Analysing Parliamentary Discourse on Regulation of MPs Expenses[1]

Judith Bara, QMUL

Aude Bicquelet, LSE

Vasiliki Tsagkroni, QMUL and Keele

Abstract

Informed by recent developments in deliberative theory and improved techniques of analysis this paper is derived from a research project which was sparked by the 2009 'parliamentary expenses scandal'. It examines whether the nature of debate on financial impropriety has altered in the past thirty-five or so years by tracking parliamentary discourse in this area. By means of Computer Assisted Content Analysis (CATA), it analyses the content of arguments presented in parliamentary debates which relate to financial impropriety, including those of individual MPs, and whether these are framed in terms similar to those of their predecessors. The particular discussion which forms the basis of this presentation focuses on the key debate held on 29th June 2009 which represented the second reading of the Parliamentary Standards Bill which, when enacted, established a new Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Introduction

This research project, which is supported by a Leverhulme Fellowship, is in large part an investigation of how the debate on regulation of MPs expenses and allowances has been framed over time. This paper examines the *dimensions* of what MPs *really talked about* when establishing the IPSA in the summer of 2009. Very unusually there were three debates on three consecutive days, 29 June to 1 July 2009, and of these the Second Reading debate of the Parliamentary Standards Bill on 29th June can be regarded as the key debate. The way in which we establish dimensions and analyse their importance is by undertaking a content analysis exercise. This effectively represents a method of data mining which has been growing in importance over the past thirty or so years.

The paper is structured as follows.

- Aims and objectives of this research.
- Background: Role of text analysis in aiding our understanding of political process.
- Methodology: Qualitative CATA - Alceste and Hamlet – to establish the dimensions of debate

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- Results of analysis
- Discussion and conclusion

Aims and objectives:

The *central* research questions posed for this research are: 'What form does parliamentary discourse on financial regulation of its members take? Are there underlying dimensions to this discourse? 'How might the content of this discourse influence the institutional nature of regulatory regimes adopted?' The discourse will be analysed largely in terms of its deliberative dimensions.

- Is there are particular kind of language / discourse / rhetoric relating to this area of parliamentary deliberation? Is it robust over time?
- How does parliament operate in terms of providing an appropriate arena for exchanging views on the financial probity of MPs?
- What role does partisanship play in these deliberations? Specifically, does party affiliation indicate particular approaches to problem-solving or is there evidence of cross-party agreement?
- What reforms have been effected since 2009 which regulate MPs expenses and/or make the House of Commons more inclusive and transparent?

Different methodologies are employed in answering these questions. With regard to this paper, we are focusing on the first which broadly uses computer-assisted content analysis (CATA).

The focus of the research is thus on analysis of the content of arguments by individual MPs within the debates as well as collective reports of select committees which relate to financial impropriety. We are seeking to determine whether there is an underlying language used in these deliberations over time and whether these debates and reports are framed in terms similar to those of their predecessors. In addition, MPs will be interviewed about how well they think that IPSA has achieved its purpose of regulating their financial conduct and whether the situation has improved since 2009. The fact that much of the discussion took place in non-whipped situations allows it to be informed by recent developments in deliberative theory which helps in determining whether the rhetoric of debate has altered in the past forty or so years through tracking the nature of parliamentary discourse in this area.

Background: Role of text analysis in aiding our understanding of political process.

Textual analysis, and especially content analysis has played a growing role in bringing new light to our understanding of the underlying ideas and policies of political parties as well as a range of other political activities, including parliamentary debates.Texts have therefore been viewed, increasingly, as an important source of evidence to use in appreciating better how democracy functions. Historians of course have always recognized this but their approach tends to focus on specific individual documents and does not really allow

for answering more general questions. For that we need more general textual evidence, covering many documents.

Arguably, the only way to make this evidence manageable is to collect and organize it in summarized, often numerical form. The particular manner in which this has been done in the case of party manifestos (and government declarations in the form of Queen's Speeches) is essentially by means of a form of content analysis which counts the sentences of manifestos and declarations into specific policy categories. This is based on an approach which first emerged in the early 1930s in the United States which had been conceived as a tool for communications research, but even at this early stage, a political component appeared. Indeed, the very first large scale study based on content analysis, which was carried out in 1930, examined the proportion of space in American newspapers taken up by reports on foreign policy in an effort to discern which subject editors regarded as important (Madge 1953). In this and other early studies newspaper coverage was literally measured by a ruler applied to the newspaper itself and results were reported in 'column inches' (Berelson 1971). In 1937 Lasswell adapted the method to undertake a study of psychoanalytical interviews on the basis of the systematic application of classification categories (See, *inter alia*, Lasswell and Kaplan 1952; Lasswell and Leites 1965). He went on to utilize this classification scheme to analyze a broader range of topics.

Ironically it was the threat of war in 1939 which led to a breakthrough in the development of content analytic techniques, Lasswell, at the request of the US government, took on responsibility for the 'World Attention Survey' which investigated the content of foreign newspapers. It was assumed that the German and British papers would carry considerable amounts of material on US policy, but this was found not to be the case. More importantly, the analysis showed how the papers could presage considerable shifts in policy and strategy. For example, several months before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Lasswell's method revealed a tailing off in negative references to the Soviet Union in German papers—and likewise, a diminution in negative references towards Germany in Pravda. Indeed, in the German case, fewer and fewer references of any kind relating to the Soviet Union were evident (Berelson 1971).

In the half century following World War II, the use of content analysis to further the study of various types of social behaviour increased. Many disciplines, notably in the area of cultural studies, devised their own approaches, often used in conjunction with other research tools such as discourse analysis and ethnomethodology. Much, however, concentrated on analysing media 'messages'. Content analyses proved useful in both qualitative and quantitative analyses and might well be considered as a bridge between the two. In the case of political science, significant developments took place from the late 1940s, mainly in the US and largely in the analysis of elections and voting behaviour. From the 1970s attention began to turn to party election programmes.

