

**Univerzita Karlova v Praze
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Diplomová práce

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**Srovnání atenuace (*hedging*) v politickém diskurzu britské a
australské angličtiny**

A comparison of hedging in British and Australian political discourse

Praha, 2016

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Poděkování

Rád bych poděkoval prof. Ph.Dr. Aleši Klégrovi, vedoucímu práce, za připomínky, úsilí a čas, který mi věnoval. Rád bych také poděkoval Lucii Wellartové za podporu a trpělivost.

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze, dne 27. června 2016

ABSTRAKT

Abstrakt:

Práce zkoumá pragmatické aspekty jazyka politického diskurzu na konkrétním příkladu parlamentních interpelací. Práce analyzuje a srovnává fenomén *hedging* (atenuace) v kontextu dalších komunikačních strategií politického diskurzu *evasion*, *reformulation*, *dodging a footing shift* (vyhýbání se odpovědi, reformulace, protest proti přenesení atribuce otázky) v prostředí britské Dolní sněmovny (*House of Commons*) a australské Sněmovny reprezentantů. Práce vychází z metodologického přístupu prací Alana Partingtona (2003) a Bruce Frasera (2010). Současně si klade za cíl ověřit jejich závěry a metodické postupy na typově odlišném zdrojovém materiálu.

Klíčová slova:

pragmatika, politický diskurz, atenuace, reformulace, změna atribuce, Dolní sněmovna (Velká Británie), Sněmovna reprezentantů (Austrálie)

Abstract:

The thesis analyses the pragmatic aspects of the language of political discourse in the particular context of the institute of parliamentary question time. The thesis examines and compares the use of hedging in the context of other communication management strategies (e.g., evasion, reformulation, dodging a footing shift) in the British House of Commons and in the Australian House of Representatives. In addition, the thesis seeks to test the methodological approaches and verify the conclusions reached in previous research, especially by Alan Partington (2003) and Bruce Fraser (2010).

Key words:

pragmatics, political discourse, hedging, evasion, reformulation, footing shift, parliamentary question time, House of Commons (United Kingdom), House of Representatives (Australia)

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List of Abbreviations

HOC (UK) - House of Commons (United Kingdom)

HOR (AU) - House of Representatives (Commonwealth of Australia)

PMQ - Questions to the Prime Minister (United Kingdom)

UQ - Urgent Question (United Kingdom)

TQ - Topical Question (United Kingdom)

OQ - Questions for Oral Answer (United Kingdom)

Col. - Column

QTU - Question Time Unit (question time section related to one tabled question)

QE - Question Exchange (a pair of one interrogative and corresponding response block)

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Introduction

The thesis examines the use of hedging in the context of a set of rhetoric strategies (evasion, reformulation, dodging a footing shift) the speakers adopt to succeed in the struggle *for face and power* in the political discourse of the question time in the British House of Commons and in the Australian House of Representatives. The primary focus of the thesis is on the speech of the podium, *i.e.*, on the language of the representatives of the Government responsible for answering the tabled questions. However, in order to interpret the data correctly, it was necessary to examine also the language of the questions. The thesis does not approach hedging as an isolated phenomenon but as a one of a set of choices available to the speakers. The four communication management strategies addressed by the thesis (hedging, evasion, reformulation and dodging a footing shift) were selected following the methodological approach of Alan Partington in *Linguistics of Political Argument* (2003). They allow capturing the continuum of the main choices available to the members of the podium when formulating their answers. Accordingly, the thesis approaches hedging as one of several strategies available to the speakers answering the questions. This approach has the benefit of providing a comparative perspective on the use of linguistic phenomena mentioned above that serve as both alternative, intertwined and complementary solutions to specific situations the speakers face.

The secondary aim of the thesis is to test to what degree the methodological approach outlined by Alan Partington in his *Linguistics of Political Argument* is applicable to a slightly different type of political discourse. As hedging is one of the four strategies addressed by the thesis, the text seeks also to verify the conclusions reached by Bruce Frasers (2010: 212) in his article *Hedging in Political Discourse*; mainly that hedging was not used for the purposes of evasion.

The thesis analysed a transcription of the parliamentary question time of the House of Commons sessions in the United Kingdom and that of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia. The transcriptions are available in both printed and online form as part of the Hansard official edition, which is published throughout the Commonwealth of Nations.

In addition, as pointed out by Chilton and Schaffner (2002: 5-21), the process of transcription of the debates allows certain space for *ex post* changes in accordance with “linguistic propriety and idealised genre conventions”. The editing, however, comprises mainly omissions of phenomena such as irrelevant interferences by the MPs in the

audience, slips of the tongue. Still, the source remains verbatim in nature and, as such, presents a valuable source for the purpose of the analysis. Moreover, the editing practice in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) follows the same norms, which makes the two samples comparable.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one summarises previous research on the topics addressed in the thesis. Chapter two outlines the main methodological principles as well as the institutional and communicative context of the question time and the main characteristics of the analysed samples. The third chapter examines, in more detail, the political discourse management strategies and outlines their typology used for the purposes of the analysis. Chapter four summarises and interprets results of the analysis with respect to both the four selected strategies and the overall communicative framework of the parliamentary question time. The last chapter presents the conclusions.

I. Literature overview and methodology

1. Summary of the previous research

The research summarised in this chapter contributed to the methodological framework of the thesis by providing theoretical background and methodological tools as well as examples of practical application. However, it was also helpful by identifying several problematic issues which needed to be taken into account when interpreting the data. These included, e.g., the significance of the institutional context, the influence of the personal style of speech of each individual speaker and the flaws inherent to any kind of classificatory apparatus such as overlapping categories or linguistic phenomena not falling within the scope of any of the categories.

The overall attention of the researchers in the field of interaction between language and politics has not been distributed equally. Harris (2001: 452) points out that more research has been devoted to the interaction of politics and the media than to the pragmatic aspects of communication of politicians within a political institutional framework. In addition, in the case of British parliamentary discourse, multiple authors focused rather on the Questions for the Prime Minister than on the ordinary question time. Moreover, comparative studies of parliamentary language appear to be interested particularly in the comparison of British political culture and its norms of interaction with those in other countries in Western Europe. The linguistic aspects of parliamentary or, more specifically, question time language have thus remained unnoticed.

The pragmatic analysis of parliamentary language borders on several other disciplines including discourse analysis and political science. From the political science point of view, a number of works were devoted to British political discourse in the political science way of understanding the notion. These publications include, e.g., *European Political Cultures* (1997) edited by Roger Eatwell or *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis* (2001) by Henrik Larsen.

A significant part of the research devoted to the pragmatics of political language has been published under the *Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture* series of the John Benjamins Publishing Company. The most significant works include, e.g., *Text and Talk: Analytic Approaches to Political Discourse* (2002) edited by Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner. Focused specifically on parliamentary language are, e.g., *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Parliamentary Discourse* (2004) edited by Paul Bayley, or

European Parliaments under Scrutiny: Discourse strategies and interaction practices (2010) edited by Cornelia Illy.

The pragmatic analysis of political language is provided by, e.g., John Wilson in *Politically Speaking: The pragmatic analysis of political language* (1990). A general overview of the relation between language and politics is outlined by Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner in their introductory chapter to *Politics as Text and Talk* (2002). Their text called *Themes and principles in the analysis of political discourse* offers a basic overview of the existing approaches to the study of the language of political discourse including the most significant pragmatic theoretical approaches, such as the speech acts theory or the theory of politeness.

The link between language and political culture is explored also by Stephen Bates, Peter Kerr, Christopher Byrne and Liam Stanley in their article *Questions to the Prime Minister: A Comparative Study of PMQs from Thatcher to Cameron* (2014). Bates et al. use pragmatic analysis to verify the claims of several political commentators criticising the institute of Questions to the Prime Minister that it is changing from an accountability platform to a “mud-slinging spectacle”. Bates et al. use several linguistic indicators to test the alleged downgrading and politicisation of the PMQs from Thatcher’s days to Cameron.

Pragmatic analysis of the language of politics is represented, e.g., by the article written by Sandra Harris *Being Politically Impolite: Extending Politeness Theory to Adversarial Political Discourse* (2001). Harris seeks to extend Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory into a broader framework that would capture the reality of communication in the political context. Harris analysed the Questions to the Prime Minister (PMQs) in the House of Commons suggesting that various politeness strategies and FTAs can co-occur within one and the same utterance. Most importantly, Harris concludes that politeness theory must take into account also the expectations of the participants that influence both the speakers’ choices and the interpretation of their speech as polite, neutral or impolite. As a result, the speakers may often do an intentionally impolite or face-threatening act without actually breaking down the conversation or damaging their own face. Despite being sceptical about developing one universal, intercultural model of politeness, Harris’ text suggests that the pragmatic approach is capable of providing a framework for the comparison of linguistic choices and norms

between two or more political institutions (communities of practice) both synchronically and diachronically.

In addition to the texts mentioned above, there is a number of works related to the field of pragmatic analysis of political discourse. The text *Evasive Action* (1991) by Sandra Harris provides an insight into politicians' language in the media. The overview of hedging in scientific research discourse may be found in Ken Hyland's *Hedging in Scientific Research Articles* (1998). Another perspective on the phenomenon of political hedging is provided by Ghaleb Rabab'ah and Ronza Abu Rumman in their article *Hedging in Political Discourse: Evidence from the Speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan* (2015); or by A. Jalilafar and M. Alavi in their article *Power and Politics in Language* (2011).

In addition to the research described above, there are two works of particular importance for the thesis which concentrate on communicative strategies used by politicians in the interaction with the public, the media, and other politicians. These are *Hedging in Political Discourse* by Bruce Fraser (2010) and *The Linguistics of Political Argument* (2003) by Alan Partington.

The article authored by Bruce Fraser, *Hedging in Political Discourse*, was published as a chapter in *Perspectives in Politics and Discourse* edited by Urszula Okulska and Piotr Cap (2010). Fraser's text analysed a group of 2007 press conferences of the American president George Bush. Seeking to establish to what extent politicians utilise hedging as an evasion tool, Fraser concludes that hedging in this particular function is rather rare. Fraser's analysis of political discourse suggests that politicians tend to use different means when trying to evade answering the question, means including, but not limited to, ignoring the question, saying that the question was already answered, or simply lying. Fraser concludes that most hedging items are used as an empty rhetoric device with no impact on the utterance (neutral hedging).

A more extensive characteristic of the enquirer and podium interaction in political discourse is provided by Alan Partington in his monograph *The Linguistics of Political Argument: The-spin doctor and the wolf-pack at the White House* (2003). Partington's text is based on the corpus and qualitative analysis of the White House press briefings. In general, Partington's text works with the premise that, in this particular discourse, the participants, to a large extent, fulfil defined roles and aims: the press is trying to obtain

information from the podium whose main target is to satisfy the press without harming their own face (or, being the PR officers, the face of the institution and its main representative). Partington provides an overview of how the podium and the press manage their interaction by utilising a number of rhetoric strategies such as hedging, reformulation, evasion or footing shift management.

Partington outlines two major ways to understand hedging. From the politeness perspective, hedges are usually understood as items “which modify the force of an utterance”, generally softening it or imbuing it with imprecision. The other, grammatical, perspective, relates hedging to modality defining it as “the speakers’ room for manoeuvre between absolute yes and absolute no.” In addition, Partington (2003: 146-147) points out that hedging as a rhetorical strategy may be used to express modesty and “to avoid an impression of arrogance”.

According to Partington (2003: 154), the podium makes use of negative politeness more often than the press. Hedges adopted by the podium have two main functions. The core of the first function is modesty. The podium seeks to avoid presenting itself as the authority trying to reduce the distance between the two sides and “offering rather than imposing” the answer. The second function relates to the fact that hedging allows the podium to incorporate a certain degree of acceptable and convenient imprecision.

2. Question time analysis: methodological framework

2.1 Question time in the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

In order to give the setting of the question time analysis, the following subsections briefly characterize the discourse of question time and the way question time is conceived in the two institutions under investigation.

2.1.1 Question time and political discourse

The language of parliamentary questions in both the British and the Australian parliament represents a specific sub-genre of political discourse. The question time consists of language produced in political context by politicians for, primarily, a political audience. According to Ilie (2010: 11-12), parliamentary questions, as an accountability tool, have three major functions: a) to require information, b) to criticise government action (or non-action), c) to test the honesty and ability of the members. However, Bates et. al. (2014: 253-278), in their article on the development trends in the Questions Time, demonstrated that parliamentary questions may also serve the government as a tool to keep majority in the house and attack opposition.

2.1.2 Question time in the House of Commons (United Kingdom)

The first recorded parliamentary question in the British parliament was raised in the House of Lords in 1721. However, until the 19th century, the members of the Parliament preferred using different methods, as put in the parliamentary Factsheet P1 (2010: 2), “to put pressure on the ministers”. Only in 1869 did the institute of questions receive formal recognition with the questions for the Prime Minister being formally established only in 1961. The questions represent one of the instruments of political battle in the House of Commons and serve as a tool used to increase the accountability of the Government to the Parliament and, consequently to the public. Chilton and Shaffner (2002: 92) thus claim that the purpose of the question time is to give the Parliament the opportunity to get more information on a specific issue from the Government, to expose the failures or successes of the Government or indirectly press the Government for action.

The questions to receive oral answers represent one of four types used within the framework of the question time. Each of these types is subject to different formal requirements.

Types of questions in the House of Commons

- Questions for Oral Answer (Oral Questions or OPQs taken in the Chamber)
- Questions for Written Answer (Written Questions or WPQs)
- Cross-cutting questions (taken in Westminster Hall)
- Urgent Questions (formerly Private Notice Questions, taken in the Chamber)

(Factsheet P1 - Parliamentary Questions, 2010: 2)

In general, according to the Factsheet P1 (2010: 3), each question, apart from the questions for the Prime Minister and other exceptions, must be listed at least three working days before the scheduled session. In order to be listed, each question must fulfil several formal and content-related requirements set by the procedural rules. In addition, there is only a limited time allocated for the question time; approximately an hour on all days except Fridays. In addition, the number of questions is regulated by quotas. The question time is divided into two parts. In the first part, the questions are responded to by the responsible representative of the Government. In the second part, the *listed* questions for oral answers are followed by *untabled* Topical Questions, and follow-up questions related to the topics discussed.

In addition to questions for oral answer, the MPs may raise an Urgent Question. The purpose of Urgent Questions is to provide space for a discussion on sudden developments and emergencies. As a result, the time schedule requirements for listing and Urgent Question are more flexible than in the case of the other types of the questions.

In addition, the British parliamentary procedure enforces the use of *polite* language by introducing an institute of “Unparliamentary Language”, which prohibits the use of certain lexical items especially vulgarisms and other language that may be considered offensive. Most importantly, according to Factsheet G7 (2010: 5) the members of the House of Commons are not allowed to accuse one another of lying. The enforcement of the language rules is one of the duties of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

2.1.3 Question time in the House of Representatives (Australia)

As in the British political system, the parliamentary questions in the Australian Parliament represent an instrument by which the legislature exercises control over the executive branch of the Government. There are two basic kinds of questions: Oral Questions (without notice) and Written Questions (on notice). The practice of asking

questions without notice developed throughout the 20th century “in a rather ad hoc manner” and had been formally recognised only as already de facto established practice.

However, the question time does not serve only as a means of the Parliament’s control over the Government. For the Government, as stated in the *Infosheet 1* (2016: 1), it is one of the important tools to keep the support of the majority of the members. This political dimension of the question time has a significant impact on the linguistic choices not only in the House of Representatives but also in the House of Commons.

