Question-response sequences in the House of Commons

A conversation analytic study of adversarial questioning in the British parliament

Fråga-svar sekvenser i House of Commons
En konversationsanalytisk studie om motstridigt utfrågande i det brittiska parlamentet

Adam Blick

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
English
English III: Degree Project
15 credits
Supervisor: Silvia Kunits
Examiner: Ying Wang
Spring 2020

Title:	Question-response sequences in House of Commons: A conversation analytic study of adversarial questioning in the British parliament
Titel på svenska:	Fråga-svar sekvenser i House of Commons: En konversationsanalytisk studie om motstridigt utfrågande i det brittiska parlamentet
Author:	Adam Blick
Pages:	25

Abstract

With the method of conversation analysis, this study examines the level of adverseness in questions between members of parliament from different parties. The data consists of question – response sequences derived from a ministerial statement from the prime minister in the House of Commons. This study finds that, in question – response sequences between oppositional members of parliament and the prime minister, adversarial presuppositions in questions can be used as a strategy to project negative traits upon the respondent. Adversarial dimensions of hostility, assertiveness and directness can also be found in adversarial questions. In these instances, the respondent may adjust their answer to match the level of adverseness from the questioner through the use of certain lexis, creating counter sequences. Adversarial questions are the most common type of question from members of the oppositional party, and there are different adversarial strategies being used. Questions from members of the government party do not make use of adversarial strategies, and should not be described as adversarial.

Keywords: conversation analysis, question, adversarial, assertive, institutional talk

Sammanfattning

Den här studien använder konversationsanalys som metod för att undersöka olika nivåer av motstridighet i frågor mellan parlamentsmedlemmar från olika partier. Datan består av fråga – svar sekvenser som uppstod från ett redogörelsetal från statsministern in the House of Commons. Den här studien finner, i fråga – svar sekvenser mellan partimedlemmar från oppositionen och statsministern, att motstridiga antaganden i frågor kan användas som en strategi till att projicera negativa egenskaper på den svarande. Motstridiga dimensioner av fientlighet, assertivitet och direkthet kan också hittas i motstridiga frågor. I dessa fall kan den svarande anpassa sitt svar för att matcha nivån av motstridighet från den frågande genom användningen av lexis, vilket skapar en kontrande sekvens. Motstridiga frågor är den vanligaste formen av frågor från medlemmar av oppositionen, och det finns olika motstridiga strategier som används. Frågor från medlemmar av regeringspartiet använder inte motstridiga strategier, och borde inte beskrivas som motstridiga.

Nyckelord: konversationsanalys, fråga, motstridig, påstridig, institutionellt prat

Contents

1. Introduction and Aims

Rhetoric is a topic under scrutiny within the political domain. It is important for politicians to maintain reliability in the public eye, which also might explain why interviewers ask challenging questions to politicians. The political interview in particular has undergone a change in the recent years when looking at question forms. Neutral questions, which used to be the norm, is nowadays switched in favour of antagonizing or adversarial questions (Tolson, 2012). Through comparing questions asked by journalists to presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, Clayman and Heirtage (2002) have also shown that adversarial questioning has increased in political interviews. In the interest of examining rhetorical strategies in political debates and interviews, it is beneficial to study other parts of the political domain further to see if adversarial questions can be used in other contexts.

One particularly interesting part of the political domain is parliamentary interaction. Even though neutral interviewers nowadays tend to challenge the political views of political figures, as previously mentioned, such interviews are often carried out by neutral interviewers or journalists. There is therefore a clear difference here between neutral political interviews and questions asked in a parliamentary setting. As parliaments consist of members from different political parties with different political views, parliamentary interaction is explicitly confrontational, and it would therefore be interesting to examine the concept of adversarial questioning in the less neutral parliamentary setting.

The aim of this study is therefore to look into question - response sequences in the interaction between different members of parliament within the British House of Commons (henceforth HoC) to investigate whether and how adversarial questioning is used and how it is responded to. The present study relies on conversation analysis (CA), a methodology which is suited to the purposes of analysing conversational interaction. There are studies explaining how adversarial questioning can be used in interviews. For example, Clayman and Heritage (2002) studied adversarial questions asked by journalists to former US presidents, listing four different dimensions of adversarial questioning (*initiative, directness, assertion* and *hostility*). Adversarial questions asked by journalists have been studied extensively, but there is limited research on how adversarial questioning can be used by members of parliament. This study will therefore aim to fill this research gap by analysing questions issued by members of parliament addressed to the prime minister of Great Britain in the British parliament after a ministerial statement. There are many different question sequences that can be analysed from the HoC because of how well documented and archived these interactions are. The British parliament has therefore been chosen as the field of study for parliamentary interaction.

In particular, this study addresses the following research questions. In question – response sequences between members of parliament (henceforth MPs) and the prime minister (PM):

1. How often are adversarial questions issued?
2. What different assertive or adversarial strategies are being used in adversarial questions?
3. What is the difference in frequency of adversarial questions between the oppositional parties and the government party?
4. If adversarial questions are formulated, is the response adjusted to the degree of adverseness that is present in the questions? And if so, how?

This study will answer these research questions by examining question – response sequences that have been selected from a recording from the chamber of the HoC during a statement from the PM regarding Brexit. It is by examining these sequences in terms of adversarial questioning, and by analysing responses in relation to adversarial questions, that this study aims to analyse levels of adverseness in the interaction between members of different parties and the PM. The questions from different parties will also be compared to determine whether there is a difference in level of adverseness between MPs from the opposition and MPs from the government.

2. Background

The background section is structured as follows: first, it provides a review of the field of study, institutional talk, in general and then, it contextualises the field of study in relation to the HoC. Institutional talk is covered in section 2.1, providing a review of the norms of communication within institutions. Section 2.2, which revolves around epistemics and mitigations, will examine how knowledge in particular domains affects communication. Section 2.3 provides a review of question and response design, which will delve deeper into the inner workings of questions and responses. This includes previous studies on questions in interviews, as well as adversarial questioning and question resistance which serve as two key-features this study examines.