One reason for this was clearly their prominence in the election campaign. (Even when not widely read directly by voters they were adapted and launched with great publicity and covered by the media). Besides this directly 'political' reason election programmes were of interest to political philosophers as a practical application of concepts like justice and fairness, and a working out of more abstract political theories in a real life context. It is no coincidence that the first comprehensive analysis of manifestos was undertaken in 1976 by a theorist, David Robertson, in A *Theory of Party Competition*. A further boost to the study of manifestos was given by the emergence of rational choice theories of party competition, most obviously Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) which gave a central place to party policy positions and party movements along a basically 'Left-Right' policy continuum. This was the starting place for the genesis and development of the Manifesto Project which since the early 1980s has developed a content analysis framework for the study of party election manifestos and platforms. This now covers thousands of party election documents published since 1945 in more than fifty countries. It was a short step from this to adapt such techniques to the study of coalition government formation, party pledges and whether governments fulfil them, televised leadership debates, as well as speeches by party leaders (for example at annual conferences) and parliamentary debate. Over time, of course, we have also been able to avail ourselves of technological innovations, especially in the form of CATA.

The analysis of parliamentary debates links a number of developments in political science. As stated in Bara et al (2007: 577-8)

> *'The rise of theories of deliberative democracy (for example, Habermas 1996; Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 2004) has focused attention on the discursive elements of political interaction including interaction among political representatives (Uhr 1998). If democratic politics involves the giving and exchange of reasons in public discussion, then the study of how reasons are given becomes important. In parliaments representatives offer arguments in support of positions they adopt and an important function of such arguments is to frame issues in certain ways. The empirical study of parliamentary discourse thus contributes to an understanding of how policy issues are framed. Studying parliamentary discourse can also be related to comparative assessments of the deliberative performance of different parliaments'*

In this work, the authors went on to analyze a series parliamentary debates on abortion. The issue of abortion reform, was chosen partly because it represented an area of importance to political discussion in its own right and partly because it is also discussed by scholars interested in theories of deliberative democracy as an area where it would be difficult to achieve consensus, and that this would lead to ongoing public discussion (e.g. Gutmann and Thompson 1996,

2004). The situation in Britain is that abortion is regarded as an issue of conscience and that when discussed in parliament is not subject to whipped votes. Hence individual MPs are able to speak and vote according to their conscience. Different positions are also commonly found across the party divide. The 1966 second reading debate on the Private Member's Bill proposed by the David (now Lord) Steel, which resulted in the 1967 legislation has set the framework for British law on abortion ever since. This debate was also chosen as it lent itself to the testing of the two methods of CATA which are employed in the current study. Before passing on to discuss the methodology, however, it is useful to say a few words about the analytic framework within which the current project is sited.

From an empirical perspective, the work of the Manifesto project is instructive for analysis of parliamentary discourse of the type undertaken here. This relates, firstly, to the idea that the more parties emphasize particular issues or ideas in their programmatic texts (such as manifestos and other campaign materials) the more we can imply that these are of greatest importance or salience for those parties. These emphases can be then used to establish patterns of difference among parties and over time, most notably in terms of movement along a left-right scale. Secondly, there will be cases where, rather than take different approaches to implementing policy, such as 'nationalization' versus 'privatization' as approaches to structuring the economy, parties emphasize completely different issues These represent situations of 'issue ownership'. In extreme situations other parties will not deem such issues necessary of comment, so parties will simply 'talk past each other' (Budge et al., 1987; 2001).

Following this notion, work by Riker (1996) suggests that we can understand the dynamics of debate in terms of a series of dimensions. The crux of this assertion is that any given disagreement in politics is not uni-dimensional. Rather, it encompasses a number of different considerations, which is hardly surprising given that most political competition involves stressing different constellations of ideas which favour one political position or another. Of course at the extreme, Riker would agree that this may lead to partisans 'talking past one another', although this is not a problem in the case of the current study as we are interested primarily in analysing debates as whole events in their own right rather than party values as such. However, it is instructive to learn from further work on the idea of such 'stand-off' situations such as that of Sabatier (1998) and colleagues (cited in Weale et al., 2012) which suggests that only by such apparently uncompromising partisans participating in a 'neutral' forum for debate in order to have any chance of mitigating their competing views, presumably by some form of deliberation. Would parliament represent such a forum?

But traditional theoretical approaches to deliberative democracy, predicated on persuading people to change their views, would seem to be at odds with the reality of politics and if we take parliament as a

forum, its practices would hardly represent the basis for a 'neutral' forum. Yet as Weale et al. suggest, we might bring these different situations together by viewing certain contemporary theoretical interpretations of deliberative democracy, such as those presented by Guttman and Thompson (2004) or Dryzek (2001) as normative 'ideal type' benchmarks against which empirical evidence can be measured. This would neither negate the role of empirical observation nor undermine the moral authority of theory, especially given that in reality, any case study is almost certainly likely to fall short of what theorists would like to see happen. Furthermore, as Steiner et al.(2004, page 42) suggest, along with Chambers (2003), empirical studies can also keep 'normative theorists on their toes' even though it can never be seen as proving whether 'deliberation is a good thing in itself', especially as interpretations of deliberation can vary quite widely among theorists.

In their work, Steiner et al (2004) endeavoured to construct a highly empirically-driven comparative study of deliberation in parliaments which sought specifically to link deliberative theory and the behaviour of given political institutions. Whilst their contribution is instructive to the purposes of the present study it should be pointed out that their main aim is to measure the 'quality' of discourse in different parliamentary settings whereas ours is to examine the content of debate over time and whether or not specific forms of language prevail. Their primary argument was that *'...talk matters: the nature of speech acts inside legislatures is a function of institutional rules and mechanisms, and bears an influence on political outcomes that transcends those rules and mechanisms'* (Steiner et al., 2004: page 1). The authors averred that there are a number of different dimensions to parliamentary debate irrespective of the type of democratic parliamentary system be it adversarial or consociational. The most obvious dimensions distinguish between procedural and substantive aspects of debate which will always be present but will vary according to the set-up and culture of the political system and the nature of the debate topics. There may be a series of sub-dimensions to these primary aspects, as was found in the case of an analysis of debates on abortion reform (Bara et al, 2007). These dimensions thus represent the means by which we can assess an institutional role in shaping both the context of debate and its outcomes.

