive evaluation of the PM's answer, whereas the second ("The PM takes no responsibility and always blames somebody else") conveys a negative metadiscursive evaluation of the PM's actions. Cameron's follow-up question "Why can he not just admit something that everybody knows to be true – that there were not enough helicopters?" is an uptake and an escalation of the follow-up in excerpt (4) above, which did not receive a valid answer. By formulating this follow-up as a 'why-question', the LO performs a rhetorical question, i.e. a question that suggests its own answer, which can be paraphrased as: 'There is no reason why he shouldn't admit something that anybody knows to be true [...]', and which actually implies 'He should admit what everybody knows to be true [...]'. In this case the follow-up is designed as a more aggressively loaded question since it not only implies the respondent's full commitment to the proposition presupposed by the question, as in (4), but it also justifies it by adding a popular appeal, i.e. an *ad populum* argument: "everybody knows to be true (that there were not enough helicopters)". The popular appeal or the appeal to "the people" (or "the gallery") is an emotional appeal addressed to the overhearing audience of citizens and voters, and aimed to arouse the feelings of the multitude, and often perceived as argumentative fallacy. According to Walton (1980), it can function as a fully valid argument only if it is seriously substantiated. However, by making sweeping overgeneralisations whose validity can hardly be verified and/or proved, as in Cameron's follow-up, the whole argument gets invalidated.

As expected, in his follow-up response the PM refutes, by means of counterclaims, the negative evaluations and accusations conveyed in LO's second follow-up. The first one is meant to refute Cameron's main accusation: "We have increased the number of helicopters in Afghanistan." Afterwards, the PM continues to refute Cameron's accusations by means of a rhetorical three-part list addressed to the latter:

- (5') I think that the right hon. Gentleman *should recognise* that the Merlins were adapted.
 He *should also recognise* that the Chinooks were also adapted [...]
 He *should recognise* that we have other helicopters in Afghanistan that are working.

To enhance the persuasive force of his message, the PM closes the three-part list by reiterating his initial refutation: "I think that *he should accept* that our troops

[...] have been given the equipment that they need.” The rhetorical force of this statement derives from the use of the same speech act verb he used in (4) – “accept”, but this time its purpose is not to refute an accusation (“I do not accept ...”), but rather to challenge the LO to change his standpoint: “I think that he should accept X”.

In (6), Cameron’s next follow-up starts with a reaction to the PM’s response conveyed by means of a negative metadiscursive statement: “Again, no answer”:

(6) Mr. Cameron: Again, no answer. [Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Government Back Benchers must calm down.

Mr. Cameron: *Why should anyone believe this Prime Minister, when he was the first in history to go in front of a public inquiry and not give accurate information about defence spending?* Let me ask about another decision for which this Prime Minister ought to be accountable. In the last 13 years, he has robbed pension funds of £100 billion. His own welfare Minister said: “when Labour came to power we had one of the strongest pension provisions in Europe and now probably we have some of the weakest”. Presumably, he was deceived as well. *Will the Prime Minister finally admit that robbing the pension funds was the wrong decision for Britain?*

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman said that there was no answer to the last question, but it is he who has never given an answer on any single policy. As far as pension funds are concerned, we debated the matter in this House two years ago, and the shadow Chancellor put the case that the dividend tax credit had affected the ability of pension funds to have money. I showed at that time that during the period before the stock market crash, what had actually happened was that the resources of the pension funds had doubled. He lost his case when he put it to the House of Commons; it is no use trying to put it again.

What we have done over these last 12 years is give a pensioners' winter allowance, initially opposed by the Conservative party. What we are saying that we will do is link pensions to earnings—a link taken away by a Conservative Government. What we have done is give 2 million pensioners a pension tax credit, and have given them dignity in retirement—again, that was opposed by the Conservative Government. What we now have is a national concessionary fare scheme that gives pensioners the chance to travel the country; that would be at risk under a Conservative Government. (Hansard, 7 April 2010, col. 962)

The LO’s first question in this follow-up is a rhetorical question that is formally addressed to the PM, but actually intended for the parliamentary audience and the public at large: “Why should anyone believe this PM when he was the first in history to go in front of a public inquiry and not give accurate information about defence spending?”. Its rhetorical force consists in the fact that, rather than requesting information from the PM, it actually makes accusatory claims about the latter. What Cameron wants his audience to notice and remember is the challenging statement about the PM (‘There is no reason why anyone should believe this Prime

Minister ...'). By implication, the audience is expected and encouraged to retrieve the following message: 'This Prime Minister is not to be trusted'.