These sections are then followed by section 2.4, which gives a small description of the setting in which the analysis takes place. This includes both a description of the physical setting, as well as conventions of communication within the House of Commons.

2.1 Institutional Talk

Within CA, there is a clear distinction between ordinary talk (i.e., everyday communication) and institutional talk. However, Heritage and Clayman (2010) explain that there cannot be a clear definition of institutional talk, since different institutions contain different patterns. Finding definitions that separate ordinary talk from institutional talk can also be problematic. Heritage & Clayman (2010) maintain that institutional talk is not necessarily tied to its institutional locale, and that even a conversation at the dinner table can be analysed within the framework of institutional talk. However, three distinct aspects are presented as defining features of institutional talk:

> 1 the interaction normally involves the participants in specific goal orientations *which are tied to their institution-relevant identities:* Presidents-elect and Chief Justice, doctor and patient, teacher and student, etc.;
>
> 2 the interaction involves special constraints on what will be treated as allowable contributions to the business at hand; and
>
> 3 the interaction is associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 34).

Moreover, Drew & Heritage (1992, as referenced in Heritage & Clayman, 2010) compiled six other dimensions where institutional talk differs from normal talk: turn-taking organisation (section 2.1.1), turn design (section 2.1.2), sequence organisation (section 2.1.3), overall structural organization (section 2.1.4), lexical choice (section 2.1.5) and epistemological asymmetry. Some of these features can also be found in the institutional talk of the British House of Commons, and the significance of this will be examined in the different sections below.

2.1.1 Turn Taking

In any conversation, the participants take turns interacting. Clayman (2013) states that the coordination between participants in turn-taking is intuitive and that turn-taking is managed orderly, with minimum effort and with few instances of silence and overlapping speech. Clayman (2013) also explains even though turn-taking occurs naturally, there are instances where turn-taking is predetermined, as in debates or interviews for example. Heritage & Clayman (2010) elaborate on this and explain that, while there are instances of turn-taking in institutional talk similar to turn-taking of ordinary talk, some institutions have specialized turn-taking conventions. This makes certain forms of institutional talk more predictable in comparison to ordinary talk, since topics and turn-taking may be predetermined (Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

According to Heritage and Clayman (2010), special turn-taking conventions, often used in institutional talk, can be divided into three groups. The first group is characterized by pre-allocated actions; in this case, speakership is restricted to pre-determined actions. This kind of turn-taking is used in courtrooms, for example. The second group uses mediation of turn-allocation. In these groups, a mediator allocates speakership to interactants. An example of this can be seen in chaired meetings, where a chairman allocates speakership. The last group uses a combination of the first two groups and can often be seen in counselling situations (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Heritage & Clayman (2010) explain that these kinds of specialized turn-taking conventions are often used to restrict speakership, and in some cases negate the possibility of conflict between two parties.

It is necessary to understand that the institutional talk of the British parliament uses a form of specialized turn-taking. While specialized turn-taking is not included in all forms of institutions or institutional talk (Heritage & Clayman, 2010), the British parliament uses a distinct form of turn-taking which closely

resembles the one mentioned above as mediated turn-allocation. The Speaker of the HoC, often referred to as Mr. Speaker by other MP's, is a mediator who controls turn-taking and limits speakership. In the case of this study, this limits the amount of overlap between speakers since only one is allowed to speak at a time.

2.1.2 Turn Design

As Paul Drew (2013) states, turn design is a large area of interest within CA, but can be simplified into three specific aspects that summarize its central ideas. That is, turn design defines "*where* in a sequence a turn is being taken; *what* is being done in that turn; and to *whom* the turn is addressed. In short, *sequence, action* and *recipient*" (Drew, 2013, p. 134, italics in original). To expand on this, Drew (2013) explains that people in an interaction take turns to talk and these turns-at-talk are designed to convey specific things in the interaction. This creates a chain of turns-at-talk, each turn being dependent on following and preceding turns. In the unfolding of these turns-at-talk, interactants design and adjust their turns to maximize the effectiveness of what they are trying to convey (Drew 2013). Speakers design turns to perform certain actions, such as delivering news, by using *turn-constructional units*, which are resources ranging from lexis (words) and phonetics, to laughter, eye gaze and other non-verbal resources (Drew, 2013).

One way of adjusting a turn is by making self-repairs. Drew (2013) says that self-repair is the action of altering a sentence in the middle of producing it by replacing words to better reflect what the speaker wants to convey on their turn. There are many different kinds of self-repair, as evidenced by Schegloff (2013) who exemplifies ten different kinds of operations of self-repair, such as *replacing* turn-constructional units, *inserting* new elements and *deleting* parts of an utterance. As Drew (2013) asserts, sentence altering may occur to correct factual errors, such as in this example where the speaker corrects *Saturday* to *Friday*:

Example 1

"So'e didn'take **Sa-uh f- Fridee** o:ff . . ." (Drew, 2013, p. 133).

In other circumstances, like Drew (2013) specifies, self-repair may occur to convey a message in a different way, such as in this example:

Example 2

"**But you were- (.) u-were you ou:t?** Or: was it the night before perhaps." (Drew, 2013, p. 133).

Drew (2013) clarifies that the interrogative sentence *Were you out* is a bit more cautious in comparison with the declarative sentence *You were out*.

Analysing question-response sequences in the HoC requires a form of knowledge of turn design. It is relevant to analyse how the MPs design and adjust their turns to convey their actions, and how this affects the responses.

2.1.3 Sequence Organization

According to Stivers (2013), one of the central ideas of CA is the organization of interaction into sequences, where one action is followed by another. An utterance made by a speaker in a conversation has to be viewed in the light of following and preceding utterances by other participants in order to understand the meaning of the utterance and the action it accomplishes (Stivers, 2013). In interaction, social actions can be organized into adjacency pairs where one action sets the expectation of a particular second action by the coparticipant (Stivers, 2013).