Methodology

The methodology used to analyse the content of parliamentary debate is qualitative CATA. We utilize two types of software, Alceste and Hamlet, each of which was chosen to fulfil slightly different purposes although there is also an overlap in terms of distinguishing between the different aspects of the content of the debates. In both cases, the input data is exactly the same- the texts of the debates on from 1974 dealing with regulation of MPs' interests and allowances and expenses, most of which represent debates on a series of parliamentary bills. In addition, a selection of relevant reports of Select Committees over the same time period is also analysed. The link between Alceste and Hamlet is twofold. Firstly, both produce data which inform the

selection and nature of the categories selected for use in the later Hamlet analysis on the basis of strategic words. Secondly, they inform the analysis of individual speakers since Alceste shows individual speakers linked to particular configurations of word usage in the form of 'classes'. These inputs can be analysed further using Hamlet.

Constructing the Hamlet dictionary

Since the main catalyst for this research is the 2009 Expenses Scandal and the subsequent changes made to the monitoring of MPs expenses and allowances, it was decided that the key debate in terms of relevant parliamentary texts was the debate of 29th June 2009. This was the Second Reading debate on the Parliamentary Standards Bill which established the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to oversee all matters relating to MPs' expenses and allowances. As such, we wanted to establish the dimensional parameters of this debate and then examine whether these were relevant to other parliamentary debates and Select Committee reports on related topics which both preceded and followed it.

The selection of the dimensions which comprise the dictionary was also informed by the findings of previous research, notably Steiner et al. (2004) and Bara et al. (2007) as well as contemporary accounts of the context within which the expenses scandal and its aftermath played out, such as Van Heerde Hudson (2014) and Allen and Birch (2015). The expectation was that a clear procedural dimension would emerge as well as several substantive dimensions. Taking into consideration both the results of the Alceste 'classes' and the word counts pertaining to the 29th June debate, it emerged that there were six dimensions. The nature of the Alceste 'classes' are discussed in detail below in relation to results of our analysis. The Hamlet categories have been designated as advocacy, ethical, financial, institutional, legal and procedural. Collectively these comprised some 670 inputs. Some dimensions, notably advocacy, comprised the most expressions (235) whereas financial comprised the least (51). The only human intervention in the construction of the Hamlet dictionary is the selection of the designation of the categories representing the different aspects of the debate and the initial selection of the input terms.

Before proceeding with this, however, it should also be pointed out that in these types of investigation, the *actual* dictionary inputs account for very small proportions of the words covered by the texts themselves. For example, the total occurrence of all six dictionary entries for the 29 June 2009 debate represents only some 15% of the total word count for the text which was not unsurprising in the light of similar work in the past (Bara et al, 2007; Tsagkroni, 2014). This would make it extremely difficult to depict differences between the different dimensions. Thus it has become conventional to use the proportions of each dimension's contribution to the overall dictionary presence in the text. This notwithstanding, every one of the 518 context units of the debate contained at least one word present in the dictionary.

Results of analysis of debate of 29th June 2009

Alceste results

The Alceste analysis of this debate yielded five distinct 'classes'. These demonstrated a significant amount of overlap.

Figure 1 about here

Dendrogram of classes from Alceste

Figure 2

Factor analysis: Alceste

Hamlet results

We will firstly consider the results for the debate of 29 June 2009 in terms of the proportions of the different dimensions present, whether party affiliation or gender makes any difference and a consider differences between the speakers in terms of their individual emphasis on the six aspects aspects. Finally we will look at the use of the dictionary in all nine of the debates under investigation.

Given that this debate is concerned with the establishment of a new institutional framework to manage MPs' expenses and allowances it is expected that the most prominent dimensions to this debate are the procedural and the institutional and this is exactly the case, as we can see in Table 1, with these two dimensions accounting of some 67% of the dictionary usage. This clearly reflects the assertion by Steiner et al (2004) regarding the procedural-substantive division being at the heart of the content of parliamentary debate. However, considering that there was little controversy about the need to bring about institutional change in this area and that the parties were not interested in creating un-necessary conflict, the role of the advocacy dimension was also reasonably strong. The remaining three dimensions did not figure prominently in the debate overall, although we will see some considerable variation in this regard when we come to consider the input of individual protagonists. We must also remember that the dictionary, besides being represented throughout the debate, nevertheless only accounts for about 15% of the total word usage. This is neither

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surprising nor out of step with previous research in this area, given the extensive use of general vocabulary in all debates.

Table 1 about here.
Hamlet dictionary input for debate of 29th June 2009.

As the subject of this debate is not an area of inter-party conflict, and clearly not a matter of ideology and although it might be seen as a matter of conscience, we would not expect a great deal of difference in terms of party affiliation. The breakdown of the 37 MPs who spoke in this debate, some quite briefly, was 11 Labour, 18 Conservative and 8 others.

Figure 3 about here
Positions on six dimensions by party in debate of 29th June 2009 (mean%)

We note that the proportions of contribution to debate for all six aspects is generally in the same order of magnitude for all three party groups and there is no discernible difference among them in the case of the procedural aspect. Of the other two more significant aspects, Conservatives appear to favour the institutional aspect above the other parties, although only slightly more than Labour. The smaller parties, however, do not use this type of language as frequently and there is about an eight point gap between them collectively and the Conservatives, whereas that between Labour and Conservatives is only about two to three points. In the case of the advocacy aspect, however, there is slight variation, with the speakers representing smaller parties being more likely to use this type of argument than the two main parties. This is to be expected given that these parties, especially the regional nationalists, have more clearly defined interests and clienteles to represent to make a case for than the two larger parties.

With regard to the three aspects of lesser importance to the language of the debate, the use of the financial aspect by speakers from the different parties follows the same pattern as that for the institutional aspect. The ethical and legal aspects follow a similar pattern as that for advocacy. There is a degree of overlap in terms of general argument with regard to ethical and advocacy rhetoric on the one hand and ethical and legal on the other. However, we must continue to bear in mind that the contribution to the overall language of debate by the ethical, legal and financial elements collectively is of a similar magnitude to the contribution of the advocacy aspect alone. This is not to say that their contribution is undervalued but clearly their contribution to the argument overall amounts to far less than that of the procedural, institutional and advocacy aspects and certainly less than the contribution made by more general vocabulary.