As in (5) above, the LO's why-question is a particularly loaded question since it starts by implicitly expressing non-confidence for the PM ('there is no reason why anyone should believe this Prime Minister'), and afterwards seeking to justify it by means of what looks like an overgeneralising and unsubstantiated claim ('he was the first in history to go in front of a public inquiry and not give accurate information about defence spending'). Why-questions tend to be heavily loaded in argumentative dialogue since they assume, as in (5), that both questioner and respondent are committed to the proposition implied or referred to in the question. However, in adversarial settings like the parliament, the controversy between debaters (for the benefit of overhearing audiences) is precisely about justifying and motivating one's own commitments, on the one hand, and challenging and attacking the adversary's commitments, on the other. Follow-ups addressed during PMQs by the LO and opposition MPs are by definition adversarial in that they seek to reinforce the questioners' positions by reiterating their initial claims and subsequently reinforcing them with further arguments. At the same time, the PM cannot be expected to commit himself to the proposition describing him as "the first in history to go in front of a public inquiry and not give accurate information about defence spending". Hence the end-goal of Cameron's initial why-question is to instil in multiple audiences a negative perception of and a lack of trust in the PM's decisions and actions.

Moving on to a different topic, Cameron attacks the PM directly by making an openly incriminating claim: "In the last 13 years, he [the Prime Minister] has robbed pension funds of £100 billion". As supporting evidence, he provides a quote from a speech by the welfare Minister himself, considered a reliable expert on the issue under consideration. While this could theoretically function as an acceptable *ad verecundiam* argument, i.e., an argument that makes an appeal to authority, it may easily become fallacious when it is used out of context, as in this case, where the quote is an incomplete sentence taken out of context. What is embarrassing and potentially damaging for the PM is that a statement allegedly made by his own minister is provided as an argument against him and the wider audience are likely to perceive him as committed to that statement.

Cameron's last question in (6) is a typically loaded question, similar to the one in excerpt (4): "Will the Prime Minister finally admit that robbing the pension funds was the wrong decision for Britain?". This question conveys an implicit presupposition that is treated as an established fact, but for which no concrete evidence is provided: "[...] robbing the pension funds was the wrong decision for Britain". Consequently, irrespective of the answer he might give ('yes' or 'no'), the PM would appear committed to a statement that is contrary to his argument and damaging for his position.

The PM's response is symptomatic for this kind of confrontational dialogue in the sense that he reacts to the LO's challenges by means of both counter-challenging and justificatory statements, like the following: "The right hon. Gentleman said that there was no answer to the last question, but it is he who

has never given an answer on any single policy". By counter-attacking Cameron, his intention is to redress the balance of power: while the questioner places the responsibility on the respondent (through loaded questions and rhetorical questions, for example), the PM seeks to achieve a reversal of roles by redirecting the responsibility back to the questioner.

Throughout the heated exchanges of follow-ups in this PMQs session, each of the two political adversaries makes repeated attempts to self-justify and consolidate their own image, and to destabilise the adversary's positions. Several discursive and rhetorical strategies are used to this effect. In response to Cameron's follow-ups, PM Brown often performs counter-attacks in addition to providing self-justifications, which are meant to show, on the one hand, that he has assumed both his political responsibility and his leadership role as head of government, and on the other, that he has the support of government ministers. Apart from seeking to defend or exculpate himself, the PM attempts to impose his own agenda and to call into question the policies promoted by his questioner and adversary. It is worth noting that both the questioner and the respondent want to change the scope and the force of the opponent's claims in order to influence the audience's perception and understanding to their own benefit. In both cases, each interlocutor may simply make use of a follow-up question or a follow-up comment in order to emphasize and reinforce his respective position.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the prototypical forms of confrontational politics in the UK Parliament is the PMQs session, which enables the LO and opposition MPs to exert parliamentary control of government in that complaints and criticisms are openly expressed, while information is both provided and sought about the government's plans and policies. In PMQs, parliamentary action consists in question-response practices that display exchanges of challenging, accusatory, but also countering, defensive and ironical, statements between LO or opposition MPs and the PM. An examination of follow-ups performed during PMQs provides significant and revealing evidence about the confrontational nature of the relationships between the opposition MPs, on the one hand, and the PM and the government, on the other, by means of their use of multifunctional discursive and rhetorical strategies.