Heritage and Clayman (2010) expand on this by talking about the relevance of sequence organization in institutional talk. The interactional identities of participants in a conversation, such as story teller or news deliverer, as well as the participants' social and institutional roles, such as parent and teacher, are "established, maintained, and manipulated" (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 43) through sequence organization. This implicates that participants in a conversation produce sequences in the light of their specific conversational roles, which becomes especially apparent with participants with institutional roles in institutional talk. The question *Is your kid sick today?* can be considered a normal question if asked by a school official, but less normal coming from someone from a completely different institution (Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

The notion of adjacency pairs has to be taken into account when analysing question and response sequences between the MPs. For this study, it is important to analyse the questions and responses as sequences, and to analyse how the questions are produced, interpreted, what kind of answer is expected from a standpoint of adjacency pairs, and what kind of answer is provided.

2.1.4 Structural Organization

Heritage and Clayman (2010) state that most types of interaction have a structural organisation (i.e., follow certain pre-specified sequences of events), which is unrelated to the particular topic of interaction. Even in ordinary talk, which otherwise is unpredictable in line with its unscripted nature, one can find different instances of pre-specified opening and closing sequences or activities (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Heritage and Clayman (2010) explain that institutional talk is different in the sense that the interaction is built on an overall predictable structure with countable sections based on the business of interaction. These sections can range from generic "opening" and "closing" sections, to particular "business" sections based on the context of discussion (Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

It is important to note that, as interaction is moderated in the HoC, the participants are limited to the structural organisation and the pre-specified sequences. However, structural organisation is still part of the institutional talk within the HoC, and is maintained through the moderator.

2.1.5 Lexical Choice and Hedging

Heritage and Clayman (2010) say that lexical choice lies close in relation with turn design in the way that speakers make certain selections in which words are used. As Heritage and Clayman (2010) mention, the choice between two words also implies different ways of conveying the same message, which becomes apparent in the choice between *I* or *We* in institutional talk. *We* is often used to refer to an institution of which the speaker is seen as a representative (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Heritage and Clayman (2010) also explain that certain words are better used in different situations, which can be exemplified in the difference between the words *cops* or *police*. The word *cops* can work in interactions with adolescents, but does not work as well as *police* in courtroom interactions (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). For these reasons, it may be relevant to this study to consider the importance and implications of the words chosen in interactions between MPs.

Choice of lexis can also mitigate potentially adversarial questions or statements through hedging. The concept of hedging had a breakthrough with Lakoff's (1972) studies which focused on words, especially on how words and phrases could be used to make things "fuzzier or less fuzzy" (referenced in Fraser, 2010, p. 16). Furthermore, Meyer (1997) accounts for other definitions of hedges, such as mitigating a sentence to make it less forceful or politer, and to reduce one's accountability of a certain statement. More recently, Fraser (2010) has defined hedging as "a rhetorical strategy that attenuates either the full semantic value of a particular expression, as in *He's sort of nice*, or the full force of a speech act, as in *I must ask you to stop doing that*" (p. 15). Fraser (2010) also shows that hedges are linguistic devices and that there is no set word class that contains hedges.

According to Fraser (2010), expressions like *I think* and *probably* are considered hedges that convey a lack of certainty, which are used to mitigate or attenuate the probability of a speech act. It is also important to understand how hedges of this kind might be used in institutional talk. Lehtinen (2013) has researched the usage of hedges by medical professionals in talks with their patients. Lehtinen (2013) explains that hedges like *probably* and *might* are often used by the doctor to suggest that the patient has broader knowledge over their own symptoms.

However, it is also important to mention that first-person-singular cognitive-verb-based units, such as *I think*, can be used as an argumentative boost, depending on the context. Taking *I think* as an example, Fetzer (2014) claims that it functions as a boost when used in co-occurrence with "expressions of epistemic modality coding necessity and prediction, such as the modals *must*, *should* and *will*, or the modal adverb *certainly*" (p. 90). To illustrate this, in the sentence *That was wrong, and I think you*

should take that back the unit *I think* co-occurs with *should,* signalling an obligation or necessity. In the context of the present study, it is important to note that units have to be analysed in the context of co-occurrence with other units, and not as words by themselves.

2.2 Epistemics

Heritage (2013) describes epistemics as a topic that focuses on the knowledge of interactants, and how people act on the basis of knowledge claims in speech sequences. More importantly, epistemics focus on how interactants use different linguistic resources to indicate their commitment to what they are trying to convey (Heritage, 2013). This can be seen, for example, in the difference between *It´s raining* and *I think it´s raining,* where the lexical item *I think* conveys a lack of commitment in comparison with the other sentence (Heritage, 2013).

Important to the field of epistemics is the social distribution of knowledge and how it manifests itself in speech sequences. This can also be seen in certain epistemic communities. Heritage (2013) describes epistemic communities as any sort of community – whether part of a profession or hobby – that shares subject knowledge, but at the same time creates opportunities for individual identities. Someone from within an epistemic community can project knowledge and power over a participant from outside the epistemic community by using certain lexical items (Heritage, 2013).

Heritage (2013) also describes epistemic stance and status, which are tied to the interplay of knowledge between two interactants. Epistemic status is attributed to interactants in a speech sequence, where the participants can be more or less knowledgeable (Heritage, 2013). In analysis, this is often represented through K+ for knowledgeable and K- for less knowledgeable (Heritage, 2013). Depending on the knowledge domain, or information and the accessibility of it, the knowledge of the participants can range from complete unknowing to complete knowing, with some knowledgeability in between (Heritage, 2013). This creates opportunities for epistemic advantages, depending on how knowledgeable the participants are or appear to be (Heritage, 2013).

Epistemic stance, on the other hand, can be described as how epistemic status is conveyed by interactants (Heritage, 2013). For example, the three sentences *Are you married?, You're married, aren't you?* and *You're married* all contain the same proposition, but express three different epistemic stances or gradients (Heritage, 2013). The sentence *Are you married?* shows a lack of knowledge over the information, while the sentence *You're married* by contrast expresses a claim of knowledge over the information and merely acts as a question to confirm this information (Heritage, 2013).

The topic of epistemics is important to this study as it provides further examples of the different purposes of hedges, such as mitigation of a statement for example. As certain hedges serve to express different epistemic stances, it is to the benefit of this study to analyse how this is manifested in institutional talk and in the discourse of the British HoC.