In contrast to Britain, in Australia all the ministers are expected to be present; even though it is not a written rule. As in Britain, even in Australia the questions must relate to the area of responsibility of the particular minister. The ministers do not know the questions before the start of the question time. However, there is a time limit on the question which should be asked within 30 seconds. As in Britain, even the Australian Parliament has specific requirements on the form and content of the questions, whose aim, according to *House of Representatives Practice* (2012: 543-572) is to prevent the question time turning into a full scale political debate on a single issue.

2.2 Communication framework of parliamentary question time

The description of parliamentary question time in the following subsections focuses on its actors and structure and on the way questions are asked and the answers formulated (i.e. the typology of questions and requests).

2.2.1 Actors and structure of parliamentary question time

For the purposes of question time language analysis, the text adopts a modified terminology framework used by Partington (2003: 30-67). The present text uses the term *podium* to refer to MPs responsible for providing the answer. In contrast to Partington, however, in my analysis I will use the terms *enquirer* for the individual MP raising a particular question and *the audience* for the all Members of the House present. The presence of the third figure in the communication, the *audience*, is of the utmost importance for this particular type of political discourse as the answer requested by the enquirer is intended for the whole House – rather than the enquirer himself – and, in more general terms, also for the public.

In addition to this general framework, the analysis utilises a number of linguistic units determined by the specific nature of the source material and reflecting the structure of the question time. The question time, in essence, represents the highest unit of analysis. Oral answers, including the answers to Topical Questions and the answers to Urgent Questions, represent thematic blocks within the question time forming thus *Question Time Units (QTU)*. QTUs are further subdivided into *Question Exchanges (QE)* formed most typically by pairs of interrogative utterances and the following responses. Each interrogative block, generally, consists of one or more interrogative sentences complemented by other sentences. The following example of a Topical Question dealing with immigration constitutes one *Question Time Unit* and consists of two *Question Exchanges*.

- (1) *Enquirer 1: How many applicants have been granted citizenship over the last 20 years; and what estimate she has made of the number of errors or mistakes made in decisions on citizenship in that period.*

Podium: The published national statistics of British citizenship grants show that there have been more than 2.4 million grants of citizenship over the last 20 years. The recent report by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration endorsed decision making in the overwhelming majority of cases examined.

Enquirer 2: None the less, will my hon. Friend say when errors were made and what the consequence of such changes would have been? Is he able to find out how many such citizenship errors should not have been made?

Podium: The Government are clear that the grant of UK citizenship is a privilege for those who deserve it, not an automatic right for those who do not. Some of the issues identified by the chief inspector relate to a decision in 2007...

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 16-17)

2.2.3 Communication continuum framework of question time: asking questions and formulating answers

In order to analyse the responses of the podium, we cannot avoid examining the structure of the questions first. Partington, because of the nature of his source material, encountered predominantly questions with the illocutionary force of *request for information*. For the

purposes of question time analysis, though, it will be necessary to consider a broader range of the illocutionary forces of questions.

In order to capture the continuum of choices available to the speaker answering the question, the text will make use of the following classification reflecting the two following major criteria introduced by Alan Partington (2003: 235), Sandra Harris (2001: 87) and Paul Bates et. al. (2014: 259-262): the delivery of the requested variable and the satisfaction of the answer recipient.

Typology of responses:

Direct answer: an answer which directly provides the value for the requested variable and may be expected to satisfy the enquirer;

Indirect answer – with a possible inference: an answer from which the requested variable may be retrieved by inference or which clearly implies, e.g., the opinion of the podium and, consequently, may be expected to satisfy the enquirer;

Indirect answer – without a possible inference: a response from which the missing variable cannot be inferred but which maintains cohesion, topic coherence, presupposition framework and illocutionary coherence;

Empty response: responses that do not maintain coherence with the topic and fail to respond to the illocutionary force of the question;

Question ignored: the podium does not respond to the enquirer's request ignoring either the whole interrogative sequence or just part of it.

The analysis of the question-answer dynamic of the question time centres around the key tenet of commitment which the speaker establishes by uttering the answer; a commitment that connects the speaker's face with the truth value, appropriateness and all other features that, in the particular context, the recipient expects of the answer.

The interrogative sentences identified in the source materials involved requirements for four major types of commitment: (i) factual "something is a fact"; (ii) evaluative (something is good, bad, etc.); (iii) action-related; (iv) communicative rules related. The detailed list of request typologies outlined below is by no means definitive. It is merely a systematised list of request types encountered in the sample used for the practical purposes of the analysis. The analysis of the subtypes of the illocutionary force of the questions was complemented by the identification of the corresponding segments in the response blocks, e.g. expression of concession for questions requesting concession etc.

Commitment based typology of requests:

1 Requests seeking a commitment resulting from the association with the truth-value of the provided information

- 1.1 Request for one or more items of information
- 1.2 Request for acceptance, recognition, confirmation of the truth value of one or more items of information
- 1.3 Request for concession of the truth value of one or more items of information
- 1.4 Request for expression of agreement with one or more items of information or with a viewpoint, quotation, statement, etc.
- 1.5 Request for an (personal) opinion

2 Request seeking a commitment resulting from evaluative expression

- 2.1 Request for approval
- 2.2 Request for assurance, pledge of support, emphasis or recognition of importance
- 2.3 Request for apology, expression of regret or acceptance of responsibility
- 2.4 Request for congratulation, acknowledgement or expression of thanks

3 Request seeking a commitment resulting from association with action

- 3.1 Request for permission
- 3.2 Request for a promise or an expression of commitment
- 3.3 Request for a non-linguistic action

4 Request seeking a commitment resulting from association of the podium with adherence to rules and regulations of communicative exchange

- 4.1 Request to follow conversational maxims (telling the truth, avoiding evasion, etc.)
- 4.2 Request for following procedural regulations (such as interventions of the Speaker)

5 Rhetorical questions

- 5.1. Self-oriented (question uttered only to be answered by the enquirer himself)
- 5.2. Podium-oriented (question whose aim is not to receive a direct answer but rather to serve as an incentive for the podium to make a general comment on a specific issue)

The typology is illustrated by the examples below.

- (2) ***Enquirer:** Will my right hon. Friend explain from which budget the fines and compensation will be paid? (REQUEST FOR INFORMATION) Is it not perverse that the budget that should be paying for these very improvements is to be used to compensate the companies that have been inconvenienced? (REQUEST FOR OPINION) Will my right hon. Friend look very closely at the way in which the Office of Rail Regulation has operated since the changes were made, to establish whether it is fit for purpose and is holding Network Rail to account? (REQUEST FOR ACTION)*

(HOC: 5·1. 2015, col. 16-17)

- (3) ***Enquirer:** ... Does the Home Secretary agree that such losses and cuts are the reasons behind the drop in confidence in policing for the first time in a decade? (REQUEST FOR AGREEMENT)*

(HOC: 5·1. 2015, col. 19)

Fulfilling the request embodied by the question presented by the enquirer is the first and most natural strategy available to the podium. However, not everything that follows a question can be classified as an answer. The text will thus distinguish, in accordance with Partington (2003: 234-235) and Harris (1991: 76-99), between a response (*i.e.* whatever follows a question) and an answer (*i.e.* a response that, at least to a certain degree, addresses the request raised by the question). Following Bates et al. (2014: 259), we will consider a straightforward and satisfactory answer as an end of the continuum between “full answer” and “total failure to reply” rather than as a strategy in itself.

Given the wide range of illocutionary forces encountered in parliamentary questions, the present text understands a “full answer” in broader terms than a simple delivery of a piece of information. In accordance with the illocutionary force of the question a “valuable” may be also a commitment or expression of willingness to carry out an action or a communicative action involving a specific performative verb, e.g., agree (see above).

Partington (2003: 235) defines answer as a *response which satisfies the hearer* (in contrast to a response as such which presents *any kind of communicational content following the question*). However, the satisfaction of the speaker is difficult to establish. As a result, the text will consider a particular question answered if the speaker fulfils the requested, e.g., provides a piece of information, opinion, performative linguistic act or commitment to further action. Still, together with Partington (2003: 195), we may expect fulfilling the request to be indicative of the enquirer’s satisfaction with the answer and, consequently, of the overall cooperativeness of the podium.

The empty response may very well be a result of the application of some of the communication and information management strategies. However, we should also note that even application of a straightforward evasion does not unequivocally mean that the reply will automatically classify as an empty response. We may expect to encounter cases in which the podium applies evasion strategies and at the same time provides the answer (e.g., stating that the answer has been answered but responding to it again anyway or evading one of the interrogatives in the interrogative block and answering the others).

In addition, we may expect that the particular choices of the continuum of answers will interact and utilise the information and communication management strategies reflecting specific needs of each of the particular selected choice. Out of its nature, a direct answer requires commitment by the podium, which may pose a potential threat to the podium’s

negative face. This fact thus raises the issue of the use and the function of hedging within the framework of the direct answers. Following the premise, we could thus expect a high level of what Fraser (2010: 207) classifies as neutral hedging conveying imprecision which softens the “ultimate truth” value of the direct answers.

The following two examples illustrate the classification outlined above. In the first example, the podium answers the question directly by providing a list of actions it adopted. In the second example, the enquirer seeks to limit the answering options of the podium by enforcing an approval of a statement formulated by the enquirer. The podium responds by providing an opinion exceeding the scope of the request made by the enquirer, which allows the audience to infer podium’s opinion on the particular issue.

- (4) **Enquirer:** *What steps she is taking to improve the approach of the police to working with people with mental health problems.* [request for information]
Podium: *We have taken a number of significant steps in this area: we have launched schemes including street triage, and liaison and diversion; we have reviewed the Mental Health Act 1983...* [direct answer]
(HOC: 5·1. 2015, col. 4)

- (5) **Enquirer:** *...Does she believe that overseas graduates should all have to return home before they can even apply for a high-skilled job in British science or the NHS—yes or no?* [request for opinion]
Podium: *... Of course we want people who wish to come here to do genuine degrees at proper educational establishments, but the Government have been clearing up the abuse that was allowed to run rife with student visas under the previous Labour Government, and 800 colleges are no longer able to take in overseas students. We want the brightest and best to come to the UK, and that is exactly what our policies are destined to ensure.* [indirect answer retrievable by inference]
(HOC: 5·1. 2015, col. 18)

2.3 Characteristics of the sample

The text compares samples of the question time language from the Australian House of Representatives and the British House of Commons. The whole sample is comprised of two question time sessions of the House of Commons (5th January 2015, 6th January 2015) and question time blocks of three sessions of the House of Representatives (9th February 2015, 10th February 2015, 11th February 2015). In total, the examined texts amount to 37818 words (tokens). Table 1 illustrates the extent of the particular parts of the samples in more detail. The difference between the total word counts is determined by a larger number of third-party interventions into the enquirer-podium communication exchange in the case of the Australian sample. The samples covering the speech of the enquirers

and the podium are nearly identical extent and can thus be compared without proportional recalculation.

Speakers / House word count	HOC (UK)	HOR (AU)	Total
Speech of enquirers	8042	2328	10370
Speech of podium	9980	15765	25765
3rd party interventions noted in Hansard	117	1586	1703
Enquirer and podium word count	18022	18093	36115
Total word count	18139	19679	37818

Table 1: Structure of the British and Australian samples: word count

	HOC (UK)		HOR (AU)		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Questions for Oral Answer	14	44	-	-	14
Topical Questions	9	14	-	-	9
Urgent Questions	1	42	-	-	1
Questions Without Notice	-	-	48	100	48
Total	54	100	48	100	102

Table 2: Structure of the samples: question type distribution

	HOC (UK)	HOR (AU)	Total
Total of question exchanges	119	48	167
Interrogative part: word count average	68	49	137
Response block: word count average	84	335	419

Table 3: Distribution of question time exchanges and their parts

The sample comprises questions raised by representatives of all political parties represented in both of the parliamentary chambers. The distribution of the questions is outlined in Tables 4 and 5. Answers in the UK sample were given by five speakers of the Conservative Party and 1 speaker of the Liberal Party. Answers in the Australian sample were provided by 12 speakers, members of the Coalition Government of the Liberal and National Parties.

In contrast to the UK sample, which involved communication by members of the Parliament and ministers of the Government, the Australian question time included also responses by the Prime Minister (Anthony Abbott, Liberal Party).

HOC (UK): question time exchanges according to political party of the enquirer	Total	%
Labour	51	42.9
Conservative	47	39.5
Liberal	14	11.8
UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party)	5	4.2
Green	1	0.8
SNP (Scottish National Party)	1	-
Total	119	100.0

Table 4: Structure of the samples: distribution of questions by political parties in the UK

HOR (AU): question time exchanges according to political party of the enquirer	Total	%
Labour	24	50.0
Liberal	19	39.5
National	2	4.2
Independent	2	4.2
Green	1	2.1
Total	48	100.0
<i>Leader of the Opposition (Labour)</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>31.3</i>

Table 5: Structure of the samples: distribution of questions by political parties in Australia

Both of the samples address topics that fall predominantly within the scope of the internal affairs of the country. Issues addressed in the UK sample include immigration, police, devolution, crime situation and transport crisis. In the case of Australia, the MPs raised questions concentrating on the defence budget and the budget in general, education, healthcare, economy and foreign trade, internal security, and aboriginal affairs public government support.

3. Strategies for the management of the communication and information exchange dynamics in political discourse and the communicative framework of the parliamentary question time

The following subchapters outline the rhetoric strategies (evasion, hedging, reformulation and a footing shift) adopted for the purpose of the question time language analysis.

3.1 Rhetoric strategies of political discourse

Every time a speaker formulates an answer or a question in the communication exchange process, he makes a choice of approach. Following the previous research in this field, we may establish a set of the most important strategies adopted by the speakers and by means of a quantitative analysis and interpretation of the data outline the main differences between the question time language in the House of Commons (UK) and the House of Representatives (AU). The thesis will focus on the use of the four major strategies that were identified and used in the previous research on the topic, i.e. evasion of the answer, hedging, reformulation and (dodging) a footing shift. The key sources include especially *Linguistics of Political Argument* (2003) by Alan Partington and *Hedging in Political Discourse* (2010) by Bruce Fraser.

The text does not claim that this list is complete. Rather than that, it seeks to identify and test a set of strategies that would reflect the continuum of speakers' choices in the particular context of the parliamentary question time.

The analysis of the rhetoric strategies mentioned above is accompanied by the examination of the question time communication framework in which they are adopted. The dynamics of communication in the parliamentary question time is outlined in Chapters 2.2 and 4.1.

3.2 Evading the answer

Evasion is one of the key strategies available to the speakers when responding to a question. The definitions of evasion in various sources differ. The general dictionary understanding of evasion is that of an act or action of avoiding something that is undesirable to happen. Partington (2003: 235-255) views evasion as a terminal stage on the continuum of directness/indirectness choice of the speaker (see 2.2.1.). Still, he concedes that the correlation between the degree of evasiveness and the

directness/indirectness of the answer has its limitations as speakers may include direct answer markers such as *yes* or *no* without actually satisfactorily answering the question. Following the results of his research, Partington (2003: 235) established a classificatory list of evasion type, in other words evasion techniques, which will be used for the purposes of this thesis.

Typology of ways of evading according to Partington (2003)

1) Refusal to answer

- a) on record refusal to answer without justification
- b) on record refusal to answer with justification

2) Claiming incompetence to answer

- a) lack of knowledge (claim of ignorance)
- b) lack of competence (e.g. This is a question for a lawyer.)
- c) outside the responsibility scope (e.g. This issue should be discussed with a different department.)
- d) referring the question to another person (e.g. I will forward the question to Mr. B to answer it.)