One of the recurrent discursive and rhetorical strategies used during PMQs in the UK Parliament is the use of follow-ups as multifunctional questioning and answering practices, which can operate on several levels of dialogic interaction. A dynamic interplay of challenging or evaluating statements and rhetorical or loaded questions are used by both the questioning LO or opposition MPs and the answering PM in an attempt to undermine each other's line of argumentation, but also to call into question each other's credibility in order to influence the audience's perception and understanding of their political goals. By investigating instances of follow-ups that occur in PMQs, the present study shows how particular types of follow-up questions and subsequent answers can account for (re)shaping

institutional relationships and for producing shifts in the balance of power between interacting MPs.

Follow-ups have been found to be both context-dependent (relying on information from the immediate and wider context) and multifunctional (addressing multiple audiences and their respective concerns). Questioners have similar motivations for using follow-ups: (i) to pursue particular agendas by designing (explicitly or implicitly) argumentative questions; (ii) to challenge and call into question the behaviour, decisions and actions of the respondent (the PM); (iii) to elicit certain kinds of reaction or action from the respondent (the PM); (iv) to orient the line of questioning for the benefit of an overhearing audience. An analysis of parliamentary follow-ups offers not only insights into the operating mechanisms and impact of MPs' question-answer practices, but it also reveals significant details about the political role-positioning, interpersonal and confrontational interactions between opposition and government MPs.

In parliamentary dialogue the use of challenging questions (in LO's and questioning MPs' follow-ups) and counter-questions (in the PM's follow-ups) allows interlocutors to negotiate not only the pros and cons of topic-related issues, but also their status, roles and power positions. Within the institutional frame of parliamentary debates, the acts, identity, and multiple roles of MPs are explicitly challenged and called into question. The extracts analysed above contain prototypical instances of parliamentary follow-ups that occur in the interaction between questioner and respondent during PMQs. As the analysis shows, the statements and counter-statements performed by means of follow-ups are not self-standing units. Rather, they occur in discourse sequences and are performed by speakers engaged in adversarial interaction (e.g. debating, protesting, explaining, challenging, accusing, justifying) as part of a well-established parliamentary sub-genre, i.e. PMQs. By using accusatory or countering metadiscursive acts, for example, MPs are not only challenging each other and seeking to undermine each other's line of argumentation, they are actually calling into question each other's credibility and accountability with respect to their assumed responsibilities towards electors and citizens. During PMQs both the questioner and the respondent seek to challenge the justifiability and effectiveness of each other's statements and actions in order to influence the audience's perception and understanding of their actual political agenda and goals.

This article, published with the permission of John Benjamins, is a revised and updated version of a chapter included in the following collective volume: Ilie, Cornelia, 2015, "Follow-ups as Multifunctional Questioning and Answering Strategies in Prime Minister's Questions", in A. Fetzer, E. Weizman, and L. Berlin (eds.) *The Dynamics of Political Discourse: Forms and Functions of Follow-ups*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 195–218.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ameller, M., 1964, *Les questions, instruments de contrôle parlementaire*. Paris: Montecitorio.
 Axford, B., R. Huggins (eds.), 2001, *New Media and Politics*. London: Sage.