Figure 4 about here

Positions on six dimensions by gender in debate of 29th June 2009 (mean%)

Since there were only three women among the 37 speakers, all of whom were Labour MPs, differences in behaviour between female and male MPs are hardly significant. However, are there are a couple of striking differences which deserve a brief comment. Firstly, whilst the three dimensions – procedural, institutional and advocacy - which dominate the debate overall are emphasised above the legal, ethical and financial aspects, male MPs seem far more likely to emphasize procedural vocabulary that female. Secondly, female MPs clearly use more language associated with the institutional and advocacy aspects of the debate than males. As far as the three minor aspects are concerned, there is no noticeable difference in their usage between women and men.

Figure 5 about here

Debate of 29th June 2009: Labour speakers (%)

The use of language associated with the different debate dimensions of individual speakers is much more erratic than the broad overall figures for the debate as a whole might suggest. This is also the case for non-Labour speakers. Indeed, the Conservatives have the most variable patterns of the three groups of speakers.

Picking up on the brief report on gender differences it is interesting to note that two of the Labour speakers, Bridget Prentice and Natascha Engel have joint highest scores for advocacy. Prentice, who has the shortest intervention, also has by far the lowest score for the procedural aspect. John Mann, whose intervention is also very short, has the highest score for procedural and lowest for advocacy. In general, the patterns depicted for individual Labour speakers suggest that institutional and advocacy usage is similar for most individuals, in that high use of one is accompanied by high use of the other. The fact that procedural usage varies so much is also a function of the fact that some speakers make only short interventions whereas others provide much larger input. Some of the short interventions are often almost entirely procedural in nature.

As far as the three aspects of lesser importance are concerned, there are a small number of interesting, individual cases. With regard to the legal aspect, Tony Wright, Bridget Prentice and, to a lesser extent Andrew Dismore have higher scores than other speakers. David Winnick has the highest score for the financial aspect. Otherwise, these aspects do not figure prominently in the speeches of Labour MPs.

Figure 6 about here

Debate of 29th June 2009: Conservative speakers (%)

Among Conservative speakers the highest score for the institutional aspect is for Peter Luff, whose score for procedural aspect was the lowest. It must also be recognised that his overall intervention was among the shortest. Bernard Jenkin presents a similar pattern but on a smaller scale and with only a point or two difference between the two aspects. His intervention was moderate in length. Other than these two speakers, all Conservatives clearly favour the procedural as the most used aspect in their speeches. Most also use the institutional aspect quite extensively- usually as their second highest aspect, apart from Edward Garnier and Nicholas Soames. Both of these MPs made very short contributions to the debate, with the former prioritising a legal argument and the latter, the advocacy and financial aspects. The overall use of the three aspects of less importance, with the exception of Garnier, Soames and one or two other MPs, was similar to that of Labour speakers. Overall, however, there were no discernible patterns in terms of relationships among the various aspects in the speeches of Conservative MPs.

Figure 7 about here

Debate of 29th June 2009: Liberal Democrat and other speakers (%)

The single most individualistic case emerging from speakers representing the smaller parties is that of the Independent Bob Spink who made the fourth shortest contribution to the debate. His procedural input made up 70% of his speech, followed by 20% legal input and 10% institutional. Without Spink's contribution, the other seven speakers from the Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid Cymru and the SDLP demonstrate very similar patterns of usage of the six aspects. As stated when looking at the mean usage figures for this group, advocacy, whilst still only third place overall, was clearly favoured more widely than by most speakers from the largest parties. Once again, the usage of both advocacy and institutional input follows a parallel pattern.

Figure 8 about here

Comparison of use of six dimensions in debates on expenses related matters, 1975-2011

Finally we come to a comparison of the use of these dimensions over nine debates on expenses and related issues concerning the probity of MPs, including the most unusual situation of having three debates on one Bill on consecutive days. The lack of significant difference apart from two occasions with regard to the procedural aspect, is extremely interesting. With these two exceptions (for the debate on the Nolan Report in November 1995, which effectively established the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the final debate on the establishment of the IPSA in July 2009) the usage of each of these aspects across almost forty years is remarkably similar. This is true for the order of importance of the six aspects and for the level of input each contributes to the separate debates. Is there therefore a particular parliamentary language for the discussion of topics relating to the probity of MPs?

Discussion and conclusion

Overall, this exercise has demonstrated that a fairly limited set of texts, mediated by computer software and a small amount of human intervention, can produce an interesting picture which brings out elements of parliamentary debates that our usual perusal of them in terms of adversarial exchange between front benches does not easily enable us to see. There are two levels to this. Firstly the configuration of individual debates, both in terms of the debate as a behaviour event in its own terms and as part fo a time series. Secondly, there is the possibility of analysing the contribution of individual speakers. The discussion has provided a small snapshot of this in terms of comparing the contribution of a specific dictionary to debates on related themes over a forty year period. In this project we have not yet reached the point of engaging a comparison of the use of language by individual speakers who participate in such debates over time. A number of the speakers who participated in the 29th June 2009 debate took part not only in the debates on ensuing days but also in 2011 and 2014. Some had also participated in the 1995 debate. We will be looking at this in the near future.

Turning to methodological matters,Alceste's great strength is that is an example of fully automated content analysis which minimises the need for human intervention and thus contamination which could compromise the reliability of the methodology. All the researcher needs to do is choose and prepare the text and interpret the results. Alceste is also able to provide immediate dimensional analysis with relevant statistical testing.

Hamlet, on the other hand is a semi-automated of computer assisted example of digital content analysis. The main 'problem' for some critics is that a researcher is responsible for designating the coding categories and their inputs, even though the physical construction of the coding framework can be undertaken

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within the software. Obviously the researcher also selects texts and interprets results. One advantage Hamlet has over Alceste is that it is able to deal with texts of any size whereas Alceste is much more limited in terms of not being able to analyse short texts.