3) Empty rhetoric

- a) officialese or diplospeak
- b) responding by raising a safe topic
- c) vague or exceedingly generalised answer

4) Challenging the question or the enquirer

- a) challenging the premise of the question
- b) challenging a presupposition of the question
- c) challenging the facts included in the question
- d) challenging the authority of the enquirer

5) Evasion by humour

6) Evasion by claiming the answer has already been answered

There are several factors that may encourage the podium to use evasion. The speaker may evade the answer in order to cover up the ignorance of relevant information and/or to prevent a potential damage of his positive face. In addition, the podium may intentionally evade answering the question as the information it seeks could be harmful. According to the speakers' attitudes, Partington (2003: 236) divides evasion into two categories: open and strategic.

- (a) open avoidance: the respondent does not provide information because he does not know it or is not allowed to give it (e.g. it is classified)
- (b) strategic avoidance: the respondent knows the answer but hides it; the respondent pretends to give an answer intended to mislead

(Partington 2003: 236)

However, in most cases, it is impossible to establish whether the speaker is in possession of the required information. As a result, rather than examining the speakers' motivation, the analysis will concentrate on the functional perspective of the evasion. The text will use the typology of evasions and identify and quantify the frequency of use of the particular evasion types in order to establish the degree to which Partington's classification that emerged as a result of the analysis of the press briefings corresponds to other sub-genres of political discourse i.e. the parliamentary question time.

3.3. Hedging

The overview of the previous research shows that there are multiple ways to define and approach hedging. When analysing hedging, the text follows the approach adopted by Fraser (2010: 207-211) whose definition of hedging is essentially functional. Fraser (2010: 201) defines hedging as "attenuation of the full value which the utterance would have, absent the hedging."

From a structural, rather than functional, point of view, Fraser (2010: 206) characterised hedging as *a rhetorical strategy* which speakers adopt in order to achieve a specific goal. In this particular case, it is the attenuation of the proposition or the illocutionary force of the utterance. From a different perspective, Fraser (2010: 203) defined the set of hedging items as "an inventory of devices by which the speakers qualify or attenuate commitment to either the meaning or the force which would be interpreted if the hedge were absent from the utterance."

The list of propositional hedges given in Fraser (2010: 204) includes:

about, actually, almost, approximately, as it were, basically, essentially, exceptionally, for the most part, generally, in a manner of speaking, in a real sense, in a way, kind of, largely, literally, loosely speaking, more or less, mostly, often, occasionally, particularly, pretty much, rather, real, really, regular, relatively, roughly, so to say, somewhat, sort of, strictly speaking, technically, typically, very, virtually

Hedges on illocutionary force listed in Fraser (2010: 204-205) include:

Impersonal pronouns, concessive conjunctions, hedged performatives, indirect speech acts, Introductory phrases, I believe that he is here, modal adverbs, modal adjectives, modal noun, modal verbs, epistemic verbs, negation (transferred negation, negative interrogatives), reversal tag, parenthetical constructions such as ..., I guess, if clause, agentless passive, conditional subordinators, progressive form, tentative inference, conditional clause expressing uncertainty about the extralinguistic knowledge required for a correct interpretation of the utterance, metalinguistic comment such as strictly speaking, so to say...

Most important, Fraser (2010: 207-210) established a dichotomy of *neutral* and *self-serving hedges*. The first type, *neutral hedging*, is “hedging which clearly had not impact on the issue discussed.” Fraser illustrates the concept of *neutral hedging* by several examples, two of which are given below.

Neutral hedging

- (6) *Since the tax cuts took full effect in 2003, our economy has added more than 8.3 million new jobs and almost 4 years of uninterrupted growth.*
- (7) *We don't believe freedom is just confined to our neighbourhood; we believe freedom is universal in its application.*

(Fraser 2010: 207)

In contrast to *neutral hedging*, *self-serving hedging* is characterised as hedging meant to evade answering the question in a straightforward and complete way. Fraser's descriptions allows for two basic interpretation of how hedging can serve evasive purposes. First way of using hedging for the purposes of evasion may be summarised by the phrase *may be or may be not*. In the other, the speaker may use of agentless passive to avoid revealing the identity of the agent. Two of the illustrative examples of *self-serving hedging* provided by Fraser (2010: 209) are:

Self-serving hedging

- (8) *The plan to withdraw troops will possibly be revised.*
- (9) *The ultimate decision will be decided (by?) by next month.*

(Fraser 2010: 209)

In his study, Fraser expected to encounter numerous cases of self-serving hedges which did not prove to be the case. To his surprise, he found a large number of instances of neutral hedging instead which led him to claim that the speaker preferred different strategies to avoid meeting the requests made by the enquirers.

An important note: to overcome a rather wide semantic area covered by the term function, the thesis will make use of the distinction between the “linguistic effect” of hedges,

namely attenuation, and the “purpose” for which the hedging item is used such as expressing negative politeness, evasion etc.

3.4 Reformulation

In Quirk et al. (1985: 1311), reformulation is defined as: “*Rewording in the second (defined) appositive of the first (defining) appositive*”. Following Quirk et al., Partington (2003: 178-9) divides reformulation into two major categories:

- (a) self-reformulation (reformulation of what I have said)
- (b) other-reformulation (reformulation what the other has said)

In the case of other-reformulation, Partington identifies three major categories of according to the questioner/questioned perspective and the course of interaction: the podium reformulates the question, the enquirer reformulates the response of the podium, the podium counter-reformulates enquirer’s reformulation.

However, in the question time framework, a continuous debate on a single topic that would provide an opportunity for a sequence of reformulations is largely precluded by the procedural regulations. In fact, one of the identifying features of the question time is that it is not a debate and attempts to turn it into a debate may result in an intervention by the Speaker.

In addition to the classification of reformulations according to the discourse structure, Partington (2003: 177) lists four basic functional types of reformulation: reformulation based on linguistic information, reformulation based on factual knowledge, reformulation for precision and reformulation for revision.

In addition to the previously mentioned types of reformulation, Partington (2003: 181-182) also distinguishes reformulation types according to whether or not they change the meaning of the utterance.

- (a) reformulation not involving a change of the meaning of the utterance (neutral reformulation which does not change the utterance in terms of quality of its meaning)
- (b) reformulation involving a change of proposition or another aspect of meaning (e.g. the speaker removes a formulation with negative connotations that could threaten his positive face)

This distinction is crucial for the interpretation of the use and function of reformulation in the question time. As a result, it will be used in the thesis to analyse the use of

reformulation by the audience. The thesis will try to establish whether the podium uses reformulation purely to *repeat in other words* or to manipulate the question both by removing or inserting a potentially threatening angle of the question.

Given the nature of the source material, the analysis will concentrate on the phenomenon of other-reformulation, namely the reformulation of the question by the podium. In other words, the analysis will concentrate on whether or not the podium reformulates the question that is posed to them.

Like hedging, even reformulation may be difficult to identify. The interrogative units of the question time tend to consist of more than just one question. Generally, the enquirer provides data or an account of a problem before posing a question. As a result, the podium naturally addresses the same topic, which frequently requires similar language. The text will thus not view reformulation merely as the use of different words. It will examine reformulation as a rhetorical strategy intentionally used by the speakers with a certain aim. For the purposes of this analysis, in order to be classified as reformulation, the expression will have to fulfil the criterion of having a clear strategic purpose in the question time exchange.

In the analysis of the parliamentary question time, the thesis will make use of the following functional typology of reformulation which is based on Partington's (2003: 177-182) and which reflects the specific nature of the parliamentary question time and the overall aims of the analysis.

- 1) Reformulation not involving a change of proposition (neutral)
 - a) reformulation for revision
 - b) reformulation for accuracy
 - c) rhetoric repetitive reformulation for creating a foothold for the answer
- 2) Reformulation involving a change of proposition embedded in the question or otherwise modifying the meaning of the previous utterance
 - a) defensive and precautionary: removing or modifying a potentially threatening aspect of meaning
 - b) offensive: adding an aspect of meaning threatening the face of the enquirer
 - c) promotive: adding an aspect of meaning enhancing the positive face

3.5 Dodging a footing shift

A footing shift is a rhetorical strategy used predominantly by the enquirer. The essence of a footing shift is the attribution of the question to a different source or authority such as an academic report, other relevant media, person of authority in the given field, etc. A footing shift is illustrated by the following example.

(10) *Q: Mr President, in its recent editorial, the New York Times asked whether your economic policies are as successful as you say?*

(PARTINGTON, 2003: 90)

To the media representatives, a footing shift provides a means of giving the impression of a greater degree of objectivity. On the other hand, politicians may use transposition of the source of the question is to lend it candour, neutrality or authority, e.g., by attributing it to a source renowned for expertise in the particular field or to the constituency voters. When a question involves a footing shift, the podium may either use other strategies or target their attention at a footing shift as such. In other words, the podium may respond to the question by *dodging* a footing shift. Partington (2003: 103-107) distinguishes four major types of dodging a footing shift. The podium may:

- 1) deny the account
- 2) challenge the authority of the source
- 3) claim no knowledge of the source or authority
- 4) challenge the neutrality of the attribution

II. Research part and conclusions

The research part deals first of all with communication management strategies occurring in the question time of the two institutions, focusing on the different patterns of their use in the UK and Australian samples. The key chapters describe the use of the four political management strategies, evasion, hedging, reformulation and footing a shift, presenting the findings of the analysis and their interpretation. The results are summed up and discussed in the conclusions.

4. Communication management strategies in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

Chapter four presents the results of the analysis of the UK and Australian question time samples. The chapter starts with the characteristics of the general communication framework of the question time and proceeds to the use of the four discourse strategies. Given their more frequent use, evasion and hedging are treated first and in more depth.

4.1 General question time framework: asking questions and providing/avoiding answers

The basic reaction expected of a speaker to whom a question is addressed is to answer it. This is, indeed, the case also of the parliamentary question time. The right to demand information from the government is one of the means the legislature can exercise its overseeing powers over the executive branch of the government. Question time thus presents the government with both challenges and opportunities. The main challenge consists in answering the questions without damaging their own face. The opportunity, then, is a chance to persuade the audience of their competence and successes.

Different actors in the question time framework have differing and often opposing interests, intentions and expectations. An evasive answer by means of a political attack on the previous government may cause an uproar among the opposition MPs and, at the same time, be applauded by the MPs the enquirer is associated with. On the other hand, excessive subservience of the podium towards the enquirer from the opposition may not be appreciated by members associated with the government.

To understand the dynamics of parliamentary question time and the choices made by its main actors, it is necessary, firstly, to outline a general structure of the communication exchange. The basic characteristics of the questions asked in the analysed samples of the question time in the HOC and HOR are outlined in Table 6.

Question time characteristics	HOC (UK)		HOR (AU)	
Word count				
Total word count: enquirers and podium	18027	100.0 %	18093	100.0 %
Word count – enquirer’s speech	8042	44.6 %	2328	12.9 %
Average word count - Interrogative block	68	0.4 %	49	0.3 %
Average word count - Response block	84	0.5 %	335	1.9 %
Syntactic structure of the enquirer’s speech				
Number of interrogative blocks	119		48	
Number of interrogative sentences	176		64	
Average of interrogative sentences per one interrogative block	1.48		1.28	

Table 6: Comparison of the enquirer’s speech characteristics HOC and HOR

The figures reveal substantial differences between the British and Australian sample. Firstly, in spite of a comparable size of the samples, there are significantly more interrogative sentences and question exchanges in the HOC (UK) sample. In the HOR (AU) sample, this is balanced by significantly longer answers, which reflect the procedural setting of question time and a more prominent role of the Speaker in the question time. In addition, the data show that the interrogative blocks presented in the House of Commons are not only longer but also syntactically more complex with the average of 1.48 interrogative sentence per one question exchange in contrast to 1.28 (86.5 %) in the case of HOR (AU).

In the British sample, 25 % of the interrogative sentences were responded to by a direct answer. In 29 % of the cases, the podium provided indirect answer from which the requested variable was retrievable by inference. In comparison, 35.9 % of the interrogatives in the HOR (AU) were responded to by a direct answer and further 31.3 % by an indirect answer with possible inference.

Typology of answers	HOC (UK)		HOR (AU)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Direct answer	44	25.0	23	35.9
Indirect answer with possible inference	51	29.0	20	31.3
Indirect answer without possible inference	30	17.0	4	6.3
Irrelevant answer	1	0.6	6	9.4
Other: ignored question, questions answered jointly, unclear	50	28.4	11	17.2
Interrogative sentences in the sample	176	100.0	64	100.0
Interrogative blocks responded to by complete and satisfying answer	49	41.2	26	54.2
Total number of question exchanges	119	100	48	100

Table 7: Comparison of the quality of the answers in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU)

The structure of the responses suggests that the Australian podium adopted a more collaborative attitude. However, there are other factors to take into account. A larger number of interrogative sentences per one interrogative block in the HOC (UK) sample resulted in significant number of interrogative sentences being either ignored or answered jointly together with others. In the Australian sample, the ratio of questions addressed this way was considerably lower.

In the British question time the podium preferred to conceal their refusal to answer by providing a response that relates to the topic but does not deliver the requested variable. In contrast, the Australian podium members appear more open to provide a completely irrelevant response, which in the House of Commons (UK) would be very likely considered unacceptable.

A more complex structure of the interrogative segment of the British sample is reflected also by a more diversified range of the types of illocutionary force of the interrogative sentences. The analysis is based on a list of subtypes of the question illocutionary force (see Chapter 2.2). The twelve categories were identified following a preliminary analysis of the HOC (UK) sample and it is not presented as a complete and definitive enumeration of question illocutionary force sub-types. As a result, the British sample includes instances of all analysed types of illocutionary forces. In contrast, in the question time of HOR (AU), only 7 types of the illocutionary forces were identified.

Most frequently, in both samples, the questions were asked to gain information. In the British sample, the requests for information (49.4 %) were followed by requests for opinion (13.1 %), requests for evaluative expressions such as agreement/disagreement (10.2 %), approval/disapproval (5.7 %) or congratulation/criticism (2.3 %). In addition, a noteworthy number of questions asked the podium to perform a non-linguistic action (8 %) such as to facilitate a meeting etc. Moreover, the British sample included also rare instances of other types of questions such as requests for concession (0.6 %), apology (0.6 %) or permission (0.6 %). Six illocutionary force types most frequently represented in the HOC (UK) question time sample are listed in Table 8.

Illocutionary force subtypes in the HOC sample	Number	%
1) Request for information	87	49.4
2) Request for opinion	23	13.1
3) Request for evaluative expression: agreement/disagreement	18	10.2
4) Request for a non-linguistic action	14	8.0
5) Request for confirmation, acceptance or recognition/rejection of a fact	13	7.3
6) Request for evaluative expression: approval/disapproval	10	5.7
Total number of interrogative sentences (HOC)	176	100.0

Table 8: Questions according to subtype of the illocutionary force: HOC (UK)

In contrast to the HOC, the requests for information in the Australian question time constituted a considerably larger proportion of the interrogative sentences. The remaining types of illocutionary forces were used less frequently than in the HOC (UK). The identified types included request for opinion (6.3 %), agreement/disagreement (4.7 %), request for a non-linguistic action (3.1 %), congratulation/criticism (1.7 %).

Illocutionary force subtypes in the HOR sample	Number	%
1) Request for information	50	78.1
2) Request for opinion	4	6.3
3) Request for evaluative expression: agreement/disagreement	3	4.7
4) Request for a non-linguistic action	2	3.1
5) Request for confirmation, acceptance or recognition/rejection of a fact	2	3.1
6) Request for evaluative expression: pledge of support, enhance importance, assurance	2	3.1
Total number of interrogative sentences (HOR)	64	100.0

Table 9: Questions according to subtype of illocutionary force in the HOR (AU)

In order to gain a general overview of the podium's responsiveness – compliance with the requests of the enquirers – we may compare the ratio of the illocutionary types of the questions with the ratio of the response block segments with corresponding illocutionary force.