2.3 Question and Response Design

The following sections examine the designs of questions and responses more in-depth. The section on question design (2.3.1) covers previous research on adversarial questioning, and gives a description on this question type. The section on response design (2.3.2) presents how responses are designed to answer different question types.

2.3.1 Question Design and Adversarial Questioning

Question-formatted turns contain underlying social actions which demand a response or constrain the respondent in different ways (Lee, 2013). As Hayano (2013) mentions, questions are not only requests for information, but also contain underlining assumptions that, in certain contexts, are used to control the interaction. One example of these tools can be seen through hostile presuppositions and adversarial questioning. According to Hayano (2013), presuppositions can be found in all kinds of questions. An example of this can be seen in the content question *When did she leave town?*, which presupposes that the person in question has left town (Hayano 2013). However, speakers can also convey hostile presuppositions in their questions which can be seen in Example 3 below:

Example 3

"`.hhh er What's the difference between your Marxism and Mister McGarhey's communism.`" (Hayano, 2013, p. 401).

As Hayano (2013) shows, this question presupposes that the interviewee is a Marxist, which provides two options for the interviewee as to what kind of answer to provide. The interviewee can either accept the potentially hostile presuppositions by giving an answer, or deny the presuppositions by not giving an answer, which can be interpreted as being evasive (Hayano, 2013).

Hostile presuppositions and adversarial questioning have also been studied in the political domain. Andrew Tolson (2012) has researched adversarial interviews and assertive questions in UK elections. Tolson (2012) explains that the norm of *neutral* interviews in the political domain is being challenged by new forms of interviewing, such as assertive, adversarial, and hostile interviews, partly in tandem with televised "confrontainment" (p.45)

In his research, Tolson (2012) presents various strategies that are used by interviewers in an adversarial way. An example of such strategies is provided by questions that contain face-threatening presuppositions, which are often used in adversarial questioning to imply negative traits of the interviewee. Other strategies used in adversarial interviews are statements functioning as questions, as well as assertions that challenge the interviewee through asserting a challenging opinion (Tolson, 2012).

Clayman and Heritage (2002) have also researched the adversarial nature of political interviews with presidents. In their research, they identify four different dimensions of adversarialness in interviews. The

first dimension is the interviewer's *initiative*. This is exemplified by asking multiple questions in one turn, as well as elaborating questions asked and follow-up questions (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). The second dimension is *directness.* The reasoning behind this is that indirectness often functions as a form of politeness in speech acts, as in the example *Can you pass me the salt?*. Therefore, questions that are more direct and blunter can be seen as adversarial (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). The third dimension is *assertiveness.* Assertiveness can be seen in negatively formulated questions, which are questions that are prefaced by phrases like *aren't you* or *didn't you*. Interviewers can also "tilt" questions in favour of either yes or no with prefacing statements (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 763). The fourth dimension is *hostility.* Clayman and Heritage (2002) assert that hostility can be seen in different forms, such as hostility both in prefaces to questions, and embedded in questions themselves. The definition of hostility in the context of president interviews is that the question is critical or against the president, either by asserting that the president makes contradicting statements, or by simply disagreeing with something the respondent has said or done (Clayman & Heritage, 2002).

This shows that there are many different dimensions of adversarial questions, and that many different assertive strategies can be used in political interviews. This paper will discuss whether the same strategies are being used in the parliamentary context in the analysis section.

2.3.2 Response Design and Resistance

According to Lee (2013), the analysis of response design not only concerns the response as part of an adjacency pair, but also the design of the answer, and how respondents act in relation to constraining questions. As Lee (2013) demonstrates, there are different levels of turn design, and the most basic level concerns whether or not a response provides an answer or a nonanswer. The definition of a typical answer is that it "aligns with and is fitted to the action pursued by a question" (Lee, 2013, p. 417). However, there are different kinds of nonanswers. Lee (2013) illustrates three different kinds; firstly, the *I don't know*-type which is based on insufficient knowledge, or the claim of a lack of knowledge. The second nonanswer type concerns the initiation of new sequences or counter instead of the provision of an answer (Lee, 2013). The least common type of nonanswers is silence or the absence of an answer, which can be interpreted as an act of disaffiliation with the interactant (Lee, 2013).

The second level of response design, as Lee (2013) states, has to do with the interaction between first- and second-pair parts explained in 2.1.4 and revolves around the action and form of the response in an interaction. Lee (2013) mentions that first-pair parts have natural preferences concerning second-pair parts. A second-pair part that has an action aligned with the action of the first-pair part is preferred (e.g. an invitation prefers an acceptance of the invitation). Lee (2013) explains that second-pair parts that hinder the action of the first-pair part are therefore dispreferred (e.g. a rejection to an invitation). One important aspect of this is that preferred and dispreferred responses have contrasting designs. More specifically, while preferred responses, like an acceptance of an invitation, are direct and without delay,

dispreferred responses, like rejections for example, contain mitigations, turn-initial delays and prefaces before the actual rejection (Lee, 2013).

Heritage and Raymond (2012) describe similar ways in which respondents can resist assertive polar questions (i.e., yes/no-questions). When answering polar questions, or yes/no-questions, the response can be either type-conforming or repetitional (Heritage & Raymond, 2012). Type-conforming answers are the most common type and can be described as a yes/no-response. Since the yes/no-response is indexically tied to the formulation of the question, this type of response accepts the terms projected by the question and asserts acquiescence instead of resistance (Heritage & Raymond, 2012). A repetitional answer can be described as an answer that repeats what the questioner said (e.g. the question *Have they gone?* being responded with *They have gone.*). Heritage and Raymond (2012) claim that this response type exerts resistance towards assertive questions in three aspects. Firstly, repetitional answers modify the terms set by the question by providing confirmation instead of affirmation. Secondly, repetitional answers assert authority over the agenda provided by the question, exerting epistemic power over the information conveyed in the question. Thirdly, repetitional answers allow for further elaboration in answers and sequence expansion. As shown by Heritage and Raymond (2012), this can be seen in cases with repetition alongside negation, where the question is subverted and modified through a sequence expansion, effectively changing the terms of the question.