The fact that the Alceste software has produced a series of 'classes' and a sophisticated factor analysis has demonstrated to us, not only that much of what we tend to regard as individual dimensions are actually inter-related. Indeed, it is quite difficult to disentangle what might constitute component expressions for an ethical dimension which are completely distinct from, say, human rights law? Likewise, there is the traditional example as to where we should place the term 'drugs'. Is it indicative of a medical or legal context? The key here is indeed *context*. It is possible within Hamlet to distinguish by means of a KWIC facility. It is, of course, sometimes not possible to use a word because it would be too problematic. For example, 'services'. Does this refer to armed services, social services, public services or what? (Fortunately these examples are not a major problem for the current project.) In any case the debates themselves provide an initial contextual framework which we can employ as a starting point.

Alceste also provides a link between the words actually used and the speakers who use them. This is very helpful when we get to look at dividing speakers into possible 'camps' such as parties. In the case of this analysis, there is actually little difference in the rhetoric of speakers which is attributable to alternative outlooks on the topic in question. Where Alceste has been particularly helpful is to set out a first level of division into different dimensions (aspects) although we have not been able simply to morph these into Hamlet categories without further investigation but it is clear that there is a relationship between the two initial sets of results.

Hamlet, as a means of aiding analysis, has also been useful to this project in terms of enabling the construction of a dedicated dictionary of relevant aspects or dimensions. Neither of these pieces of software can account for 100% of all possible aspects contained within a debate. However, what they can provide are indications and estimates. For a qualitative analyst this can go a long way to help unravel the inner workings of the process of parliamentary debate. Indeed, the contribution made by he content analysis of the texts of the debate of the 29th June 2009 has provided an intriguing insight into its inner dynamics, especially with relation to the contributions of individual speakers and the facility to provide a robust set of analytic categories to use to compare language in similar debates over time. The fact that the dictionary has proved so robust is of considerable significance. It has also allowed us to corroborate the view held by several analysts, and succinctly put by Steiner et al (2004) that parliamentary debates are essentially predicated along two primary dimensions- the procedural and the substantive.

But the results do more than this. In comparing the inputs of the dictionary, notably the procedural and advocacy categories we find a noteworthy correspondence between these categories and similar categories used in the analysis of abortion debates by Bara et al (2007) and Bicquelet et al (2012). In the case of the procedural aspect (labelled 'rhetoric of debate' in the earlier analyses) this is not unexpected. After all, parliamentary language is fairly ubiquitous and arcane across any debate- and in the British Parliament this is probably more so than in others. However, the similarity of the advocacy category was more surprising as the nature of the topics, the context, the positions of MPs and the times were all very different. Perhaps this indicates that indeed there is such a thing as dedicated parliamentary language of both a procedural and a substantive nature. Only further testing will enable us to conclude this with certainty.

References (to be completed)

Allen and Birch, 2015
Bara et al., 2007
Berelson, 1971
Bicquelet et al., 2012
Birch and Allen
Budge et al., 1987
Budge et al., 2001
Chambers, 2003
Downs, 1957
Dryzek, 2001
Guttman and Thompson, 1996, 2004
Lasswell and Kaplan, 1952
Lasswell and Leites, 1965
Madge, 1953
Riker, 1996
Sabatier,1998
Steiner et al., 2004
Tsagkroni, 2014
Van Heerde Hudson, 2014
Weale et al, 2012

Table 1.

Hamlet dictionary input: debate of 29th June 2009 (%)

Dimension	% Contribution to dictionary present in text
Advocacy	14.75
Ethical	5.65
Financial	5.64
Institutional	24.99
Legal	6.69
Procedural	42.28

Figure 2:

Alceste factor analysis of debate of 29th June 2009
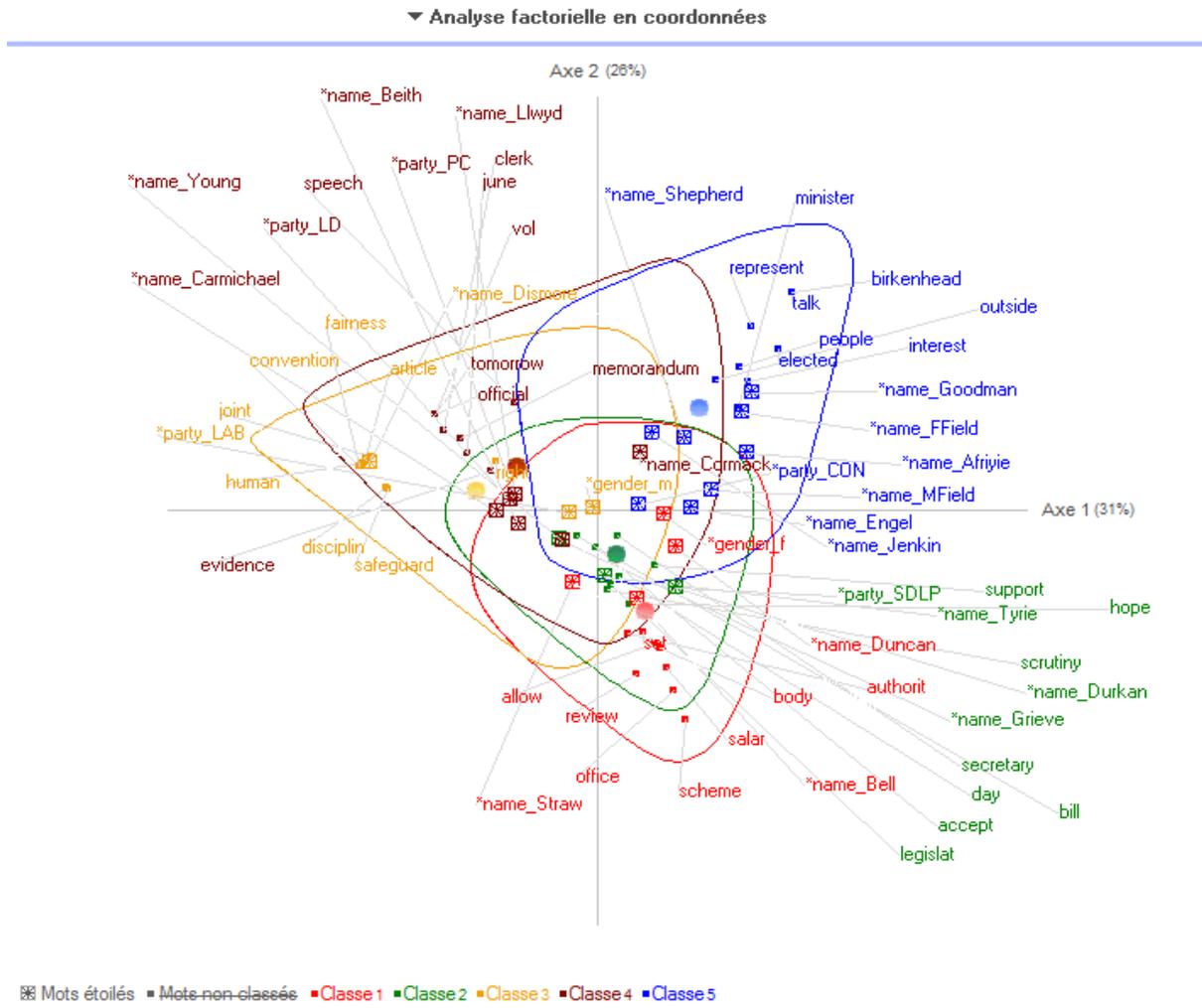
Figure 3

