

## “Don’t go twisting my words” - The activation of dialogic resonance for adversarial purposes in parliamentary debates

Recent studies in cognitive-functional linguistics explore the cognitive structure and interpersonal dynamics of linguistic structure-matching in interactional discourse (Du Bois 2001, 2003; Sakita 2006). More specifically, the model of ‘dialogic syntax’ focuses on cross-turn structural parallelism, i.e. ‘the activation of intrinsic potential affinity across instances of dialogic language use’ (Du Bois 2001: 8). Whereas traditional linear syntax describes structural relations *within* single sentences, dialogic syntax deals with structural similarities *between* immediately co-present segments in a broader conversational context. A key concept of dialogic syntax is the activation of *resonance* between turns and speakers, which appeals to recent developments in cognitive linguistics to extend its scope of investigation towards authentic, multi-agent discourse (Clark 1996; Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Langacker 2001).

In the present paper, we zoom in on two dimensions of resonance activation that have not been fully developed in dialogic syntax: (i) the *creative* cognitive processes involved in establishing cross-turn mapping relations, and (ii) the *interpersonal* aims and effects of resonance activation in multi-agent discourse. One locus of language use where speakers make extensive and strategic use of cross-turn structure-mappings are parliamentary debates (Carbó 1992). Therefore, in order to systematically analyze the creative and interpersonal aspects of resonance activation, we composed a bilingual multimodal corpus (annotated French and German audiovisual data) consisting of 224 sequences of ‘creative and adversarial interruptions’, i.e. MPs briefly commenting on a statement made by a plenary speaker by means of a witty adversarial one-liner. Consider the following example from our data-set:

Austrian National Assembly March 2006; English translation:

**Alexander Van der Bellen, MP (the Greens):** I say this and I speak frankly, whereas Professor Zeilinger never used the words I will be using here – Clearly, he is a very polite person.

**Molterer, MP:** He is a smart man! A good man!

**Groszruck, MP:** A clever man!

**Van der Bellen, MP:** I don’t think that he needs the fact that he is a very good, smart man to be confirmed by you, fellow colleague!

In this apparently simple example, the plenary speaker’s utterance part “he is a very polite person” sets up a lexico-syntactic template [PRON<sub>[PERS]</sub> *is a* ADV ADJ SUBST<sub>[MASC]</sub>] that is resonating across turns and speakers in the sequence. By substituting the lexical element *polite* by *smart*, the first interruptive comment partially parallels the template and suggests an *a contrario* reasoning, in which the plenary speaker himself is put onstage (‘Professor Zeilinger is a clever man, whereas you are not’). This form of dissociative ironic echoing (Sperber & Wilson, 1986[1995]) is further elaborated in the following two discourse acts (*A good man / A clever man*). In the last turn of the sequence, the plenary speaker merges elements from both the initial priming utterance and the interruptive comments into the blend *a very good, smart man*, once more evoking an ironic reading meant to trump the political opponent.

On the basis of different manifestations of dialogic syntax in parliamentary debates we argue that resonance is a powerful construal mechanism that can be creatively exploited in order to undermine other interlocutors’ argumentation and illocutionary intentions. It is not simply a matter of repetitive, one-to-one linguistic feature mapping, but rather operates at different levels of linguistic organization simultaneously.

Key words: DIALOGIC SYNTAX, RESONANCE ACTIVATION, CREATIVITY, PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSE, INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

## REFERENCES

- Barlow, M. & S. Kemmer (red) (2000). *Usage-based Models of Language*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Carbó, T. (1992). Towards an interpretation of interruptions in Mexican parliamentary discourse (1920-1960). *Discourse & Society* 3, 24-45.
- Clark, H. (1996). *Using Language*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Du Bois, J. (2001). *Towards a dialogical syntax*. University of Santa Barbara, California [manuscript].
- Du Bois, J. (2003). Argument structure: Grammar in use. In: J. Du Bois, L.E. Kumpf & W.J. Ashby (red), *Preferred Argument Structure. Grammar as Architecture for Function*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 11-60.
- Langacker, R.W. (2001). Discourse in Cognitive Grammar. *Cognitive Linguistics* 12, 143-188.
- Sperber, D. & D. Wilson (1986[1995]). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.