In the HOC (UK), the number of assertive response block segments delivering requested information (74 cases) is lower than the share of questions requesting information (87 cases). On the other hand, the HOC podium provided a higher number of evaluative expressions such as criticism (4 requested in contrast to 22 delivered) or agreement/disagreement (18 requested in contrast to 28 delivered). Table 10 presents the question subtypes which demonstrate the most significant disproportion between requested and delivered communicative acts. The notion of *balance*, in the particular use of Tables 10 and 11, expresses the difference between the percentage of the question

subtypes in the total of the interrogative sentences and the share of the response block segments with corresponding illocutionary force in the total of all the response blocks.

Question subtype according to illocutionary force	Questions: % in the total of interrogative sentences		Response block segments with corresponding illocutionary force: % in the total of the segments		Balance	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Top three: positive balance						
1) Evaluative expression: congratulation/criticism/condemnation	4	2.3	22	12.4	+ 18	+ 10.2
2) Evaluative expression: agreement/disagreement	18	10.2	28	15.8	+ 10	+ 5.6
3) Non-linguistic action	14	8.0	19	10.7	+ 5	+ 2.8
Top three: negative balance						
1) Information	87	49.4	74	41.8	- 13	- 7.6
2) Evaluative expression: approval/disapproval	10	5.7	3	1.7	- 7	- 4.0
3) Confirmation, acceptance or recognition/rejection of a fact	8	7.3	3	4.0	- 5	- 3.3
Total	176	100.0	177	100.0	-	-

Table 10: Illocutionary force of the questions and responses in the HOC (UK)

Question subtype according to illocutionary force	Questions: % in the total of interrogative sentences		Response block segments with corresponding illocutionary force: % in the total of the segments		Balance	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Top three: positive balance						
1) Opinion	4	6.3	28	27.7	+ 14	+ 21.5
2) Evaluative expression: congratulation/criticism/condemnation	1	1.6	18	17.8	+ 17	+ 16.3
3) Evaluative expression: a pledge of support, assurance or importance enhancement	2	3.1	7	6.9	+ 5	+ 3.8
Top three: negative balance						
1) Information	50	78.1	42	41.6	- 8	-36.5
2) Non-linguistic action	2	3.1	1	1.0	- 1	-2.1
3) Confirmation, acceptance or recognition/rejection of a fact	2	3.1	1	1.0	- 1	-2.1
Total	64	100.0	101	100.0	-	-

Table 11: Illocutionary force of the questions and responses in the HOR (AU)

In the HOR (AU) sample, the drop of the information-conveying assertive segments in the response blocks – with respect to the ratio of questions with a corresponding subtype of illocutionary force – was more significant than in the British sample (-36,5 %). The resulting discrepancy was compensated by a higher ratio of the opinion-conveying assertive and evaluative expressions among the answers. The figure was, however,

considerably affected by a higher number of interrogative sentences in the HOC (UK) sample, in which the enquirers frequently provided more than one interrogative sentence per one interrogative block. On the other hand, the MPs in HOR (AU) asked less complex questions focuses on receiving information that, however, served more as incentives for the podium to provide a more complex response or comment on the topic in question. As a result, the HOR (AU) data show a significant difference between the number of interrogative sentences (64) and the response block segments (101). In contrast, in the HOC (UK) sample, the number of interrogative sentences (176) is nearly identical to the response block segments (177).

The disproportions between the ratio of requested and delivered linguistic acts suggest the general tendencies in the linguistic choices of the podium. In both of the samples, the most significant drop involves the requests for information, which illustrates the tendency of the podium to avoid answering certain fact oriented questions. On the other hand, the response block segments demonstrate a higher ratio of opinion-based answers or evaluative expressions such as congratulations, criticisms. In addition, the data suggest that it is not only the requests for information that the podium tries to avoid. We may observe also a decrease in the case of specific evaluative linguistic acts which would establish a strong, and possibly contestable, commitment such as approvals or confirmations.

The question time in the HOC (UK) is rhetorically more elaborate and subtle in terms of the communication dynamics between the enquirer and the podium. However, the language of the parliamentary questions in the HOC (UK) provided more manoeuvring space for evasive tactics of the podium. The language of the HOR (AU) sample, on the other hand, appeared to be more direct but at the same time more contentious. The data suggest that the Australian politicians, in fact, satisfactorily answered a higher ratio of questions than their British counterparts. On the other hand, they were more prone to openly ignore the communicative expectations of not only the enquirer but also the Speaker, often purely for the sake of a politically motivated attack outside the scope of the subject-matter of the question. Very frequently, the members of the Australian podium provided a direct and satisfactory answer to the question and then use the rest of the allocated time to indulge in an unrelated political attack on the opposition, previous government or the person of enquirer.

4.2 Political discourse management strategies in the question time of the HOC (United Kingdom) and the HOR (Australia)

In general, the number of communication management strategies in the British and Australian sample was comparable; with a slightly higher number in the case of the HOC (UK). However, when set against the discourse structure of the sample, the strategies seem to take a more prominent role in the question time of the HOR (AU).

Whereas evasion and hedging emerged as strategies commonly adopted by the podium, reformulation was encountered rather rarely. Dodging a footing shift was not present in the analysed sample. Evasion was used to more or less the same extent in both of the samples. On the other hand, the Australian sample demonstrated a significantly higher proportion of hedging. The difference is significant especially in the case of propositional hedging. The particular factors influencing the parameters of use of the particular strategies are explained below. Frequently, the strategies were not used independently. On the contrary, the podium often combined more strategies within a single response block.

Strategy	HOC (UK)			HOR (AU)		
	Number	%	Instances per one QE	Number	%	Instances per one QE
Evasion	100	33.8	0.8	52	19	1.1
Propositional hedging (including very)	103	34.8	0.9	141	51.5	2.9
Illocutionary hedging	77	26	0.6	72	26.3	1.5
Reformulation	16	5.4	0.1	9	3.3	0.2
Dodging a footing shift	-	-	-	-	-	-
In total	296	100.0	2.5	274	100.0	5.7
Number of question exchanges (QE)	119			48		

Table 12: General overview of the strategies adopted by the podium

4.3 Evasion in the question time in the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

The use of evasion in the UK and the Australia sample is described in the separate subsections 4.3.1-4.3.2 and compared in the last one, 4.3.3.

4.3.1 Evasion in the House of Commons (United Kingdom)

The evasion techniques outlined by Partington (2003: 234-255) were used rather frequently in the question time of the House of Commons. In 59 question exchanges (49.6 %) of the total 119, the podium made use of one or more of the evasiveness techniques, which had a considerable impact on the quality of the answer. In the additional 16 instances (13.4 %), the evasion techniques were used but, in the overall context of the communication exchange, did not negatively affect the overall quality of the answer. In the remaining 44 cases (37 %), the podium did not use any of the evasiveness techniques.

Given the complex nature of the interrogative blocks, one response block may include more than one evasion technique. This is the case of the response blocks of 24 QEs (20.1 %). The overall number of the evasiveness techniques in the sample is thus higher than the number of the QEs in which they occur. In total, 100 instances of application of evasiveness techniques were identified in the British sample.

When analysing the HOC (UK) sample, a noteworthy difference in the use of evasion between the procedural types of questions was encountered. In contrast to the Oral and Topical Questions, the Urgent Question sample demonstrated a higher variability of the evasiveness strategies (10 in contrast to 7).

In addition, the speakers in the Urgent Question segment utilised, more than the speakers in the Oral and Topical Question, the *offensive* evasion techniques such as challenges to the authority of the speaker or to the relevance of the question. Despite the fact that the size of the Oral Question and Urgent Question segment is roughly comparable, the ratio of the “offensive” evasiveness techniques slightly differs. The Oral Questions contained 15 “offensive” evasion instances (41.7 %) in contrast to 18 instances (50 %) in the Urgent Question segment. The remaining 3 instances (8.3 %) were identified in the Topical Questions part of the British sample.

Out of the ways of evasion outlined by Partington (2003: 235-255) were challenges to the question or the enquirer and empty rhetoric, which were represented most frequently. In

addition, the members of the podium also made use of various means of topic management. This included not only evasion by raising a new and safe topic (it is listed among the Partington’s categories), but also changing the perspective on the topic in question from negative to positive. The detailed distribution of the evasion techniques is summarised in Table 13.

Evasion techniques	Number	%	Instances per QE
Challenging the question or the enquirer	36	36	0.30
Empty rhetoric	29	29	0.24
Topic management evasion	24	24	0.21
Claiming the answer has been already answered	6	6	0.05
Incompetence to answer	5	5	0.04
Total	100	100	0.84

Table 13: Distribution of evasion techniques: HOC (UK)

The distribution of the most frequently occurring specific evasion techniques in the House of Commons sample is given in Table 14. When adopting the “offensive” means of evasion, the podium in the HOC (UK) seemed to resort to challenges of political nature more often (challenges addressed to the enquirer or the political party he represents, challenges to the previous government). In contrast, evasion by challenging the formal aspects of the questions or their content was used less frequently.

Evasion by challenging the question or the enquirer	Number	%	Instances per QE
Challenging enquirer’s authority, competence or honesty of intention	13	36.1	0.11
Accusation of previous government, political attack on opposition	13	36.1	0.11
Challenging the premise of the question	5	13.9	0.04
Challenging the facts included in the question	5	13.9	0.04
Total	36	100.0	0.3

Table 14: Distribution of specific evasion techniques in the HOC (UK)

The example below illustrates how the podium made use of a political attack on the enquirer, a representative of the opposition, as a means of evading the answer.

(11) **Enquirer:** *After the Christmas shambles, I was pleased to see that the chief executive of Network Rail voluntarily said that he would not take his bonus of £34,000. Has the Secretary of State considered introducing performance-related pay for rail bosses, in the same way as his Government advocate it for teachers?*

Podium: *I do not think I will take too many lessons from the Labour party about bonuses. In 2009-10, the bonuses paid to Network Rail were £2.3*

billion; this year, it was going to be £260,000. I think there should be carrots and sticks, and, if the criteria set are met, a bonus is a way of rewarding the people directly involved in providing services.

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 35)

In 29 cases (29 %), the podium attempted to avoid providing a complete and satisfying answer by means of empty rhetoric. Most commonly, the podium resorted to vague or extensively general language. Vagueness was followed by *jargons* associated with political or civil service environment such as officialise or diplospeak. In addition, the sample included a specific form of evasion by empty rhetoric, which consisted in thanking or congratulating the enquirer to raising the question and/or responding by agreement to the points raised by the question without actually providing the answer. In more general terms, we could call this strategy of the podium as *evasion by politeness*. The use of empty rhetoric for the purpose of evasion is illustrated by (12):

(12) **Enquirer:** ... which would provide our border posts with information about people involved in serious crime—such as the person who murdered the son of my constituent, Mrs Elsie Giudici—during the course of the year. Is that facility now available, and if not, when does he expect that to happen?

Podium: We are finalising the arrangements for joining the second-generation Schengen information system for the benefits that I have identified and to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I regard it as an important enhancement to our work in identifying those with criminal records. It is being advanced and I expect it to be in place very shortly.

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 22)

Evasion by empty rhetoric	Number	%	Instances per QE
Vague or excessively general answer	17	58.6	0.14
Officialese and diplospeak	8	27.6	0.07
Evasion by politeness (e.g. empty agreement)	4	13.8	0.03
Total	29	100.0	0.24

Table 15: Evasion by empty rhetoric in the HOC (UK)

The third most frequent type of evasion is the evasion by topic management. Partington (2003: 237-247) did not introduce topic management as an independent category of evasion. Instead, Partington classifies “evasion by raising a safe topic” as one of the forms of evasion by empty rhetoric. However, the composition of the evasion techniques in both British and Australian sample substantiates treating the thematic area as an independent group of ways of evasion. The usage of topic management by the podium in the HOC (UK) for the purposes of evasion is presented in Table 16.

Evasion by topic management	Number	%	Instances per QE
Topic “reprojection” (presenting a positive perspective on the topic)	17	70.8	0.14
Raising a new safe topic	7	29.2	0.06
Total	24	100.0	0.2

Table 16: Evading by topic management: HOC (UK)

The data suggest that, rather than raising a new safe topic and risking accusation of speaking off topic the podium preferred to introduce a new positive perspective on the topic in question. In spite of not being *off topic*, the podium still *de facto* avoided the answer by not reflecting the request posed by the original question. As this strategy appears to be used relatively often, it seems meaningful and relevant to establish it as an individual category and evasion technique on par with, e.g., raising a new safe topic. For the purpose of the analysis, the phenomena will be marked as *topic reprojection*. The thesis will then handle topic management as a new specific type of evasion techniques. The use of topic reprojection is illustrated by (13).

(13) **Enquirer:** *Is the Secretary of State aware that, specifically in relation to what happened at King’s Cross, the travelling public will not be impressed with his bland assertion that “some aspects” of the work were delayed? Does he know which aspects were delayed? Is he able to share that with the House? Does he accept that the travelling public, including those poor people caught up at Finsbury Park, feel that so long as Network Rail can get away with just saying, “Aspects of the work were delayed”, these delays will continue to happen?*

Podium: *I referred at the start of my statement to the seven points being changed at King’s Cross and the amount of work that was being done. The work over the Christmas period amounted to a £200 million investment—by far the biggest investment in the railways over the Christmas period for many years.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 32)

4.3.2 Evasion in the House of Representatives (Australia)

As in the question time in the House of Commons, evasion constituted a prominent instrument of political communication also in the House of Representatives of Australia. The podium in the HOR (AU) decided for evasion which negatively affected the quality of the answer in 19 of the 48 analysed Australian Question Exchanges (39.5 %). In additional 13 cases (27.1 %), the podium used evasiveness techniques without affecting the quality of the answer. In the remaining 16 (33.4 %) of the question exchanges, the podium did not make use of any of the evasiveness techniques and provided a satisfying

answer. The complex nature of some of the response resulted in involvement of more evasion techniques in one response block. Of all 48 analysed Australian question exchanges, 17 cases (35.4 %) comprised more than one evasion technique. The total number of evasion techniques in the Australian sample amounted to 52.

The structural composition of the evasiveness techniques usage is given in Table 17. The most frequently occurring ways of evading consisted of challenges to the question or the enquirer, empty rhetoric and evasion by topic management.

Evasion type	Number	%	Instances per QE
Challenging the question or the enquirer	35	67.3	0.73
Empty rhetoric	10	19.2	0.22
Topic management evasion	7	13.5	0.15
Total	52	100.0	1.1

Table 17: Use of evasion techniques in the HOR (AU)

A closer look on the use of “offensive” evasion (Table 18) shows that the podium in the HOR (AU) used a more restricted range of specific evasion techniques. The main instrument used by the Australian government during the question time is the evasion by attacking the previous government and thus, at the same time the current opposition. The political attacks on the previous government or opposition (74.3 %) were followed by challenges to the enquirer as such (25.7 %).

Evasion by challenging the question or the enquirer	Number	%	Instances per QE
Accusation of previous government, political attack on opposition	26	74.3	0.54
Challenging enquirer’s authority, competence or honesty of intention	9	25.7	0.19
Total	35	100.0	0.73

Table 18: Evasion by challenging the question or the enquirer in the HOR (AU)

The prominent function of “offensive” evasion, and political attacks in general, reflects a high degree of politicisation of the question time in the HOR (AU) that may be attributed to the specific regulations of the HOR (AU) question time and the presence of the Prime Minister. The political nature of the question time and, consequently, of adopted evasiveness techniques is illustrated by the example below.

- (14) **Enquirer (Leader of the Opposition):** *My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the Minister for Finance's statement on Sunday, and I quote: 'No minister has ever said to me that the budget was unfair. 'So, just to be clear:*

has any minister in your government ever said to you that the budget is unfair?