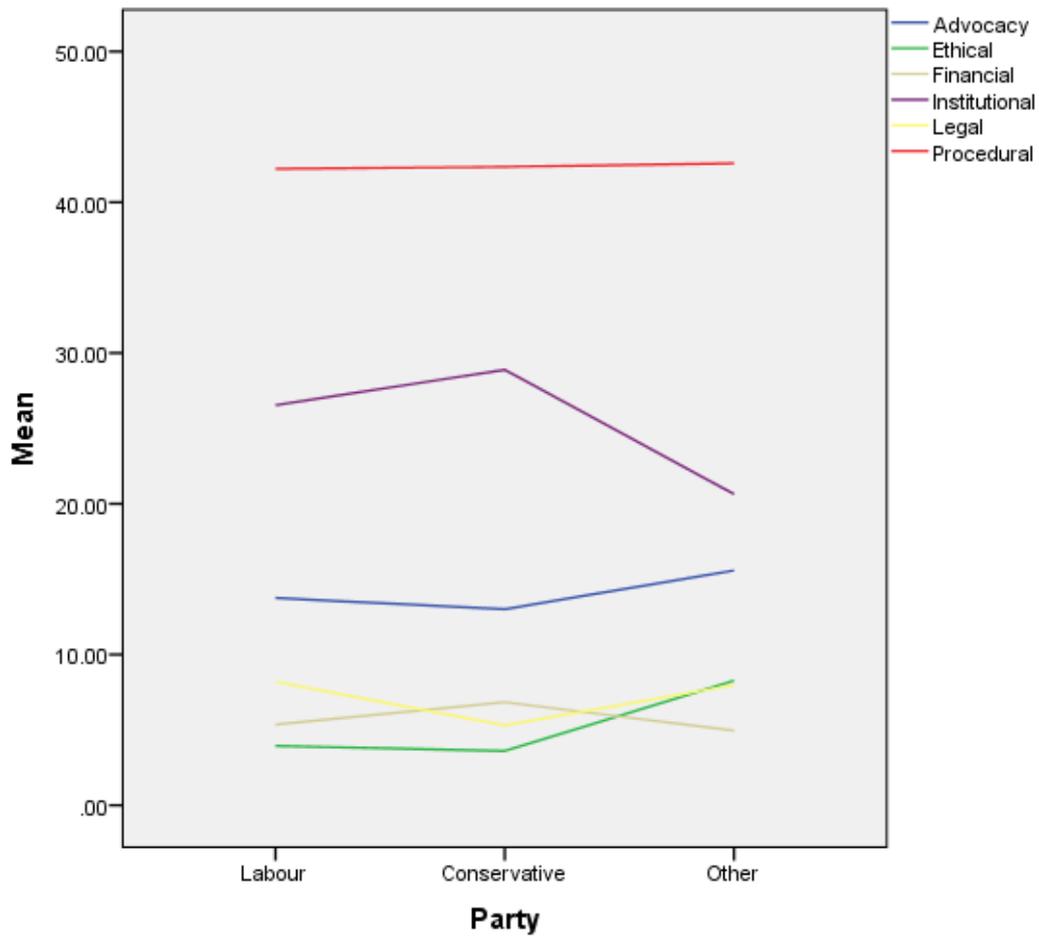**Positions on six dimensions by party in debate of 29th June 2009 (mean%)**