Similar research on question resistance has been done by Fox and Thompson (2010), who claim that *specifying wh-questions,* i.e. questions starting with a word containing wh- (e.g., when, who, where), can be answered with phrasal or clausal responses, projecting different attitudes towards the question asked. To illustrate this, the question *What time did we get home?* can be answered with a phrasal clause (e.g., *One thirty*), or with a clausal response (e.g., *We got home at one thirty)*. A phrasal response, which can be either a noun, a noun phrase, an adjective or a prepositional phrase, is a simple and short answer which provides exactly the information sought by the question without any delay in terms of prefaces or accounts (Fox & Thompson, 2010). A clausal response, on the other hand, is longer than a phrasal response and does not provide the information sought by the question right away. In other words, the turn is delayed through the added lexical units. Fox and Thompson (2010) claim that the delay provided by a clausal response shows that the respondent finds the question problematic in some way. This only applies to *specifying wh-question*, not *telling questions* where a longer response is necessary (Fox & Thompson, 2010).

When analysing the responses to the questions in the HoC, it is important to look at the designs of the answers. It is necessary to investigate how answers are designed, and whether nonanswers and resistance are more common in response to adversarial questions.

2.4 Discourse of the House of Commons

To better understand the context in which the analysis presented here is conducted, it is necessary to introduce some of the features that characterize political discourse. Ilie (2010) describes many different aspects of the HoC, such as the physical setting and the expected behaviour of the members of the MPs. Perhaps most important to this study, Ilie (2010) describes the political discourse in the parliamentary setting as one discourse with multiple sub-genres. The parliamentary setting consists not only of debates, but also speeches and questions, all of which form the parliamentary discourse (Ilie, 2010). Ilie (2010) also describes the parliamentary setting as both institutional and non-institutional in nature; the statements each participant make are viewed in the light of their political standpoint, which leads to dramatic and confrontational dialogues. At the same time, the aim of the political debates is to reach agreeable solutions which may affect the lives of the general public (Ilie, 2010).

According to Ilie (2010), the HoC has been studied extensively, partly because of its history as one of the oldest forms of parliament. One aspect that is particularly interesting is the physical setting of the parliament chamber. Ilie (2010) explains that the HoC may be considered to be an inherently competitive setting, because of the fact that the government on the right side of the Speaker is facing the opposition on the left side. The Speaker, who serves as a mediator, is raised in a chair at one of the short ends (Ilie, 2010).

Ilie (2010) further observes that the MPs use a specific way of addressing each other in the HoC. The MPs refer to each other in third person, usually with the phrase *the Right Honourable Gentleman/Lady*, but can also address each other in second person in an adversarial tone (Ilie, 2010).

Of particular interest for present purposes are two moments in which questions are raised and answered at the HoC: ordinary question time and ministerial statements. During question time, the PM or other ministers answer questions issued by the MPs. The questions need to be submitted ahead of time in order to give the ministers time to prepare an answer (Ilie, 2010); each submitted question is given a number. During question time, the questions are not read out loud (UK Parliament, 2019b). Instead, the MPs simply call out the number corresponding to a specific question addressing one specific minister and the relevant minister provides an answer. However, there is also room for other supplementary questions; the rules for these extra questions depend on what the Speaker deems fitting (Ilie, 2010).

Aside from ordinary question time, questions can also be raised during so called ministerial statements, where different ministers respond to questions asked by MPs (UK Parliament, 2019a). Ministerial statements in the HoC work differently from ordinary question time in that they are performed “often at short notice” (UK Parliament, 2019a). A ministerial statement starts with a minister delivering an oral statement regarding major events, which then is followed by oral questions from MPs (UK Parliament, 2019a).

There is thus an important difference between ordinary question time and ministerial statements. That is, during ordinary question time the questions are submitted ahead of time and are not read out loud, and the answers are prepared, while ministerial statements offer affordances to analyse question-answer sequences that emerge spontaneously in institutional talk. Therefore, the present study, which relies on CA tools for the analysis of naturally occurring adversarial questioning in parliamentary interaction, focuses on questions issued during ministerial statements.

3. Data and Methods

Three important aspects are brought up in this section: first, a description of the CA methods along with the different conventions adopted within this discipline; secondly, a description of the data analysed in this study, and lastly, a description of the method used for data analysis.

3.1 Conversation Analysis

This study uses CA as a method of analysis. Conversation analysts work with naturally occurring sequences of talk, which are either audio or video recorded (Mondada, 2013). The benefit of recordings as a data collection method lies in the fact that recordings preserve the naturalistic features of interaction and therefore allow to explore how talk-in-interaction is produced by one participant, and interpreted and reacted to by the coparticipants (Mondada, 2013). It is important to note that production, interpretation, and reaction can also be observed in the participants' embodied behaviours (including gaze and gestures), which is why it is important to be able to observe what the participants are doing in interaction.

Once recordings are collected, they are viewed multiple times and transcribed following specific conventions. Hepburn and Bolden (2013) assert that simple orthographic representation of interaction is not enough for data analysis, because a lot of the interactional work in conversation is observable in subtle details in the delivery of turns-at-talk, such as prosodic features, silences, sound elongations, gaze behaviours, etcetera. Everything in interaction, no matter how subtle, is potentially meaningful and of interest in CA, and therefore no form of behaviour in interaction can be dismissed as accidental or irrelevant (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Therefore, CA transcription conventions are very fine-grained and allow to represent temporal and sequential relationships, pitch, loudness, tempo, degrees of emphasis, non-linguistic sounds such as crying, etcetera (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013).

Central features for the analysis of any interaction are temporality and sequentiality (Mondada, 2013). Stivers (2013) claims that the focus on sequentiality is a distinguishing aspect of CA. While other social sciences focus on functions and designs of single utterances, CA maintains a focus on the position of utterances in relation to what came before and what comes next in a conversation (Stivers, 2013). The focus on sequence in conversation works in tandem with the central focus on action in CA. As Levinson (2013) asserts, each turn-at-talk accomplishes an action, which is then responded to with another action.

If one turn produces the action of a question, the following action could reasonably be an answer. Following this, Stivers (2013) asserts that actions produced in interaction cannot be ordered in random ways, but are instead built upon the action that came before, hence the importance of sequentiality.