- Baldwin, N. J. (ed.), 2005, *Parliament in the 21st Century*. London: Politico.
- Brown, P. M., 1987, *The Art of Questioning: Thirty Maxims of Cross-Examination*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bull, P., P. Wells, 2012, "Adversarial Discourse in Prime Minister's Questions", *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 31(1), 30–48.
- Coulthard, M., D. Brazil, 1979, "Exchange Structure", in M. Coulthard, M. Montgomery (eds.), *Studies in Discourse Analysis*, 82–106. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Franks, S., A. Vandermark, 1995, "Televising Parliament: Five Years On", *Parliamentary Affairs* 48(1), 57–71.
- Goffman, E., 1974, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. London: Harper and Row.
- Harris, S., 1989, "Defendant Resistance to Power and Control in Court", in H. Coleman (ed.), *Working with language: A Multidisciplinary Consideration of Language Use in Work Contexts*, 129–164. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Harris, S., 2001, "Being Politically Impolite: Extending Politeness Theory to Adversarial Political Discourse", *Discourse & Society* 12(4), 451–472.
- Heritage, J., 2002, "The Limits of Questioning: Negative Interrogatives and Hostile Question Content", *Journal of Pragmatics* 34, 1472–46.
- Huddleston, R., G. K. Pullum, 2002, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ilie, C., 1994, *What Else Can I Tell You? A Pragmatic Study of English Rhetorical Questions as Discursive and Argumentative Acts*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Ilie, C., 1995, "The Validity of Rhetorical Questions as Arguments in the Courtroom", in F. H. van Eemeren, R. Grootendorst, J. A. Blair, C. A. Willard (eds.), *Special Fields and Cases. Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Argumentation*, 73–88. Amsterdam: SICSAT.
- Ilie, C., 1998, "Questioning is not Asking: The Discursive Functions of Rhetorical Questions in American Talk Shows", *Texas Linguistic Forum* 39, 122–135.
- Ilie, C., 1999, "Question-response Argumentation in Talk Shows", *Journal of Pragmatics* 31 (8), 975–999.
- Ilie, C., 2001, "Semi-institutional Discourse: The Case of Talk Shows", *Journal of Pragmatics* 33(2), 209–254.
- Ilie, C., 2003a, "Histrionic and Agonistic Features of Parliamentary Discourse", *Studies in Communication Sciences* 3(1): 25–53.
- Ilie, C., 2003b, "Discourse and Metadiscourse in Parliamentary Debates", *Journal of Language and Politics* 1(2), 269–291.
- Ilie, C., 2009, "Rhetorical Questions", in L. Cummings (ed.), *The Routledge Pragmatics Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge.
- Ilie, C., 2010, "When Speaking Means Doing: The Dynamics of Parliamentary Speech Acts", *Bolletino della Società Filosofica Italiana* 201, 50–65.
- Ilie, C., 2012, "Metadiscourse in Follow-Ups: Crossing the Micro-Macro Divide in Political Dialogue", in A. Fetzer, E. Weizman, and E. Reber (eds.) *Proceedings of the ESF Strategic Workshop on discourse follow-ups across discourse domains*, 121–133. Würzburg: Universität Würzburg.
- Ilie, C., 2015, "Questions and Questioning", in K. Tracy, C. Ilie and T. Sandel (eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, 1257–1271. Boston: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ilie, C., 2016, "Parliamentary Discourse and Deliberative Rhetoric", in P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie and K. Palonen (eds.) *Parliaments and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of Disputes about a European Concept*, 133–145. Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books.
- Ilie, C., 2017, "Parliamentary Debates", in R. Wodak, B. Forchtner (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics* (section "Genres for Political Action"), 309–325. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ilie, C., 2021, "Evasive Answers vs. Aggressive Questions: Parliamentary Confrontational Practices in Prime Minister's Questions", in C. Ilie (ed.) *Questioning and Answering Practices across Contexts and Cultures*, 35–69. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Ilie, C., 2022a, "How to Argue with Questions and Answers: Argumentation Strategies in Parliamentary Deliberation", *Languages* 7(3), 205, 1–19.
- Ilie, C., 2022b, "Strategic Questioning", in J. D. Fahnstock, R. A. Harris (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Persuasion*, 165–189. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kiefer, F., 1988, "On the Pragmatics of Answers", in M. Meyer (ed.), *Questions and Questioning*, 255–278. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Koshik, I., 2003, "Wh-Questions as Challenges", *Discourse Studies* 5, 51–77.
- Kotthoff, H., 1993, "Disagreement and Concession in Disputes: On the Context Sensitivity of Preference Structures", *Language in Society* 22, 193–216.
- Meibauer, J., 1986, *Rhetorische Fragen*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Mishler, E., 1975, "Studies in Dialogue and Discourse, II: Types of Discourse Initiated by and Sustained through Questioning", *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 4(2), 98–121.
- Pérez de Ayala, S., 2001, "FTAs and Erskine May: Conflicting Needs? – Politeness in Question Time" *Journal of Pragmatics* 33, 143–169.
- Petty, R. E., J. T. Cacioppo, M. Heesacker, 1981, "Effects of Rhetorical Questions on Persuasion: A Cognitive Response Analysis", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40, 432–440.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik., 1972, *A Grammar of Contemporary English*. London: Longman.
- Rogers, R., R. Walters, 2006 (6th ed.), *How Parliament works*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Sánchez de Dios, M., M. Wiberg, 2012, "Questioning in European Parliaments", in S. Martin, O. Rozenberg (eds.), *The Roles and Function of Parliamentary Questions*, 96–109. Oxford: Routledge.
- Walton, D. N., 1980, "Why is the Ad Populum a Fallacy?", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13(4), 264–278.
- Walton, D. N., 1981, "The Fallacy of Many Questions", *Logique et Analyse* 95–96, 291–313.
- Walton, D. N., 1997, "Judging How Heavily a Question is Loaded: A Pragmatic Method", *Inquiry: Critical Thinking across the Disciplines* 17(2), 53–71.
- Wiberg, M., 1995, "Parliamentary Questioning. Control by Communication", in H. Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, 179–222. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Wiberg, M., A. Koura, 1994, "The Logic of Parliamentary Questioning", in M. Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary control in the Nordic countries*, 19–44. Tampere: Finnish Political Science Association.