Figure 4
Positions on six dimensions by gender in debate of 29th June 2009 (mean%)
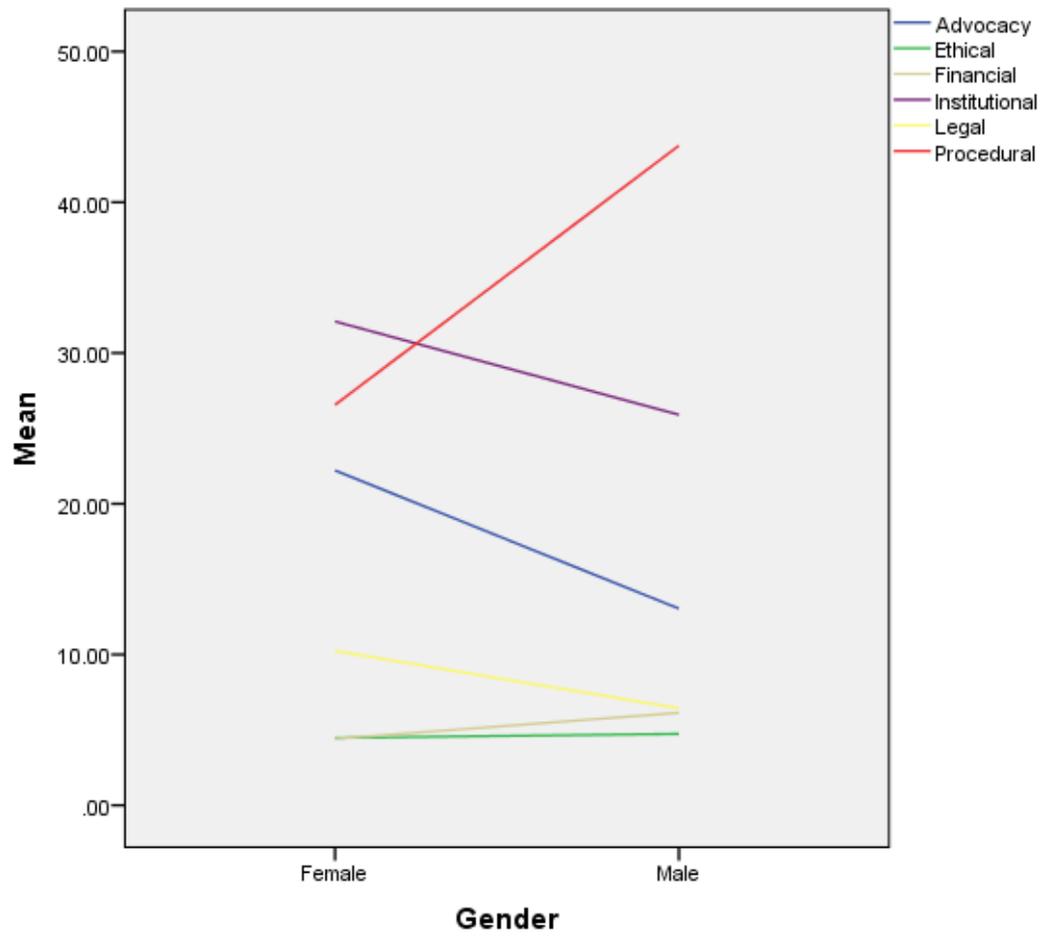
Figure 5

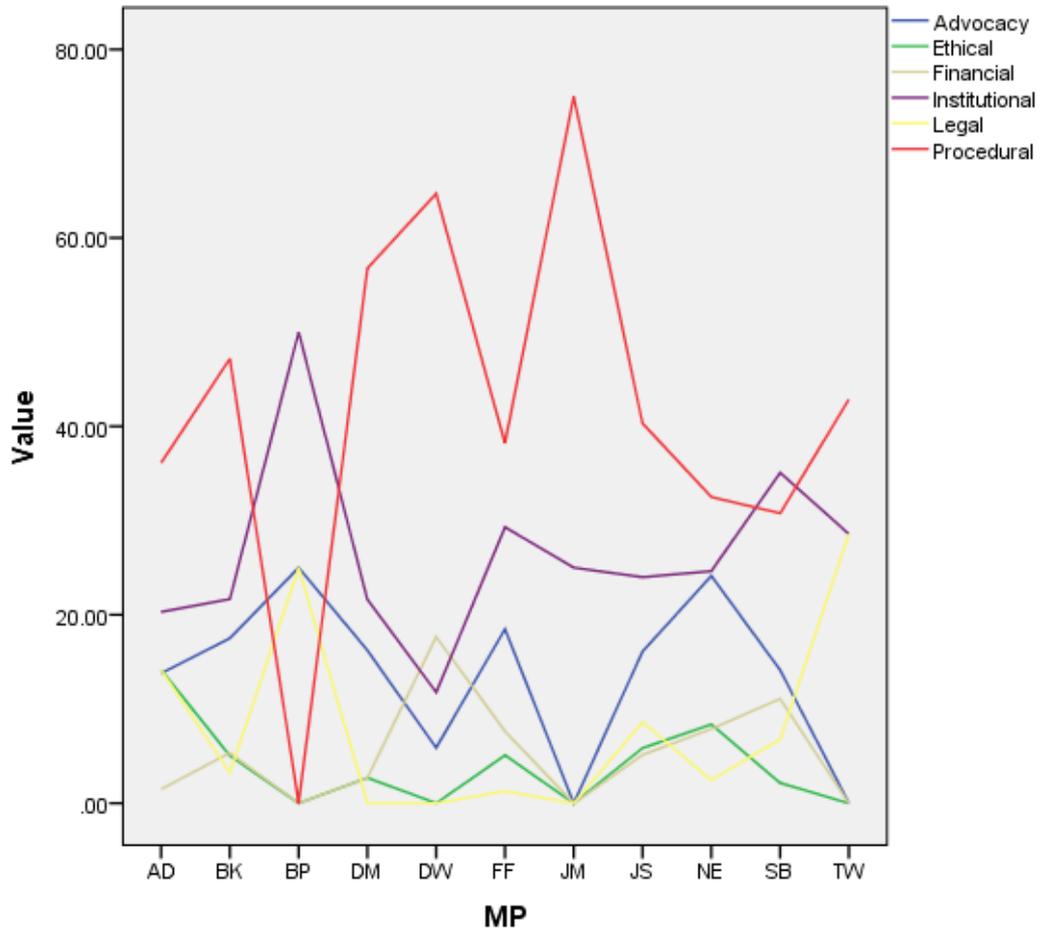**Debate of 29th June 2009: Labour speakers (%)**