3.2 Data

The data consist of question-response sequences found in a ministerial statement regarding Brexit negotiations issued by Boris Johnson on Thursday October 3rd 2019. The entire ministerial statement segment of the HoC meeting was 1 hour, 54 minutes and 4 seconds, including the statement itself. However, the amount of time that was analysed for this study was 59 minutes and 9 seconds. A video recording of the statement is available for the public through Parliamentlive.tv (2019c), a website under the UK parliament, which means that informed consent is not required. A ministerial statement was chosen specifically because of the fact that it allows for analysis of question-response sequences. Other kinds of interaction within the HoC (such as question time) does not present interaction between two participants since the questions are not asked orally. The specific ministerial statement was chosen because it was one of the most recent ministerial statements. Ministerial statements in the HoC are not as common as question time, and the amount of question-response sequences from one ministerial statement gave enough data for analysis.

Overall, 82 question-response sequences have been identified. However, the analysis focuses only on 52 of these sequences. It is in fact worth mentioning that the MPs had access to the statement in written form and thus had a chance to formulate questions before its oral delivery; that is, in some cases the questions had been written down by the MPs in advance. In a study focusing on naturally occurring interaction, it was necessary to remove question-response sequences where the MPs are reading out their questions from a paper. Therefore, only question-response sequences in which the MPs are asking questions without looking at a script have been selected for analysis. Out of the 52 selected sequences, 24 sequences contain questions from government parties, 25 sequences have questions from oppositional parties, and 3 questions are from independent parties.

This study uses words-only transcripts from the House of Commons Hansard (2019) as a standpoint. These words-only transcripts were useful to find patterns of adversarial questioning as well as question resistance. However, a more detailed transcription was necessary in order to conduct a proper CA analysis. For this reason, I have transcribed a number of sequences with CA conventions to account for the aspects that are missing in the words-only transcripts. The transcription method is based on Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions (the conventions can be found in the Appendix). Transcription of embodied behaviours, such as hand gestures or nods, are not accounted for in this study. Only one speaker is visible at a time in the video recording, which makes it difficult to analyse the role of embodiment in the participants' interaction.

3.3 Method

In order to answer the first and second research questions, which aim to answer if and how adversarial questions are used in interaction in the HoC, the data has been analysed to find adversarial features. In order to see whether adverseness can be found in these interactions, each of the 52 question-response sequences were analysed separately with a focus on adversarial features. This study defines adversarial questions as questions containing one or several of the adversarial features that are described in section 2.3.1. For the sake of clarity, questions that contain hostile presuppositions, negative or challenging assertions, or the implication of negative traits are considered as adversarial questions for this study. Furthermore, questions that adhere to the four dimensions of adversarialness (interviewer *initiative, directness, assertion* and *hostility*) described by Clayman and Heritage (2002) are also considered as adversarial questions. These adversarial strategies will be explored in the qualitative analysis section.

It is also through the qualitative analysis that this study aims to answer the third research question, which aims to compare levels of adversarialness in questions from government and oppositional MPs. This study distinguishes different levels of adversarialness by comparing frequency and amount of assertive strategies used by government and oppositional MPs. The fourth research question, which aims to answer how adversarial questions are responded to, will also be accounted for in the qualitative analysis. The previous research on answer resistance and response design which is covered in section 2.3.2 will be used as a starting point to find patterns of adversarial question response. In particular, this study will look at responses in terms of nonanswers, adjacency pairs, and answer delay to find answer resistance.

The data will also be analysed quantitatively in terms of the sheer number of adversarial questions among the government parties and oppositional parties. The quantitative analysis exists for one main reason, namely the validity of the study. The qualitative data would not have had high validity with an overall low frequency of adversarial questions.

4. Analysis

The following section is divided into two sub-sections. Section 4.1 consists of a quantitative analysis. In this section, the frequency of adversarial questions among MPs from different parties is presented. Section 4.2 covers the qualitative analysis of the data, which consists of four different excerpts showcasing different interactions: one neutral question-response sequence and three adversarial question-response sequences. In this section, conversation analysis is used to analyse the interactions in-depth in order to find adversarial strategies.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

It is perhaps not surprising that some questions from MPs from the opposition are more adversarial, and adversarial questions are overall more frequent from the oppositional parties. Out of the 25 question-response sequences from oppositional parties, 7 are neutral, non-adversarial questions and 18 are adversarial, containing one or several of the assertive strategies discussed in section 2.3.1.

No adversarial question types were found among questions from the government parties or the independent parties. Instead, the government MPs tend to ask information seeking questions and produce question-formatted statements that agree with the PMs actions or statements.

There is a clear difference here when looking at the frequency of adversarial questions from different parties. There is a high frequency of adversarial questions from the oppositional parties, which most likely is because of the relationship between different parties. The oppositional party is against the policies of the government party, which is reflected in the adverseness of the questions. This can be compared with what Clayman and Heritage (2002) described as hostility, which can be seen when the interviewer is explicitly against the deeds or statements of the interviewee.

The most common adversarial dimension found in this study was the dimension of hostility. Hostile presuppositions and directness are also common features in adversarial questions, and can also be found in tandem with the dimension of hostility. The dimension of assertiveness is not as common as the aforementioned features, and the dimension of initiative is the least common. The adversarial dimensions are exemplified in the qualitative analysis in the following section.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

This study has identified two different types of question-response sequences, in order to analyse the level of adverseness in questions and responses: adversarial questions with answer resistance, and neutral questions with neutral responses. Excerpt 1, a question – response sequence between a government MP and the PM, shows an example of neutral questioning.