Podium (Prime Minister): *The unfairest thing of all is the intergenerational theft that members opposite perpetrated on our children and our grandchildren. That is the unfairest thing of all.*

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: *The member for Lingiari will desist, as will the member for Bendigo.*

Podium (Prime Minister): *... Thanks to members opposite, thanks to the fundamental unfairness against the future, this government is wrestling with a big fiscal challenge—but we are up for it. Some 80 per cent of budget measures have already been implemented and some \$16 billion worth of budget savings are now in place. But what we are not going to do is rip off the future to satisfy ourselves. That is what members opposite did. They ripped off the future to try to buy an election. That is what they did. They were prepared to sacrifice our children and our grandchildren's future for their own political purposes. That is the ultimate unfairness and that is what we are saving this country from.*

(HOR: 10: 2. 2015, p. 348)

The second most frequently used evasion type was empty rhetoric. In contrast to the HOC question time, nearly all examples identified in the Australian sample represented the use of vague or extensively general language.

Thirdly, the podium made use of the topic management to avoid answering the question. In a large majority of cases (85.7 %), the podium sought to introduce different and more positive view on the topic discussed. Comparably to the evasion usage in the HOC (UK), evasion by raising a completely new and safe topic emerged as a relatively rare phenomenon. A detailed structure of the evasion techniques identified in the HOR (AU) sample is outlined in Table 19 and Table 20.

Evasion by empty rhetoric	Number	%	Instances per QE
Vague or excessively general answer	9	90	0.19
Empty agreement	1	10	0.02
Total	10	100	2.1

Table 19: Evading by empty rhetoric: HOR (AU)

Evasion by topic management	Number	%	Instances per QE
Topic reprojection	6	85.7	0.125
Raising a new safe topic	1	14.3	0.021
Total	7	100.0	0.146

Table 20: Evading by topic management: HOR (AU)

4.3.3 Comparison of evasion in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

Comparison of evasion techniques used by the podium in the question time of HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) showed several major differences. Firstly, the British sample included a broader range of evasion techniques than the Australian. In contrast to the HOC (UK) sample, the Australian sample did not include evasion by claims of incompetence to answer the question and evasion by claiming that the answer has been already provided. The narrower range of specific evasiveness techniques in the Australian sample may be attributed to the different structure of the question time in HOR (AU) and to a greater degree of politicisation of the question time of the HOR (AU).

The question time in the HOC (UK), with the exception of several individual cases which in the overall context of the question time feel rather extreme, remained generally subject matter-oriented and factual. In contrast, in the HOR (AU) it appears to be a rule that, apart of answering the question, the podium is expected to use the allocated time also to attack their political opponents. This fact is reflected in the significant role of evasion by challenging the enquirer or the political opponents (35 cases, 68.6 %) with a prototypical technique of attacking the incompetence of the previous government.

The analysis identified a larger number of applications of evasion techniques in the British sample. However, when projected against the number of interrogative sentences included in each of the two samples, evasion especially the “offensive” one appears to be more common in the HOR (AU) question time than in the House of Commons. On the contrary, evasion by topic management and evasion by empty rhetoric in the British sample are more frequently used than in the HOR (AU) question time.

In addition, the data suggest that evading the answer by raising a new safe issue is more acceptable in the HOC (UK) sample whereas in the framework of the HOR (AU) question time it seems to be a rare phenomenon. This fact may be contributed to by a higher number of interferences into the answer by both the Speaker and the audience in the House. Any obvious change of topic thus threatens to meet with expression of displeasure by the audience and, consequently, with the intervention of the Speaker.

Still, in both of the samples, the podium prefers to provide a new perspective on the topic discussed to avoiding it by raising a new one. The reprojection, given its nature, may involve reformulation of phrasing used by the enquirer using expressions with more positive connotations. The use of the topic reprojection therefore does not affect only the

information quality of the answer. Frequently, it introduces also a linguistic act that seeks to enhance the positive face of the podium. The detailed structure of the evasion techniques in comparative perspective is presented in Tables 21 and 22.

Evasion techniques	HOC (UK)			HOR (AU)		
	Number	%	Instances per QE	Number	%	Instances per QE
Refusal to answer	-	-	-	-	-	-
Claims of incompetence to answer	5	5.0	0.04	-	-	-
Empty rhetoric	29	29.0	0.24	10	19.2	0.21
Challenging the question or the enquirer	36	36.0	0.31	35	67.3	0.73
e) evasion by humour	-	-	-	-	-	-
Evasion by claiming the answer has been already answered	6	6.0	0.05	-	-	-
Topic management evasion	24	24.0	0.2	7	13.7	0.16
Total	100	100.0	0.84	52	100.0	1.1
Question exchanges	119			48		

Table 21: Evasion techniques in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) samples

Evasion techniques	HOC (UK)			HOR (AU)		
	No.	%	Instances per interrogative sentence	No.	%	Instances per interrogative sentence
1) Empty rhetoric						
Vague or excessively-general answer	17	58.6	0.09	9	90.0	0.14
Empty agreement	4	13.8	0.02	1	10.0	0.02
Empty rhetoric total	29	100.0	0.16	10	100.0	0.14
2) Challenging the question or the enquirer						
Challenging the authority of the enquirer	13	36.1	0.07	9	25.7	0.14
Accusation of previous government, political attack	13	36.1	0.07	26	74.3	0.41
Challenging the Q or E total	36	100	0.20	35	100.0	0.55
3) Topic management evasion						
Raising a new safe topic	7	29.2	0.04	1	14.3	0.02
Topic “re-projection”	17	70.8	0.09	6	85.7	0.09
Topic management total	24	100.0	0.13	7	100.0	0.11
Interrogative sentences	176			64		

Table 22: Distribution of specific evasion techniques in the HOC and the HOR sample

4.4 Hedging in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

The results of the analysis will again be first presented separately for each sample and compared in the third subsection.

4.4.1 Hedging in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom)

In total, the analysis of the sample identified 181 hedging items in the language of the podium. The figure includes lexical, phrasal as well as structural hedges such as the passive voice. Following Fraser's distinction of propositional and illocutionary force hedges, we may state that 63 cases of hedges (34.8 %) were addressed to the proposition. If we add *very* which Fraser (2010: 204) also lists as a propositional hedge the figure is even higher 103 cases (56.9 %). Next, 77 cases (42.5 %) of the identified hedging items were classified as illocutionary force hedges. Apart of the speech of the podium, hedging items were encountered also in the speech of the Speaker and random third persons intervening into the speech of the podium. The structure of hedging in the question time sample of the HOC (UK) is given in Table 23. The most frequently used propositional hedges are listed in Table 24.

Hedging in non-interrogative part of the sample	Number	%
Hedging items addressed to the proposition	63	34.8
Hedging items addressed to the proposition including <i>very</i>	103	56.9
Hedging items address to the illocutionary force	77	42.5
Total number of hedges uttered by the podium	180	99.4
Hedges by the Speaker or intervening 3 rd (illocutionary+propositional)	1	0.6
Total	181	100.0

Table 23: Hedging in the HOC (UK) sample

Most frequent hedging items	Number	%	Most frequent items	Number	%
(i) <i>Particularly</i>	10	15.9	(v) <i>A number of</i>	5	7.9
(ii) <i>Some</i> (approximation)	7	11.1	(vi) <i>Majority</i>	5	7.9
(iii) <i>Simply</i>	7	11.1	(vii) <i>Quite</i>	3	4.8
(iv) <i>Often</i>	6	9.5	(viii) <i>Sort of</i>	3	4.8
Total				46	100.0

Table 24: Propositional hedging in the HOC (UK) sample

In addition to the hedging items included in Table 24, the sample comprised also the following hedging items addressed to the proposition: *almost, nearly, over, rather, a bit, generally, most, partly, in some/most cases, largely, in certain ways.*

In total, 77 cases of hedging to the illocutionary force of the utterance were identified in the HOC (UK) sample. Aside of the agentless passive, the most frequently represented category of the illocutionary hedges were attenuative verbs (16, 20.8 %) including *believe*, *hope*, *suspect* and *think*. The use of attenuative verbs was followed by the agentless passive and introductory comments such *I would say* or *I would point out*. Third major group of illocutionary hedges constituted modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives and nouns. The most frequently occurring hedging items were *perhaps* (6 instances, 7.8 %) and the modal verb *may* (5 instances, 6.5 %).

Hedging addressed to the illocution	No.	%
Agentless passive	25	32.5
Attenuative verbs: <i>believe, hope, suspect, think</i>	16	20.8
Introductory sentences and mitigating comments (<i>I would say that, I would point out that...</i>)	11	14.3
Epistemic modal verbs: <i>may, might, should</i>	9	11.7
Modal adverbs: <i>perhaps, possibly</i>	7	9.1
Conditional concessive conjunctions	3	3.9
Modal adjectives: <i>possible</i>	2	2.6
Impersonal subject one	2	2.6
Modal nouns: <i>possibility</i>	1	1.6
Total	77	100.0

Table 25: Illocutionary hedging in the HOC (UK) sample

The findings suggest that hedging as a tool for evasion was extremely rare in the question time language. In the HOC (UK) hedging with such a function was not identified. Rather than hedging, the podium utilised different strategies examined in more detail in Chapters 3.3 and 4.4, which confirms the general conclusion reached by Bruce Fraser (2010: 212). Closest to the principle of evasion is the use of agentless passives when the explicit identification of the agent is an inherent part of a complete and satisfying answer. However, in many cases, the agent was deducible from the context and was, thus, not completely evaded but minimised (15).

- (15) **Podium:** *The situation in which the police were being used as a first resort rather than a last resort—particularly for those with mental health problems—carried on year after year under the previous Labour Government with no action being taken.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 6)

The use of the passive voice often involved omission of the explicit mentioning of the agent (podium or 3rd party associate podium) who could become a target for criticism for his action. However, the passive voice was used by the politicians also for other purposes. One of the typical example is the use of the passive voice to emphasise the agent by making it a rheme of the sentence in a verbal attack on the political opponents of the speaker (16).

(16) **Podium:** *We are dealing with the mess of the uncontrolled immigration system that was left by the previous Labour Government.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 18)

In addition, the samples included also instances of *self-serving* hedging addressed to the probability scale of the utterance (may be, may be not). However, instead of to the future, all them were oriented towards the present or the past. As a result, hedging, in fact, did not lead to concealing the requested information. Rather than that, hedging items were used to soften the weightiness of FTAs such as apologies or admissions of guilt (17).

(17) **Podium:** *... The decision was an attempt in certain ways to help some passengers, but with hindsight Finsbury Park was never really an option for main trains to terminate, and perhaps that should not have been done. However, not to have done that would have meant cancelling at short notice many trains on which people were relying.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 26)

Rather than by evasion, or in other words avoiding to fulfil the request raised by the enquirer, the use of hedging in the parliamentary question time can be explained in terms of struggle for power which may be possible to capture by the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) as adopted and extended by Sandra Harris (2001: 452). Generally, we may say that the aim of the enquirer is to damage the positive face of the podium without breaching the conversational principle or the acceptable level of FTA weightiness. However, the framework of the question time is far more complex. It involves a set of participant specific interests and expectations that influence the linguistic choices of the speakers.

The enquirer from the ranks of opposition would often seek to pose a question that would damage the positive face of his political opponents. However, questions may be raised also by members of the political party the podium represents. In these cases, the strategic decision may be to raise a question that would provide the podium with an opportunity to enhance their own positive face.

On the contrary, the podium acts in order to fulfil its obligations to the enquirers without threatening its own positive face. However, sometimes an overt evasion served the podium well by fulfilling the expectation of the members of their own party who would not respond well to subservience or passive approach to the opposition.

In addition, in the political context, the speakers did not represent - and were not motivated by - solely by the management of their own personal faces. In the case of the question time especially, the MPs represent various other political figures and entities, which have their own *faces*. These may involve, e.g., political parties and their leaders, various parts of government, police, national healthcare or education authorities etc. The case is illustrated by the two following example (18) and (19).

(18) **Podium:** *The decision was an attempt in certain ways to help some passengers, but with hindsight Finsbury Park was never really an option for main trains to terminate, and perhaps that should not have been done.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 25)

The data suggest that the use of hedging in the HOC (UK) question time was predominantly self-oriented and positive-face-oriented. Typically, this was the case of propositional hedges the podium used to insert into their speech a certain degree of imprecisions, which would protect their own positive face from future criticism, accusations of inaccuracy, from breaking the conversational maxim of quantity by getting drawn into unnecessary details or from negative consequences of excessively authoritative rhetoric style.

Of the illocutionary hedges which manifested a clear association with a particular “face”, 33 cases (67.3 %) were addressed to the face of the podium and 11 cases (22.4 %) to the face of the enquirer. The remaining 5 cases (10.2 %) were targeted at third parties not participating in the question time. 73.5 % of the illocutionary hedges excluding the passive voice were addressed to the positive face whereas only 13 cases (26.5 %) were aimed at the negative face.

The politeness related use of hedging in the HOC (UK) sample is illustrated in Table 26 and Table 27. The tables present illocutionary hedges without the agentless passive whose function with respect to power and politeness would require a specific approach.

Politeness related function of hedging	Number	%
Self-oriented safeguarding imprecision	31	63.3
Other-oriented FTA mitigator	13	26.5
False politeness	2	4.1
Other	3	6.1
Total	49	100.0

Table 26: Politeness related function illocutionary hedging in the HOC sample

Person orientation	Number	%	Face orientation	Number	%
Podium	33	67.3	Positive face	36	73.5
Enquirer	11	22.4			
3 rd party	5	10.2	Negative face	13	26.5
Total	49	100.0	Total	49	100.0

Table 27: Politeness related function of hedging in the HOC (UK)

The podium used hedging as a safeguarding device for their positive face should the information later turn out inaccurate. By inserting a limited degree of imprecision, the podium avoided a potential future criticism of inaccuracy and, consequently, incompetence. The most typical hedging items used in this function include propositional hedges such as *some* (approximation), *a number of*, *majority* etc. Example (19) below illustrates the case.

- (19) **Podium:** *We are doing a great deal of work with the French authorities in relation to the situation at Calais. The hon. Gentleman mentions fingerprinting, and it is important that those who are coming to Calais and trying to get across to the United Kingdom should be fingerprinted when they first enter the European Union. In most cases, they are coming in through Italy.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 1)

In addition, avoidance of complete explicitness by means of hedging was used also as a stylistic device to maintain modesty in the speech. Modest, or in other words less authoritative, rhetoric style is less imposing on the audience and contributes thus to the enhancement of the positive face of the podium (20).

- (20) **Podium:** *I do not want to bore the House, but I will repeat the figures that I have already mentioned. Under British Rail, 750 million journeys were made every year.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 33)

In addition to the previous types of usage, hedging items functioned also as softeners of acts threatening the positive face of both the enquirer and the podium. In the case of the

podium, hedging in this function was particularly prominent in exchanges involving admission of guilt or a mistake. In these situations, a combination of several hedging items in one utterance emerged as very common and contributed to the prominence of hedging as the chief strategy selected by the speaker (21).

(21) **Enquirer:** *Over Christmas too many passengers suffered twice ... Does the Secretary of State believe that this was about individual events or was it indicative of a major problem with major works on the railways for which ministerial involvement was required?*

Podium: *I partly agree with the hon. Lady, and I know that her Select Committee will see both Mark Carne and Robin Gisby for a hearing next week. I am sure the Committee will pursue the matter with further questions. The truth of the matter is that there is no doubt that there was a failure to communicate with the passenger. The decision was an attempt in certain ways to help some passengers, but with hindsight Finsbury Park was never really an option for main trains to terminate, and perhaps that should not have been done. However, not to have done that would have meant cancelling at short notice many trains on which people were relying.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 26)

Examples 21-23 illustrate the use of hedging for the purpose of softening the impact of the FTAs to the positive faces of both the podium and the enquirer.