Figure 6

Debate of 29th June 2009: Conservative speakers (%)
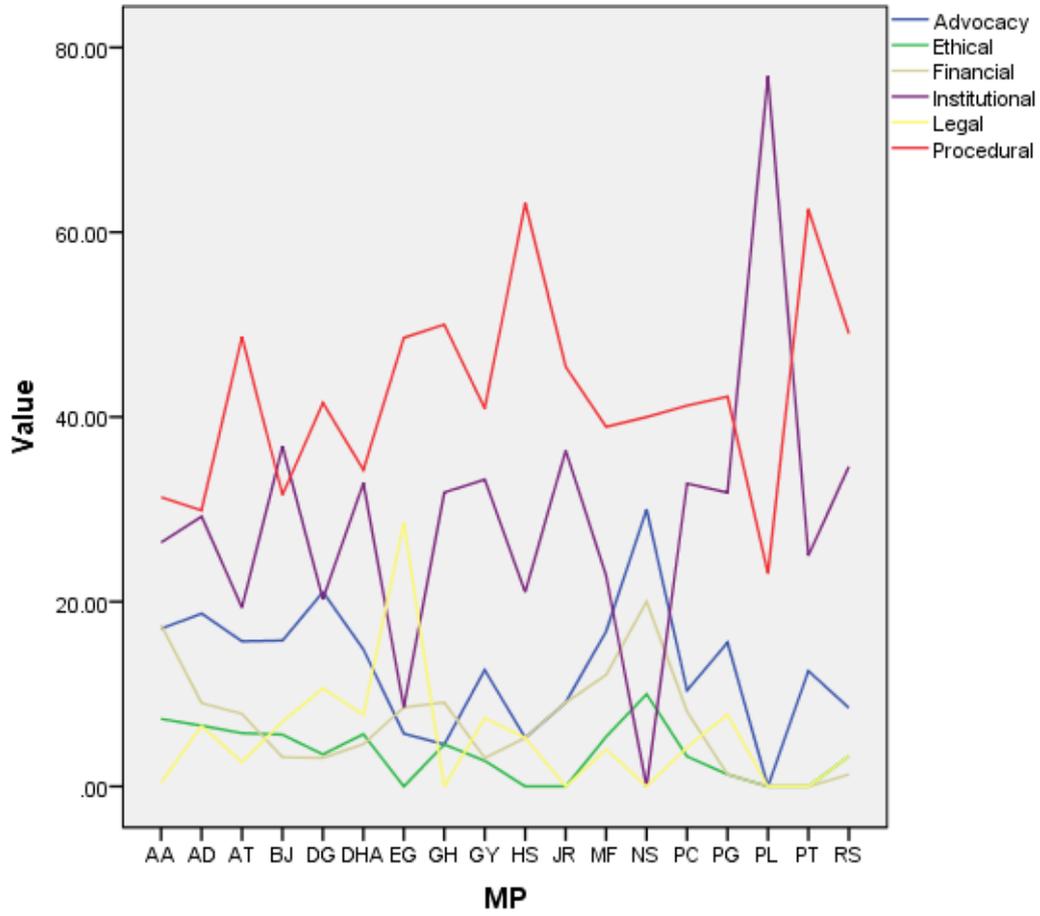
Figure 7

Debate of 29th June 2009: Liberal Democrat and other speakers (%)
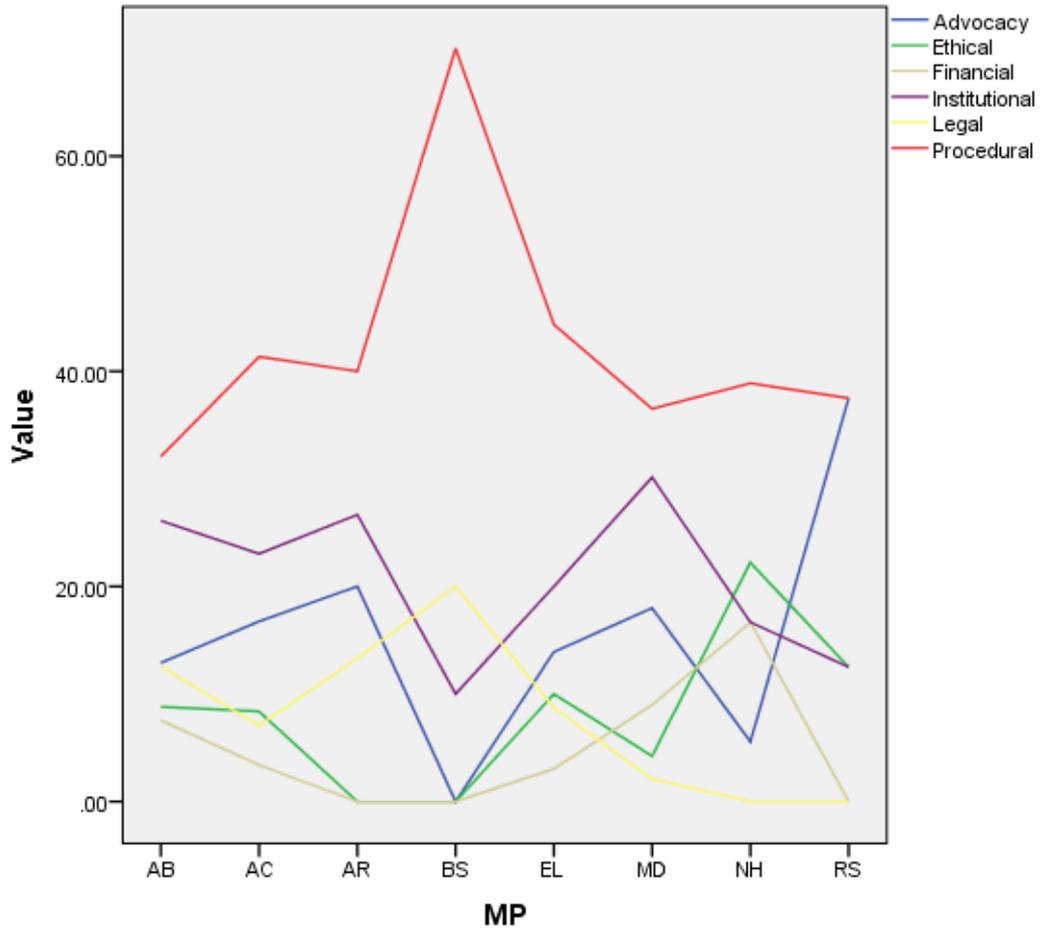
Figure 8

Comparison of use of six dimensions in debates on expenses related matters, 1974-2011