Excerpt 1 – Neutral questioning and neutral answer

1. MP: thank you mister speaker.
2. can i commend and congratulate my right honorable friend on his
3. statement and on his valiant efforts to secure us a deal
4. and get us out of the european union
5. (.) on the thirty first of oct↑ober.
6. but may i ask him a question which a lot of
7. my constituents are asking me.
8. that when we finally leave on the thirty first of oct↑ober.
9. .hh that if it were to be without a deal

10. .hh that there would be no adverse effect
11. on any UK european defense collaboration
12. .hh especially in the field of (.) procurement (.) manufacture
13. (.) and wider operations.
14. Mr.S: [*prime minister*]
15. PM: [u:h i] i i'm i'm grateful to (.)
16. u:h my honorable friend and i i can tell him that (.)
17. u:h we are proceeding with (.) u:h
18. (.) huge collaborations across the ↑front (.)
19. u:h with our european friends and i have no reason to believe
20. that any of them (.) u:h will be interrupted.

The MP starts the turn by thanking the mediator, here addressed as *Mister Speaker*, for giving him the floor. Lines 2-4 of the MP produces a question performing the action of appreciation, as indicated by the lexical choices of *valiant efforts, commend and congratulate* and *friend*, the latter of which discloses the relationship between the two interactants. In lines 6-7, the MP starts a new action separate from the first appreciative action, and prefaces this by referring to other constituents asking him questions regarding the issue. In lines 8-13, the MP asks an information seeking question regarding the possible negative effects of a no-deal Brexit on EU collaboration within different fields. The PM then starts his response by thanking the MP for the appreciative comment in line 15 and reciprocates with the same lexical choice of *friend* in line 16. In lines 17-18, the PM provides the information that huge UK-EU collaborations are ongoing. In lines 19-20, the PM elaborates on his answer further by assuring that it is preferable to maintain ongoing collaborations between the UK and EU, and that there are no plans to interrupt collaborations with the *European friends* through Brexit.

In this excerpt, it is worth noting the positive assessment prefacing the question seen in lines 2-4, which are then echoed by the PM in line 16. The question is also prefaced by a mitigation starting at line 6. The phrase *may I ask […]* serves as a mitigation conveying a polite stance. Compared with questions from the opposition, questions from government MPs are more often prefaced with phrases like *may I ask* and *can I ask*. In this instance, the MP also references other constituents seeking an answer to his question in lines 6-7, further warranting the upcoming question.

One thing to take note of is the way the MP stresses certain words in lines 8-10. In the line *that when we leave on the thirty first of October*, the word *finally* is emphasized, which shows that the process of exiting has been ongoing for long enough. Similarly, the word *were* is stressed in the line *that if it were to be without a deal*, which shows that a no-deal Brexit is both undesirable and unexpected. The MP also emphasizes *no* in *that there would be no adverse effect.*

From the PM's turn-at-talk, it is important to note the lexical choice of *we* in line 17 as it can be used to reduce one's accountability of a statement. In this particular instance, however, it is used to share the merit of the *huge collaborations* with Europe with his fellow MPs. The PM brings up the continuing collaboration with the EU in lines 18 to 20. It is worth noting the lexical choice of *European friends* here. This implicates that the relationship with the EU is friendly, and that the cancellation of collaborations is unwanted. Finally, the phrase *I have no reason to believe* is worth to take note of here. It is not completely within the knowledge domain of the PM whether the EU intends to interrupt collaborations, hence the K- stance. In terms of sequence organization, the response serves as an informative answer to the information seeking question in lines 8-13.

In summary, no assertive strategies are employed in this interaction. The exchange is non-adversarial, as seen in the different appreciative comments from both interactants.

The following example shows an adversarial question-response sequence between an oppositional MP and the PM.

Excerpt 2 – Adversarial questioning with assertiveness

```
1.MP:      thank you >mister speaker< =
2.         can thee (.) prime minister not accept thu uh
3.         a customs post .hh that is sited twenty ↑mi:les away from a ↑bor↓der
4.         (.) still represents a hard ↑bor↓der
5.         .hh  [and therefore it goes]
6. PP:          [((uninteligeble))    ]
7. MP:     and therefore it goes against the good friday agr↑eement.
8.         (.)
9.         why is he willing to prioritize brexit against the
10.        good friday agr↑eement?
11.Mr.S:   *prime ministe:r*
12.PM:     well um >thank you mister speaker<
13.        i should uh re↑mind the honorable gentleman that the
14.        (.) there has been a fiscal border u:h
15.        (.) fo::r u:h muh many years (.) uh between
16.        the the yu- th- the UK and and ireland = a fiscal border
17.        a:nd and customs ↑checks (.) ↓u:h do not mean customs posts
18.        or infrastructure of any kind. = ↑as i'm sure
19.        .hh as i'm su:re he >appreciates ↑and if he ↓does↑n't<
20.        .hh then i'm (.) mister speaker
21.        (.) i'm mo:re than happy to sha:re with him our thinking
22.        and to explain u:h how it can be done.
```

Starting in line 2, the MP produces a question which functions as a prefacing assertion. In lines 3-4, the MP argues that a customs post still represents a hard border, no matter the actual distance from the land border. This refers to the border between the UK and Ireland, specifically between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The MP argues that such borders are prohibited through the Good Friday agreement (henceforth GF) in lines 5-7. The question can then be seen in lines 9-10, where the MP asks why the PM would prioritize Brexit over the GF agreement. The PM then starts his turn in line 12 by thanking the mediator for the floor. In lines 13-16, the PM explains that there already is a financial border of sorts in place. This is elaborated on in lines 17-18 where the PM argues that *customs checks* can be implemented without *customs posts or infrastructure*, effectively maintaining the GF agreement. In lines 19-22, the PM shows willingness to further explain how their proposal would not violate the GF agreement.

The turn of the MP is a question-formatted turn, but can be seen as an assertive turn rather than information seeking. From line 2, the MP produces a negatively formulated question (*can the prime minister not accept),* which then leads to the statement in lines 3-4 (*a customs post that is sited twenty miles away from a border still represents a hard border*). This sequence shows two dimensions of adversarialness that Clayman and Heritage (2002) discuss: firstly, *assertiveness,* which can be seen in the negatively formulated question in lines 2-4, and secondly *hostility,* which can be seen in the disagreement in lines 3-4. Assertiveness in questions can sometimes tilt the respondent towards a certain answer, and hostility can be seen in explicitly challenging opinions (Heritage & Clayman, 2002).