(22) **Podium:** *Perhaps it is just a UKIP policy: one day one thing, and the next day another.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 14)

(23) **Podium:** *I am not sure that thinking about a previous incarnation would serve me very effectively in my job as Secretary of State for Transport.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 29)

(24) **Podium:** *I do not think football fixtures will be at the top of the priorities, but obviously we should take an interest.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 33)

We could expect a phrase such as *I am not sure* to function as a modifier of the speaker's commitment to the truth value (quality maxim) of the sentence. This is, indeed, the case even in (21)-(23). However, given the function of the statements within a broader framework of the question exchange, we may see that each of the hedging items in (21) and (22) helps to soften the impact of the answer, which is harmful to the positive face of the enquirer. To some extent, the hedging items themselves help to trigger the sarcasm included in the utterances.

In conclusion, the data support the claim made by Fraser (2010: 212) that hedging as a tool for evasion in political discourse is rather rare. However, the data suggest that the hedging items in the question time are not mere fillers without purpose of function. They function as protective guarantee against a potential future threat to the podium’s positive face and as a device to tone down the weightiness of the face threatening potential of the authoritativeness in the rhetorical style of the podium. In addition, the data suggest that the use hedging may be motivated also by the maintenance of the face that does not belong to the speakers directly involved in the conversation (5 instances, 10.2 %). Rather than that, these hedges address entities that are related to or represented by the speakers. As a result, damaging the face of these third party entities may indirectly pose a threat to the face of the speaker.

In addition, even hedging items may be imbued with conversational implicit meaning and used as a tool of “false irony” helping to convey sarcasm. The implicit meaning fundamental for correct interpretation of the utterance represents one of the ways in which hedging may become a prominent rhetoric strategy within a sentence or utterance. The other way appears to be the accumulation of several hedging items of different kinds within one utterance especially in particularly threatening situations such as admitting guilt or failure.

4.4.2 Hedging in the question time of the House of Representatives (Australia)

In the Australian sample, 228 instances of hedging were identified. Including the word *very*, the sample consisted of 139 propositional hedges (61.5 %) and 72 illocutionary hedges (31.9 %). The remaining 6.6 % of the hedges were encountered in the speech of the Speaker and in the recorded third-party interventions of other MPs.

Hedging	Number	%
Hedging items addressed to the proposition	101	44.7
Hedging items addressed to the proposition including <i>very</i>	139	61.5
Hedging items addressed to the illocutionary force	72	31.9
Total number of hedges uttered by the podium	213	93.4
Hedges by the Speaker or 3 rd party intervening in the answer (illocutionary/propositional)	15	6.6
Total (hedges in non-interrogative part of the sample)	226	100.0

Table 28: Hedging in the HOR (AU)

In total, 22 types of propositional hedging items were identified in the HOR (AU) sample. The propositional hedges most frequently represented in the sample were *about*, *over* and *some* functioning as indicators of approximation. The frequent use of expressions of approximation is illustrated by (25) below.

(25) **Podium:** ... *I can update the house on the latest details on foreign fighters. Approximately 16,000 foreign fighters from some 90 countries are believed to be in Syria and Iraq. Ninety Australians are believed to be in the conflict, along with 3,000 fighters from western European states—around 500 from the United Kingdom and from Germany, about 1000 from France and also from Russia, and we estimate about 100 to 200 from Indonesia. We believe that over 20 Australians have been killed in the conflict in Syria and Iraq. ...*
 (HOR: 10. 2. 2015 p. 335)

The Australian sample consisted of 72 cases of illocutionary hedging. The most frequently used hedging items included agentless passive, attenuative verbs such as *believe*, *think*, *suspect*, *estimate* and modal adverbs and introductory phrases.

Most frequent items	Number	%	Frequent items	Number	%
<i>About</i> (approximative)	14	13.6	<i>A bit</i>	7	6.8
<i>Over</i> (approximative)	13	12.6	<i>Particularly</i>	7	6.8
<i>Some</i> (approximative)	10	9.7	<i>Simply</i>	6	5.8
<i>Almost</i>	7	6.8	<i>A range of</i>	6	5.8
Total (excluding <i>very</i>)				101	100.0

Table 29: Propositional hedging in the HOR (AU)

Illocutionary Hedging	Number	%
Agentless passive	25	34.7
Attenuative verbs: <i>believe</i> , <i>think</i> , <i>suppose</i> , <i>suspect</i> , <i>presume</i> , <i>estimate</i>	18	25
Introductory phrases and comments: <i>Might I say</i> , <i>Frankly</i> ...	10	13.9
Epistemic modals: <i>may</i> , <i>might</i> , <i>could</i>	10	13.9
Modal adverbs: <i>probably</i> , <i>perhaps</i> , <i>possibly</i> , <i>potentially</i>	6	8.3
Conditional subordinators: <i>so long as</i>	2	2.8
Epistemic verbs: <i>seem</i>	1	1.4
Total	72	100.0

Table 30: Illocutionary hedging in the HOR (AU)

Tables 31 and 32 analyse the power and politeness related function of the illocutionary hedges with the exception of agentless passive whose function with respect to power and politeness would require specific approach. The data reveal that the majority of the identified hedging items were self-oriented and addressed to the positive face of the podium.

Politeness related function of hedging	Number	%
Self-oriented safeguarding imprecision	24	51.1
Other-oriented FTA mitigator	17	36.3
False politeness	6	12.8
Total	47	100.0

Table 31: Politeness related function of hedging in the HOR (AU)

Person orientation	Number	%	Face orientation	Number	%
Podium	30	64	Positive face	31	66
Enquirer	16	34			
3 rd party face	1	2	Negative face	16	34
Total	42	100	Total	49	100

Table 32: Hedging according to politeness related function in the HOR (AU) sample

Hedging in the HOR (AU) sample was used primarily for two purposes similar to those in the HOC (UK). Firstly, the speakers used hedging items to avoid total explicitness both in terms of information quality and the commitment to the illocutionary force. The key purpose of the inexplicitness was to prevent the positive face of the podium speaker from a future harm should the utterance later prove inaccurate. In addition, the podium used the inexplicitness triggered by the hedging items also to manage their rhetoric style. Hedging items, propositional in particular, contributed to a more colloquial and less authoritative style of communication in the question time of the HOR (AU). Hedging in this function was predominantly self-oriented and focused on positive face (26).

(26) **Podium:** *I have suspended five passports under our new counter-terrorism legislation, and I have refused to issue a further 10 of those to people who we believe pose a national security threat.*

(HOR: 10. 2. 2015, p. 335)

In its second main function, hedging in the Question Time of HOR (AU) was used to mitigate the impact of face threatening acts addressed to the enquirer. By mitigating the commitment to the illocutionary force of e.g. critical assertive sentences, the speakers make them more acceptable to the environment (27).

(27) **Podium:** *I would say to the Australian Labor Party: the best thing that the Labor Party can do for jobs is get out of the way.*

(HOR: 9. 2. 2015, p. 78)

In many several, hedges were used by the podium as elements of *false* politeness. Despite their primary mitigating function, hedging items in this particular usage conveyed

additional conversational implicit meaning that contributed to the irony or sarcasm of the utterance – see (28) and (29).

(28) **Podium:** *You might think that is common sense but, of course, it was a penetrating glimpse of the obvious that was denied to the Labor Party the most uncommercial deal.*

(HOR: 9. 2. 2015, p. 523)

(29) **Podium:** *He might want the Russians to compete—the Putin class subs.*

(HOR: 11. 2. 2015, p. 523)

4.3 Comparison of Hedging in the Question Time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

The comparison of hedging in the question time of House of Commons and the House of Representatives revealed several differing features. The Australian sample demonstrated a higher frequency of hedging both in terms of *tokens* and *types*. In the HOC (UK) question time, 21 types of propositional hedges were identified. In the Australian sample, the number of propositional hedging types amounted to 23.

Podium hedging	HOC (UK)		HOR (AU)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Hedging propositional	63	34.8	101	44.7
Hedging propositional + <i>very</i>	103	56.9	139	61.5
Hedging illocutionary	77	42.5	72	31.9
Hedges in the speech of the Speaker (illocutionary and propositional)	1	0.6	15	6.6
Total	181	100.0	226	100.0

Table 33: Comparison of hedging in the HOC (UK) and the HOR (AU)

HOC (UK)			HOR (AU)		
Most frequent items	No.	%	Most frequent items	No.	%
<i>Particularly</i>	10	15.9	<i>About</i> (approximative)	14	13.9
<i>Some</i> (approximation)	7	11.1	<i>Over</i> (approximative)	13	12.9
<i>Simply</i>	7	11.1	<i>Some</i> (approximative)	10	9.9
<i>Often</i>	6	9.5	<i>Almost</i>	7	6.9
<i>A number of</i>	5	7.9	<i>A bit</i>	7	6.9
<i>Majority</i>	5	7.9	<i>Particularly</i>	7	6.9
<i>Quite</i>	3	4.8	<i>Simply</i>	6	5.9
<i>Sort of</i>	3	4.8	<i>A range of</i>	6	5.9
Total number of cases (excluding <i>very</i>)	63	100.0	Total number of cases (excluding <i>very</i>)	101	100.0

Table 34: Propositional hedging in the question time of the HOC and the HOR

The Australian sample showed a higher frequency of propositional hedging than the British sample. A higher ratio of the propositional hedges in the HOR (AU) sample reflects predominantly frequent use of hedging items expressing numeral approximation such as *about*, *over* or *some*. The higher degree of propositional hedging in the HOR (AU) sample reflected generally more spoken and colloquial style of speech adopted by the speakers in the Australian question time.

The frequency of illocutionary hedging in the British and Australian sample was roughly comparable. However, due to a large number of propositional hedges in the HOR (AU) question time, illocutionary hedging took a more prominent role in the question time language in the HOC (UK) sample.

HOC (UK)			HOR (AU)		
Most frequent items	No.	%	Most frequent items	No.	%
Agentless passive	25	32.5	Agentless passive	25	34.2
Attenuative verbs: <i>believe, think, suppose, suspect, presume, estimate</i>	16	20.8	Attenuative verbs: <i>believe, think, suppose, suspect, presume, estimate</i>	18	25
Introductory sentences and mitigating comments (<i>I would say that, I would point out that...</i>)	11	14.3	Introductory phrases and comments: <i>Might I say, Frankly ...</i>	10	13.9
Modal verbs: <i>may, might, should</i>	9	11.7	Modals: <i>may, might, could</i>	10	13.9
Modal adverbs: <i>perhaps, possibly</i>	7	9.1	Modal adverbs: <i>probably, perhaps, possibly, potentially</i>	6	8.3
Conditional concessive conjunctions	3	3.9	Conditional subordinators	2	2.8
Modal adjectives: <i>possible</i>	2	2.6	Epistemic verbs: <i>seem</i>	1	1.4
Impersonal subject <i>one</i>	2	2.6	-		-
Modal nouns: <i>possibility</i>	1	1.3	-		-
Epistemic verbs: <i>seem</i>	1	1.3	-		-
Total	77	100.0	Total	72	100.0

Table 35: Illocutionary hedging in the question time of the HOC (UK) and the HOR (AU)

Both in the HOC (UK) question time and in the HOR (AU) question time, hedging serves similar function. In both parliamentary contexts, the podium did not typically use hedging as a means of evasion. The attenuation brought about by the use of hedging items was used by the podium as an instrument of *struggle for face and power* during the question time exchanges. In other words, the podium used hedging as a “face management device” to protect their own face or to damage the face of their political opponents; or to mitigate the locutionary aspect of the intended FTAs to make them more acceptable to the audience.

The data show that the use of hedging by the podium in the British sample was more self-oriented and positive face focused. The use of hedging in the British sample was generally more positive face oriented than in the HOR (AU). In the case of the British sample, hedging items were addressed also to third-parties not present in the exchange but related to either the podium or the enquirer, e.g., the police in relation to the government. This was not the case of the Australian sample, in which the communication was more politicised and more targeted at the direct participants of the exchange which given the question time regulations in the HOR (AU) involved also the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Person orientation			Face orientation			Function		
Addressee	UK %	AU %	Face	UK %	AU %	Orientation	UK %	AU %
Podium	67.3	63.9	Positive face	73.5	66.0	Self-oriented safeguarding imprecision	63.3	51.1
Enquirer	22.5	34.0	Negative face	26.5	34.0	Other-oriented FTA mitigator	26.5	36.3
3P	10.2	2.1	-	-	-	False politeness	4.1	12.8
-	-		-	-	-	Other	6.1	0
Total	100.0	100.0	Total	100.0	100.0	Total	100.0	100.0
Total no. of cases			HOC (UK):		49	HOR (AU):		47

Table 36: Illocutionary hedging according to politeness related function in the HOC (UK) and the HOR (AU)

Most frequently, the podium used hedging in order to make their message desirably imprecise to avoid potential future accusation of inaccuracy and, consequently, lack of competence. In addition, the podium used hedging in order to mitigate FTAs aimed at the enquirer or the political party he represented. Thirdly, hedges were used as politeness expressions which, contrary to their primary function, contributed to the rise of sarcasm in the speech of podium.

In comparison to the British sample, the Australian question time language demonstrated a higher ratio of hedges used as FTA mitigators (17, 36.3 %) and false politeness sarcasm triggers (6, 12.8 %). This fact underlined the overall more contentious nature of the language of Australian question time. In contrast to 8 direct Face Threatening Acts (100 %) in the British sample, 32 (100 %) were identified in the HOR (AU) sample. In 29 cases (90.1 %), the Australian FTAs targeted the positive face of the enquirer whereas only 3 instances (10.9 %) the negative face with the most typical case being imposition of

opinion on the enquirer. Still, in both samples prevail the FTAs to the positive face of the enquirer– see (30) and (31).

- (30) **Podium:** ... *What we have, I am afraid, in this parliament today, is an utterly unprincipled and utterly unscrupulous opposition. They were incompetent in government and now they are determined to be wreckers in opposition. Frankly, this kind of behaviour is just shameful. ...*
(HOR: 10. 2. 2015, p. 531)

- (31) **Podium:** *I do not think I will take too many lessons from the Labour party about bonuses. In 2009-10, the bonuses paid to Network Rail were £2.3 billion; this year, it was going to be £260,000.*
(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 36)

FTAs to the negative face of the enquirer were rather rare in the speech of the podium both in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU). Those identified in the sample involve primarily impositions of opinions on the enquirer or suggestions of future action limiting the freedom of action of the enquirer – (32) and (33):

- (32) **Podium:** *I am sure that my hon. Friend would support that.*
(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 11)
- (33) **Podium:** ... *I can understand why the Leader of the Opposition does not want to remember the election. That would be something he would rather forget.*
(HOR: 9. 2. 2015, p. 75)

4.5 Reformulation in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

The results of the analysis regarding the phenomenon reformulation are once again first presented separately and then compared.

4.5.1 Reformulation in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom)

The HOC (UK) sample included 16 cases (5.4 %) in which reformulation functioned as a main rhetoric strategy adopted in framing the answer. In 12 of the cases (75.0 %), the reformulation did not modify the proposition of the question. The remaining 4 of the cases (25.0 %) involved either modification of a disputable and potentially harmful aspects of meaning of the utterance or inserting/removing a proposition harmful to the podium/enquirer. All of the instances of inserting a harmful proposition were included in

the sample segment from the Urgent Questions. The two types of reformulation are illustrated by (34) and (35) below.

(34) **Reformulation involving changing a harmful proposition**

Enquirer: ...anything more than tokenistic safe legal routes for resettlement and family reunification of refugees...

Podium: ...aid that is benefiting hundreds of thousands of people in the region...