SECVENȚELE DE TIP *FOLLOW-UP* FOLOSITE CA STRATEGII RETORICE DE ÎNTREBARE-RĂSPUNS ÎN INTERACȚIUNILE PARLAMENTARE

Rezumat

În interacțiunea parlamentară, mai mult decât în alte tipuri de dialog instituțional, sunt folosite secvențe de tip *follow-up* semnalând modul în care negociază parlamentarii britanici nu numai argumentele pro și contra ale chestiunilor dezbătute, ci și propriul lor statut, roluri și poziții de putere.

În general, o secvență de tip *follow-up* este condiționată de replicile precedente dintr-un dialog și, la rândul său, contribuie la modelarea sferei de acțiune, a focalizării și/sau a conținutului reacțiilor și al secvențelor succesive de tip *follow-up*. În mod particular, secvențele de tip *follow-up* construite în mod interactiv în cadrul sesiunilor denumite Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) comportă strategii argumentative și contra-argumentative recurente, care nu numai că evidențiază aspecte controversate ale chestiunilor dezbătute, dar contribuie (în mod explicit sau implicit) și la persistența punerii sub semnul întrebării a poziției adversarilor politici, subminând astfel autoritatea și credibilitatea acestora.

Cercetarea de față are scopul de a identifica și examina funcțiile discursive și argumentative ale secvențelor de tip *follow-up* care se întâlnesc în sesiunile PMQs din Camera Comunelor a Parlamentului Britanic. Se urmărește identificarea și interpretarea răspunsurilor la următoarele întrebări: Care sunt structurile recurente ale secvențelor de tip *follow-up* în PMQs? Cum sunt inițiate și cum se răspunde la secvențele de tip *follow-up* în interacțiunea dintre parlamentari? Ce impact au

aceste secvențe de tip *follow-up* asupra luărilor de cuvânt succesive, precum și asupra echilibrului de putere dintre parlamentarii care pun întrebările și primul ministru care răspunde?

PARLIAMENTARY FOLLOW-UPS AS RHETORICAL QUESTIONING-ANSWERING STRATEGIES

Abstract

In parliamentary interaction, more than in other types of institutional dialogue, follow-ups indicate how Members of Parliament (MPs) negotiate not only the pros and cons of topic-related issues, but also their status, roles and power positions.

While a follow-up is normally conditioned by preceding turns in a dialogue, and, in its turn, it helps to shape the scope, focus and/or content of subsequent uptakes and follow-ups, interactively co-constructed follow-ups during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) display recurrent argumentative or counter argumentative strategies since they not only highlight controversial aspects of the debated issues, but they also serve (explicitly or implicitly) to successively and repeatedly call into question the position of a political adversary, thereby undermining the latter's authority and credibility.

The aim of the present investigation is to identify and examine the discursive and argumentative functions of follow-ups occurring in PMQs of the House of Commons. The main research questions to be pursued are the following: What recurrent follow-up patterns can be found in PMQs? How are follow-ups initiated and responded to in the ongoing parliamentary interaction? What impact do follow-ups have on subsequent uptakes, and on the power balance between questioning MPs and responding Prime Minister?