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 11)

(35) **Reformulation inserting a harmful proposition**

Enquirer: ... It was right that Network Rail accepted its responsibilities, and so too should the contractors, but is it not also time for the Secretary of State finally to face up to his share of the responsibility? The Office of Rail Regulation published a damning report back in November on Network Rail's performance. Was this report not a massive warning sign for Ministers that there would be serious delivery challenges associated with the planned maintenance work over Christmas? ...

Podium: ... Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Secretary of State should tell Network Rail which safety aspects and bits of engineering works it should not do? ...

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 25)

Reformulation most frequently served as preparatory starting point for further development of the answer. In addition, the podium used also a specific type reformulation, which Partington (2003: 137) the calls a *long-winded yes*. In this case, the speaker provides a lengthy and elaborately worded answer as a simple yes in given context could be considered insufficiently sophisticated and thus could potentially harm the podium's positive face.

4.5.2 Reformulation in the question time of the House of Representatives (Australia)

In the Australian sample, nine instances of reformulation were encountered. 6 of them involved change of meaning of the question. In two cases, the podium used reformulation to remove a potentially threatening aspect of the question. In one case, the podium used reformulation to add a new aspect of meaning enabling damaging the face of the enquirer. In the remaining three cases, reformulation was used to insert into the question a new aspect of meaning that would help to foster the positive face of the podium. This particular example is illustrated by (36):

(36) **Enquirer:** *My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the green shoots in the economy? How will stronger and more profitable small businesses create more growth and jobs for all Australians?*

Podium: *That collectively lifted the IQ of the Labor Party! The member for Eden-Monaro raises a very good question. The question is: how can we help small business to be more profitable and more successful?*

(HOR: 10. 2. 2015, p. 338)

4.5.3 Comparison of reformulation in the question time of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia)

In comparison to hedging and evasion, reformulation appears to be a rather scarce phenomenon in the question time language of both HOC (UK) and HOR (AU). Reformulations by the podium did not involve complete interrogative blocks or interrogative sentences. Rather than that, the speakers picked up and reformulated phrases or other segment of the interrogative block. The comparison of the use of reformulation by the podium is illustrated by Table 37.

Reformulation type	HOC (UK)		HOR (AU)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Changing	4	25.0	6	66.7
Neutral	12	75.0	3	33.3
Total	16	100.0	9	100.0

Table 37: Reformulation in the HOC (UK) and the HOR (AU) question time

Despite a rather low number of encountered instances, the data suggest a different pattern of use of reformulation in the HOC and HOR. In the British question time, the podium used reformulation mainly as a technical device to handle rather long and complex interrogative blocks presented by the enquirer. Typically, the podium chose and reformulated a specific segment of the question in order to establish a rhetoric foothold for the answer. The purpose of such reformulation was, however, not purely to revise or summarise what had been said but also to concentrate the attention of the audience on a specific part of the question. In this particular function, reformulation does not involve modifications of meaning for the purposes of evasion or political attack. Reformulations of this kind were less common in the question time of the HOR (AU) as the interrogative blocks of the Australian MPs were generally short and simple.

In the HOR (AU) question time, neutral reformulation was less common as the interrogative blocks of the Australian MPs were generally short and simple, which did not provide sufficient space and material for the podium to reformulate the question. Several times the podium quoted or reformulated alleged speech of persons not involved in the question time. These, however, did not fall into the scope of the analysis.

In contrast to the House of Commons, the reformulation in the question time of the HOR (AU) appeared to occur less frequently but was more likely to involve intentional modification of meaning. Both in British and Australian sample, reformulation was adopted to remove threatening aspects of the questions, to modify the question to enable providing answer more flattering to the podium or to modify the question in order to provide a basis for an FTA to the enquirer's face. This fact reflected both a more politicised nature of the question time in HOR (AU).

The prototypical types of usage for the British and Australian question time are illustrated by the examples below. In (37), podium used reformulation in order to create a basis for the answer. In (38), podium reformulated the question of the enquirer in order avoid a potentially threatening angle of the question.

(37) **Podium:** *The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the trend among all people now is to buy online, but I would say that what is illegal offline is also illegal online.*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 10)

(38) **Podium:** *I am sure the member is interested in all the defence work that is being done in South Australia. ...*

(HOR: 10. 2. 2015, p. 529)

4.6. A footing shift in the House of Commons (United Kingdom) and the House of Representatives (Australia) question time

A footing shift as defined by Partington (2003: 91-92) was a rather rare phenomenon in question time of both House of Commons (UK) and the House of Representatives (UK). In the HOC (UK) sample, only 4 straightforward cases of footing shift were encountered. However, in none of the answers the podium responded by directly dodging a footing shift. More often the podium responded using other evasiveness techniques such as claiming ignorance of the problem or challenging the accuracy of the facts included in the question.

Footing shift and substantiation	HOC		HOR	
	Number	%	Number	%
Footing shift	4	18.2	1	5.0
Substantiation	18	81.8	19	95.0
Dodging footing shift	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	22	100.0	20	100.0

Table 38: A footing shift and substantiation in the question time of the HOC and HOR

In the question time framework, a footing shift attributes questions to different entities than in the case of press conferences Partington (2003: 90-108). Most frequently, a footing shift links the questions with electors in particular constituency or representatives of organisations with authority in the particular field – see (39).

- (39) **Enquirer:** *I strongly support the work that the Home Secretary has done with regard to controlling bogus student visa applications. That was a huge problem that she has got rid of. However, how would she answer my constituent Sir James Dyson, who said that if her latest remarks about automatically sending all students home on completion of their studies were taken literally, there would be dire consequences for businesses such as his which rely on engineers and scientists from overseas?*

(HOC: 5. 1. 2015, col. 7)

Rather than directly attributing the question to a specific source with a particular authority the enquirers use various types of claims, quotations or references to relevant sources to base their question on and to substantiate. The data show that, in terms of frequency, substantiation was more common than a footing shift but it was rarely targeted by the podium when challenging the enquirer or the question – see (40):

- (40) **Enquirer:** *My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to comments made by Senator Edwards about Australian workers building our future submarines. He said, 'Five o'clock Friday they were precluded; nine o'clock Monday they were included.' Yet the finance minister has said, 'There is actually no change in policy.' Prime Minister, who is correct? When will the chaos and incompetence stop and when does this good government you promised actually start?*

(HOR: 10. 2. 2015, p. 524)

Some indirect attributions are, indeed, very strong and constitute a *de facto* footing shift as shown in (41).

(41) **Enquirer:** *Let me give the Home Secretary another chance to answer the question that she has failed to answer so far. When Sir James Dyson describes her plans to further restrict post-study work opportunities as a short-sighted attempt to win votes at the expense of the economic interests of the UK, it is a serious matter. Will she think again?*

(HOC: 5.1. 2015, col. 21)

In contrast to press conferences in which the purpose of a footing shift is to increase the objectiveness degree of the enquirer, in the question time framework, a footing shift is used to add legitimacy and seriousness to the question rather than to present the enquirer as impartial. In addition, in democratic context, challenging the constituents (electors) would result in damaging the podium's face, and thus does not present a rational step. In addition, in the case of substantiation, the attributed part does not present the core of the interrogative block and does therefore not present a natural target for challenges by the podium. We can therefore conclude that the rare use of footing shifts, the nature of question attribution and the nature of substantiation all contribute to the fact that dodging a footing shift is to a significant degree avoided by the podium in question time language, although it is a theoretically possible option available to the podium and might be encountered in a larger sample.

When providing answer, dodging a footing shift was not used by the podium in neither of the samples. In order to explain this fact, it is necessary to examine the footing shift in the questions of the enquirers in more detail.

5. Conclusion

The thesis focused on the pragmatic communicative aspect of the question time language of the British House of Commons and the Australian House of Representatives. In more precise terms, the thesis analyses the use of functional communicative management strategies by the key question time actors: the enquirer and the podium. The strategies were identified following previous research devoted to linguistics of political discourse, Partington (2003) and Fraser (2010) in particular, and included evasion, hedging, reformulation and dodging a footing shift.

Last but not least, the thesis hoped to compare the classification of various strategies singled out by Alan Partington in *Linguistics of Political Argument* in a slightly different type of political discourse. In this respect, Partington's typology emerged as generally applicable. However, several of the categories which Partington identified in the press briefings were not present in the question time context. This was, for instance, the case of evasion by referring the question, which given the procedural setting of question time and political responsibilities of the podium, would not be a rational and acceptable response. Another significant difference relates to the different nature of the participants. In the question time, the podium consisted of politicians, not of their public relations representatives without direct accountability to the public. As a result, the speakers did not merely turn to prepared statements or officially approved phrasing of answers but they had more freedom to shape their own responses including attitudes and opinions. Consequently, a significant part of their evasion attempts were related to work with meaning, which is reflected in establishing *topic management* as a useful independent category of analysis – in contrast to Alan Partington (2003: 238-247) whose typology included only evasion by raising a new safe issue. However, rather than evading by raising a completely new topic, the podium in both the British and Australian question time samples preferred to avoid answering the question by introducing a new positive perspective on the issue in question.

To put the use of the strategies into the communicative context of the question time, the thesis analysed also the way the questions were answered, and attempted to identify the general degree of responsiveness of the podium to the requests posed by the enquirers. The results of the analysis suggest that there are significant differences in the application of the particular strategies. Evasion and hedging emerged as the most frequently adopted

by the podium. On the other hand, reformulation appears less common and dodging a footing shift was not encountered in neither of the samples.

In general, the data indicate that the use of the listed communicative strategies in the HOR (AU) is more prominent than in the HOC (House of Commons). However, the House of Commons (UK) question time demonstrated a greater variability of the subtypes of the selected strategies. In addition, the analysis of the responsiveness of the podium to the requests by the enquirers suggests that it is, in fact, the Australian podium that satisfactorily fulfils the enquirers' requests more often. A vast majority of the questions raised in the HOR (AU) required the podium to provide information. The distribution of interrogative sentences according to the subtype of their illocutionary force in the HOC (UK) was more balanced with the British MPs trying to entangle the podium into a complex web of explicitly mentioned claims, presuppositions and requests for evaluative acts expressions. On the other hand, the questions in the HOR (AU) are generally short and straightforward. The comparison of the structure of the interrogative sentence according the subtype of their illocutionary force with the composition of the response blocks revealed, both in the HOC (UK) and the HOR (AU), a disproportion between requested and provided speech acts. In both samples, the ratio of information-oriented requests is higher than the ratio of responses providing information.

Accordingly, the podium provided more evaluative expressions than the enquirers asked for. The shift from "factual" to "evaluative" seems to be more substantial in the HOR (AU) but this is mainly due to a larger proportion of questions requesting information. Among the evaluative linguistic acts, the podium preferred only certain types such as expressions of criticism. In contrast, other types of evaluative expressions such as confirmations or approvals presented the podium with a commitment potentially harmful to their face. As a result, requests for such linguistic acts were often avoided by the podium speakers.

Given the nature of the sub-genre of parliamentary question time, evasion emerged as a frequent phenomenon. In both HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) samples, the most frequently used ways of evasion included challenges to the question or the enquirer, empty rhetoric and topic management. However, the text found it useful and purposeful for the analysis of the parliamentary question time language. The use of evasion in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU), differed in two main aspects. Firstly, in the HOR (AU) the "offensive" means of evasion such as an attack on previous governments or opposition emerged as more

prominent than in the HOC (UK). Secondly, the language of HOC (UK) question time demonstrates a broader range of evasion sub-types and a significantly higher ratio of evasion by topic management.

The podium in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) used hedging rather frequently. In the HOR (AU) propositional hedging seems to take a more prominent position than in the HOC (UK) mainly due to a large number of expressions of approximation such as *about*, *over*, *some* or *almost*. Similarly, British MPs used illocutionary hedges more frequently and in broader range than their Australian counterparts.

The analysis confirmed the conclusion reached by Bruce Fraser (2010: 212) that hedging is rarely used for the purposes of evasion. *Self-serving hedging*, as understood by Fraser, was used rarely by the podium of the parliamentary question time in HOC (UK) and HOR (AU). The rare cases that could be classified as *self-serving hedging* were restricted to situations in which the podium experienced significant threat such as when apologising or admitting a mistake (see (20)).

However, the analysis of the use of hedging in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) question time shows that the understanding of *self-serving* only in terms of evading an answer may, indeed, be too narrow as the speakers use hedging for other strategic purposes which are connected with rhetoric style and face management rather than with the information value of the response. Fraser (2010: 212) concluded that he found no indication of hedging being used for “mitigation purposes leading to polite effect”. This is, indeed, true of hedging used as a tool of negative politeness in the podium’s speech. Given the nature of the podium’s speech, the instances of hedging for the purpose of negative politeness appear considerably restricted with the typical example being the mitigation of imposition of opinion on the audience.

However, the analysis shows that the use of politeness by the podium is predominantly self-oriented and addressed to the positive face. In this case, the use of hedging is not completely *neutral* in nature. It serves the speaker even though not to avoid fulfilling the enquirers’ request. Hedging addressed to positive face is used for the purposes of *safeguarding imprecision* and *modesty*. In the case of *safeguarding imprecisions*, the podium uses hedging as a tool to avoid future accusations of inaccuracy. In the case of *modesty*, the podium attenuates its self-promotive claims such as enumerations of successes and accomplishments.

Still, from a broader perspective, even hedging items, which Fraser (2010: 207) classified as *neutral hedges* are not totally without an impact as they contribute to the nature of the rhetoric style of the speaker, which may also damage or enhance the face of both the speaker and the recipient. The use of hedging can help to limit the authoritativeness of the rhetoric style of the podium, which needs to balance the style of its speech according to differing expectations of the different groups of audience in the chamber. Even very authoritative may reflect the expectations about firm attitude towards the opposition among the MPs associated with the government. Moreover, in the HOR (AU) question time, the use of propositional hedging is an important feature of colloquial nature of the podium's speech, which may serve the purpose of bringing the language of politics closer to the people. As a result, we may, together with Partington (2003: 80), claim that, instead of mitigating the truth, hedging in the analysed samples of political discourse served to mitigate the *responsibility for the truth*.

In addition, propositional hedging, especially expressions of approximation, can serve as an important safeguarding device in an environment in which inaccuracy could result in accusations of incompetence or an intentional attempt to mislead by the opposition or the press. Last but not least, several cases were identified in which the imprecision was used in accordance with the conversational maxim of quantity in order to avoid overloading the answer with unnecessary details. This is of importance as in the parliamentary question time any attempt to disrespect the expected setting of conversational maxims could meet with a negative response by the audience or even intervention by the Speaker resulting in damage to the speaker's face.

In comparison to evasion and hedging, reformulation was used by the podium less often. This is mainly due to the procedural setting of the question time which, typically, does not allow multiple sequential exchanges between the speakers within the framework of one questions. In the HOC (UK) the podium, most typically, used reformulation at the beginning of their answer to create a rhetoric foothold for their answer. In a vast majority of cases, the reformulation did not remove or modify a potentially threatening item of meaning included in the question. In contrast to the HOC (UK), in the HOR (AU) sample, reformulation modifying face threatening aspects of meaning prevailed. However, the podium adopted reformulation in order enhance rather than protect their face.

A footing shift emerged as a rare phenomenon in the both the HOC (UK) and the HOR (AU) question time. In the press briefings analysed by Alan Partington (2003: 90-91), a

footing shift functioned as a tool that the journalists used to achieve impression of neutrality. However, in the question time context, the politicians use footing shifts to increase the impact of the question generally by attributing it to a member of their constituency. As a result, dodging a footing shift does not arise as a rational means of evasion as, in the democratic context of British and Australian political system, challenging the authority of the electorate would very likely damage the face of the speaker. No case of dodging a footing shift was identified in the samples. Rather than a footing shift the podium preferred to substantiate claims included in their questions by various means including quotations of other politicians. In several of these cases, the podium responded by challenging the authority or accuracy of the substantiation.

The question time in the HOC (UK) and HOR (AU) demonstrate differences both in terms of procedure and in terms of language. In the HOC (UK), the speech of the podium and the speech of the enquirers take a roughly equal amount of the allocated space. In contrast, the question time in HOR (AU) is dominated by the podium. This is often compensated by a high number of intrusions by Australian MPs in the audience, which can and often did result in expulsion of the MPs from the session by the Speaker. This fact is reflected in a high number of words uttered by the Speaker in the HOR (AU) sample.

The British question time concentrates more on the subject-matter. However, the language tactics of both the enquirer and the podium appear more complex and eventually result in a lower degree of *de facto* answered questions. In contrast to the HOC (UK), the language of question time in HOR (AU) is less formal and more straightforward and the general level of acceptable “familiarity” among the Australian MPs is higher than in the United Kingdom. The HOR (AU) question time frequently deviates from the subject-matter to a purely political performance. However, the Australian MPs generally move to politically motivated speeches only after addressing the topic at least to some extent. In fact, it appears that the Australian MPs are more likely to provide a satisfying answer than the members of the House of Commons.

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Résumé

Hlavním cílem práce je analyzovat užívání fenoménu atenuace (*hedging*) v kontextu dalších vybraných komunikačních strategií politického diskurzu, a to vyhýbání se odpovědi (*evasion*), reformulace (*reformulation*) a napadení přenesení atribuce otázky (*dodging a footing shift*). Práce vychází z děl Alana Partingtona (2003) *Linguistics of Political Argument* a Bruce Frasera (2010) *Hedging in Political Discourse*. Využívá nejen jejich metodického přístupu ale i typologie jednotlivých komunikačních strategií politického diskurzu. Na rozdíl od obou výše zmíněných prací, které jsou založeny na analýze interakce mezi politickou a mediální sférou (tiskové konference a briefingy), se práce zabývá rozborem parlamentních interpelací (*question time*) v britské Dolní sněmovně (*House of Commons*) a v australské Sněmovně reprezentantů (*House of Representatives*) dostupných v prepisech v edici HANSARD. Sekundárním cílem práce je tedy i ověřit relevanci Fraserových a Partingtonových závěrů a metodických přístupů na odlišném typu politického diskurzu.

V první, teoretické části se práce zaměřuje na shrnutí předchozího výzkumu relevantního pro zvolené téma, na charakteristiku zdrojového materiálu a přehled a typologii vybraných komunikačních strategií. S ohledem silnou regulaci komunikačního prostředí parlamentních interpelací (viz podkapitoly 2.1 a 2.2), která významným způsobem přispívá k charakteru a struktuře zdrojových textů, je do této části zařazena i charakteristika analyzovaných vzorků, z níž jsou patrné podstatné rozdíly mezi strukturou diskurzu interpelací v dolních komorách britského a australského parlamentu (viz podkapitola 2.3.).

V praktické části se práce nejprve zaměřuje na rozbor komunikační dynamiky parlamentních interpelací. Následně pak analyzuje a porovnává užívání čtyř zmíněných komunikačních strategií (*hedging, evasion, reformulation, dodging a footing shift*) mluvčími v kontextu interpelací.

Atenuace (*hedging*) je častým jevem jak v britském, tak v australském vzorku. Srovnání však naznačuje, že *hedging* užívá častěji pódium v australském parlamentu. K rozdílu přispívá především vyšší počet *propositional hedges*, zejména výrazů vyjadřujících přibližnost např. *about, over, some* či *almost*. V případě vzorku z britské Dolní sněmovny se naopak setkáváme s častějším i typologicky diverzifikovanějším použitím atenuace zaměřené na ilokační sílu sdělení. Výsledky práce potvrzují závěry Bruce Frasera (2010: 212), a to zejména že atenuace v politickém diskurzu nepředstavuje typický prostředek

vyhýbání se odpovědi. Přesto však atenuace v projevu mluvčích pódia při interpelacích není zcela neutrální, jak naznačuje Fraser (2010: 212). Funkci atenuace je však nutné, spíše než v ovlivňování informační kvality odpovědi, hledat v rovině zdvořilostní (*politeness, face-management*) podle Brownové a Levinsona (1987), jak činí například Partington (2003: 142-153). Práce tak potvrdila Partingtonovo zjištění (2003: 80) častého výskytu atenuace, jež má za cíl modifikovat „zodpovědnost“ mluvčího za obsah sdělení a ne obsah jako takový. V určitých případech může mít *hedging* vliv na informační kvalitu odpovědi (Fraser 2003: 209). Data však naznačují, že se v praxi jedná spíše o řídké případy a že mluvčí ve snaze vyhnout se odpovědi preferují jiná řešení.

Strategie, které mluvčí v kontextu parlamentních interpelací britské a australské dolní komory parlamentu využívali, do značné míry odráží strategie nastíněné Partingtonem (2003: 234-255) na příkladu tiskových konferencí např. obecný jazyk či rétorické útoky (viz podkapitoly 3.2 a 4.3). Významný rozdíl v užívání byl identifikován v případě strategií založených na práci s tématem (*topic management*). Namísto uvedení nového tématu, o kterém hovoří Partington (2003: 139) a které není v případě interpelací s ohledem na kontext přijatelné, se mluvčí často reagovali vyhýbavou odpovědí, která prezentovala daný problém v pozitivnější perspektivě či kontextu.

Reformulace v pravém slova smyslu se v obou sledovaných vzorcích vyskytovala v porovnání s atenuací (*hedging*) či vyhýbáním se odpovědi (*evasion*) spíše řídce. Jasně nastavený komunikační rámec interpelací, jehož cílem je mimo jiné i zabránit tomu, aby se interpelace změnila v debatu, navíc nedává příliš prostoru pro několikanásobné navazující reformulace. V britském vzorku byla reformulace užívána poslanci z řad pódia zejména jako rétorická klička při zahajování odpovědí. Reformulace v této funkci byla spíše technickým nástrojem, a nezahrnovala tedy cílenou modifikaci významu zdrojového sdělení. Na rozdíl od poslanců britské Dolní sněmovny využívali členové australské dolní komory parlamentu reformulaci v mnohem větší míře jako nástroj politického soupeření. Tato skutečnost se odráží i na častějších modifikacích významu zdrojového sdělení.

Atribuce otázky jinému zdroji i vyhýbání se odpovědi prostřednictvím jejího zpochybnění (*dodging a footing shift*) představují v jazyce interpelací australské Sněmovny reprezentantů i britské Dolní sněmovny spíše vzácný jev. Zatímco v případě tiskových konferencí či briefingů, jimiž se zabývali Bruce Fraser (2003) i Alan Partington (2010), má *footing shift* za cíl dosažení zdání vyšší míry nestrannosti a objektivity, v kontextu

interpelací se využívá spíše k zdůraznění významu a relevance otázky. Charakteristickým příkladem může být citace a následné rozvedení dotazu, který na dané téma zaslali poslanci voliči. Z pohledu pódia tak není napadení přenesení atribuce v kontextu parlamentních interpelací často racionální volbou.

Srovnání užívání čtyř výše uvedených komunikačních strategií v jazyce politického diskurzu interpelací v dolních komorách britského a australského parlamentu dokládá specifičnost obou komunikačních prostředí. Přestože je jazyk interpelací a komunikační úzus v obou komorách parlamentu v mnoha ohledech shodný, existuje řada strukturálních, jazykových i obecně komunikačních aspektů, v nichž se liší (více viz kapitola 5).

Appendix 1: Example of the House of Commons (United Kingdom) sample

House of Commons Hansard, 5. 1. 2015, col. 1-4.

Border Exit Checks

1. **Jenny Willott (Cardiff Central) (LD):** What progress her Department has made on implementing exit checks at borders. [906743]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Government are **on track** to deliver their commitment to introduce exit checks on scheduled commercial international air, sea and rail routes by April 2015.

Jenny Willott: It is clear that exit checks, which were scrapped by the previous Labour Government, are a critical part of any competent immigration system. I know that progress has been made, but how sure is the Home Secretary that she will hit the target of 100% exit checks by March?

Mrs May: As I indicated in my original answer, we are on track to ensure that we have exit checks in place by April 2015. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention the significance of exit checks in the immigration system, and I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Minister for Government Policy and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Minister for Schools who have together been supporting the Home Office to ensure that we can meet our commitment.

19. [906762]**Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab):** Given the situation at our border in Calais, does the Home Secretary regret scrapping fingerprinting, which used to help us to identify and deport those who were trying to enter our country illegally night after night?

Mrs May: We are doing a great deal of work with the French authorities in relation to the situation at Calais. The hon. Gentleman mentions fingerprinting, and it is important that those who are coming to Calais and trying to get across to the United Kingdom should be fingerprinted when they first enter the European Union. In most cases, they are coming in through Italy.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But what is the Home Secretary doing to identify the 50,00 failed asylum seekers that the Public Accounts Committee has said her Department has failed to identify?

Mrs May: I think it is a bit rich for Labour Members to stand up in the Chamber and complain about the immigration system when many of the problems that we are dealing with have been inherited from the last Labour Government's failed immigration policy.

Sir James Paice (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the problem of illegal immigrants does not exist only in the locale of Calais? There is ample evidence that many of them are getting into lorries as far afield as Spain, and this is particularly affecting lorries bringing fresh food into this country, as their whole load has to be condemned when the immigrants are discovered. Is she aware that our retail sector is becoming increasingly worried about fresh food supplies? Will she meet me and representatives of the industry to discuss ways of getting on top of this issue?

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Mrs May: I am certainly happy for either I or the Immigration Minister to meet my right hon. Friend and representatives of the industry. We are aware of this issue, and we are looking to introduce an improved ability to identify people in lorries when they pass through our juxtaposed controls in Calais, but as my right hon. Friend has said, the problem is that those people are often getting into the lorries further afield. Also, even if we find them at Calais, the load is still considered to have been damaged and contaminated.

Police and Crime Commissioners/Police Oversight

2. **John Pugh (Southport) (LD):** What assessment she has made of the effect of city deals and other forms of devolution on the future of police commissioners. [906744]

16. Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): Whether her Department plans to devolve police oversight functions to city mayors outside London. [906759]

The Minister for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall answer questions 2 and 16 together.

Police and crime commissioners have brought direct accountability and localism to policing in this country, and, as we have seen in London, incorporating the role of the PCC in mayoral devolution has worked really well, especially under this excellent London Mayor.

Mr Speaker: I have to say that I have received no request for the grouping of questions 2 and 16, but we will see what we can do if the Minister continues to smile nicely.

John Pugh: I thank the Minister for that response. Given the terms of the Manchester city deal, does he agree that police and crime commissioners could become surplus to requirements? Would not culling them result in useful savings?

Mike Penning: No; the police and crime commissioners are doing an excellent job. They bring accountability. The only bid to incorporate the PCC role at the moment is the bid from Manchester, and I look forward to seeing it working on the ground.

Mr Nicholas Brown: How will these arrangements work in the north-east of England, which has one economic zone—incorporating Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear—but two police authorities and two police and crime commissioners? Does the Home Office propose to merge the police authorities and their commissioners or to transfer their functions to a new individual?

Mike Penning: It is entirely up to the local community to decide what it wants. If we look at other parts of the country, we can see that West Mercia and Warwickshire are working closely together. If the police authorities in the right hon. Gentleman's area wanted to merge, they would need to put their business plan to us. It is not only the big cities that could come together; such proposals could involve rural areas as well.

Appendix 2: Example of the House of Representatives (Australia) sample

House of Representatives Hansard: 9.2.2015, pp. 75-78.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:39): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that nearly half of his parliamentary colleagues, including two-thirds of his Liberal backbenchers, have today expressed a lack of confidence in the Prime Minister, how can the Prime Minister claim to have a mandate from this country?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:39): I can understand why the Leader of the Opposition does not want to remember the election. That would be something he would rather forget. This Prime Minister and this government did win an election and that is the mandate that we are carrying out.

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (14:40): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister inform the House how the government will strengthen the Australian economy in 2015?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left—and that includes the member for Griffith.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:40): I very much thank the member for Deakin for his question. I accept that there are economic headwinds overseas, but the Australian economy is stronger today than it was 18 months ago.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton has begun again. He will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: Our economy is stronger today than it was 18 months ago, and I am particularly pleased to say that the jobs market has strengthened. Our economy today is growing at an annual rate of 2.7 per cent, and this time last year, under the stewardship of members opposite, it had been growing at only 1.9 per cent.

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith will remove herself under 94(a).

Mr ABBOTT: Over the last year, over calendar 2014, more than 200,000 jobs were created, and that is something that every member on this side of the House is pleased to see. The rate of jobs growth in 2014, under this government, was three times what it was under members opposite in 2013. Exports are growing strongly, with volumes up by over eight per cent over the past year. Building approvals are at near record levels and over 10 per cent higher than a year ago. The registration of new companies is at the highest levels on record. This is what happens when you have a government that is open for business and is always looking for ways to say yes to new proposals to invest, employ, create and deliver prosperity for the Australian people.

I was delighted to be with the member for Deakin, just last week, to visit Timbermate, a business in his electorate—a great Melbourne business that is benefiting from lower electricity prices after the removal of the carbon tax. It is also a business that will benefit from the free trade agreements which will reduce tariffs of up to nine per cent on its products in China and elsewhere. This is a government which is not resting on its laurels or defending the past—it is a government which is looking to the future. Shortly there will be a new small business and jobs package, there will be a tax cut for small business, there will be a new package for families focusing on child care. This is a government which is getting on with what the people of Australia elected us to do.

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (14:44): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs—and it was a wonderful pleasure to have the minister in my electorate on Thursday. Will the minister update the House on how—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I think the honourable member had best begin her question again, and we will have some silence so we can hear it.

Ms SCOTT: My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister please update the House on how the government's New Colombo Plan is helping young Australians to live, study and work in the Indo-Pacific region?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:45): I thank the member for Lindsay for her question. The New Colombo Plan is one of the government's signature foreign policy initiatives, and we are rolling it out across the Indian Ocean-Asia-Pacific region. We are now partnering with 38 nations in our region to provide young Australian undergraduates with the opportunity to study and live and work at locations in our region. I do not think members of the House should underestimate the impact that this signature policy is having in the region. Members will recall that President Xi Jinping referred to the New Colombo Plan and how China was ready to partner with Australia during his address to the joint sitting of the parliament last year. Indeed, Prime Minister Abe has also raised the New Colombo Plan as a great example of the strengthening and deepening of the relationship between Australia and Japan. I have attended regional forums of ASEAN where the New Colombo Plan has been raised as a great example of the connectivity that is required in our region, building government-to-government links, people to people, university to university, business to business.

We have now announced this year's 69 12-month scholarships for students to study in the region and 3,150 mobility grants up to a semester long. So we have now announced that, in total, 4,600 students will have the opportunity to live, study and work under the New Colombo Plan in our region. Last Thursday, the member for Lindsay and I attended a number of events in her electorate, including at the University of Western Sydney. The university has received grants and scholarships for 188 students from that university to study in one of the 38 partner countries in our region. Six 12-month scholarships have been awarded and the rest in mobility and semester-long grants.

One student, a young lady by the name of Jasmin Hammond, has come back from her New Colombo Plan experience from last year. She is the first Indigenous Australian to receive a scholarship under the New Colombo Plan. While she was studying at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology—she was studying chemistry and physics, and her period there will be counted towards her degree in Australia—she decided that she wanted to study medicine. The experience in Hong Kong was such that she decided to transform her life and to try and get into medicine, and she has been accepted by the University of Western Sydney into medicine. She grew up back of Bourke, in a country town of about 1,500 people. She is now going to study medicine at the University of Western Sydney, because she wants to give back to her local community. This is the kind of transformational experience that young students are receiving under the New Colombo Plan. We are investing in our future. We invest our young people.