The question seen in lines 9-10 presupposes that the PM prioritizes Brexit over the GF agreement. This is a hostile presupposition in the way that it asserts a negative trait on the PM which can be considered a face-threatening act (Hayano, 2013). To understand how lines 9-10 can be seen as a hostile presupposition, it is necessary to understand the context of communication. Essentially, a border between Northern Ireland and Ireland is prohibited through the GF agreement. The question presupposes that the PM is willing to break this agreement through Brexit, potentially damaging the relationship between the UK and Ireland. Whether this is a priority of the PM or not is unknown, but it is presupposed that it is through the MP question. As we can see in lines 14-18 of the response, the PM discusses the definition of a border. The PM effectively demolishes the premise on which the question was founded, meaning that an answer is not provided because the question was considered by the PM as ill founded. Instead of accepting the presupposition by answering the question, the PM risks appearing evasive by not answering the question, but negates this by deeming the question as ill founded. The answer relates more to lines 2-7 of the MP turn, which does not contain a question.

In summary, the question is adversarial because of the hostile presupposition in lines 9-10 asserting a negative trait unto the respondent. Adversarialness is also conveyed through the prefacing question in lines 2-4, which show adversarial dimensions of *assertiveness* and *hostility.* The PM also shows

resistance to the question, which can be seen in the PM's initiation of a dispreferred response and nonanswer (Lee, 2013). There is no answer to the question since it is challenged and ultimately deemed as ill founded by the PM.

The next excerpt shows another example of an adversarial question-response sequence between an oppositional MP and the PM.

Excerpt 3 – Adversarial questioning with hostile presupposition

1.MP: thank you (.) mister (.) speaker
2. = in the referendum the right honorable gentleman
3. held out the prospect of frictionless tra:de
4. with the european union.
5. .hh whatever (.) else one says about these proposals,
6. and i think he's ack(.)nowledged this
7. th- the- this is not frictionless.
8. what are the rea:sons why it hasn't been possible
9. to deliver what was ↑pro↓mised.
10.PM uh (.) mister speaker eh thi- this will be:
11. frictionless trade at the frontier¿
12. = there will be no borders, there will be no checks,
13. there will be no customs checks at the .hh frontier¿
14. .hh but of cou:rse there may be
15. de minimis customs checks! uh
16. but not at the frontier, and uh
17. with no physical .hh u:h incarnation
18. or physical infrastructure. .hh uh
19. a:nd (.) i think he's- he's raising a very important point.
20. = because as the UK comes ↑out of the EU,
21. and as we go to a (.)
22. a zero tariff zero quota (.) free ↑trade ↓deal
23. (.) it will also be incumbent on us to use this experience
24. that we are going through now (.)
25. as we develop our relations uh with the EU as a whole
26. and as we develop the ↑sys↓tems (.)
27. the frictionless ↑sys↓tems by which
28. UK EU trade will continue to operate.

The MP starts the turn by giving an account of the frictionless trade that the PM has promised to deliver in lines 2-4. In lines 5-7, the MP asserts that the trade would not be frictionless under the new agreement, and that this is acknowledged by the PM. This serves as a preface to the question in lines 8-9, where the MP asks why the promises of frictionless trade have not been fulfilled. The PM then starts his turn by explaining that trading would be frictionless in that there will not be physical customs checks in

lines 10-13. In lines 14-18, however, the PM explains that *customs checks* will be carried out at a distance from the border and without infrastructure. The argument is similar to the response in Excerpt 2 in the regard that the definition of a hard border is discussed. Line 19 also marks a shift in topic from the border to a more general comment on trade agreements between the UK and the EU. In lines 20-28, the PM discusses the importance of improving the relations with the EU after Brexit in order to further develop the prospects of frictionless trade with the EU.

The turn of the MP has both the function and form of an information seeking question. Line 6 (*and i think he's acknowledged this*), serves to convey a K- stance in relation to the PM. The MP only claims partial knowledge over the information, which can be seen in in the cognitive-verb-based unit *I think.* The K- stance mitigates the potential adverseness in the following line 7 in which there is a challenging opinion (*this is not frictionless*). This challenging opinion can be compared to the dimension of adversarailness described by Clayman and Heritage (2002) as *hostility*. There is an underlying presupposition that the PM has failed to deliver a promise in lines 8-9 (*what are the reasons why it hasn't been possible to deliver what was promised*), which can be compared to what Hayano (2013) describes as a hostile presupposition.

The lexical choice of *promised* does convey the presupposition that the PM has failed to deliver a promise, but is warranted through the prefacing line 6, in which the MP conveys a K- stance in his assumption that the PM has *acknowledged this.* This question turn is therefore less adversarial in comparison with the other question formatted turns in the other excerpts, but still shows adverseness in the way that it asserts the PM's inability to fulfil a promise.

During the PMs turn-at-talk, the PM debates the meaning of *frictionless trade* in lines 10-18, which conveys resistance to the question asked. There is therefore no explicit answer to the question in lines 8-9 since the premise of the question is being challenged. There is a form of appreciative comment in line 19, which can be seen in the phrase *I think he's raising an important point.* The start of a new sequence can be interpreted as a form of evasion, further conveying resistance to the question asked in lines 8-9.

To summarise, the adverseness in the MP's turn-at-talk can be seen in lines 7-9. There is an underlying presupposition that the PM has failed to deliver a promise in lines 8-9, which can be compared to what Hayano (2013) describes as a hostile presupposition, and there is also a challenging opinion in line 7 which can be compared to the dimension of adversarailness described by Clayman and Heritage (2002) as *hostility*. This hostility is partly negated, however, by the prefacing statement in line 6 in which the MP conveys a K- stance, mitigating the hostility. In turn, the answer resistance can be seen in the start of a new sequence in line 20.

The last excerpt shows another example of adversarial questioning and answer resistance.

Excerpt 4 – Adversarial questioning with directness

1. MP: breaking u:h the good friday agreement
2. risking twenty ye:ars of peace (.)
3. creating two new hard borders and a smugglers paradise
4. (.) in northern ireland and
5. scrapping (.) all of the labour .hh regulations environmental standards
6. and other standards in the rest of the united king-
7. this is nothing like what he peddled .hh
8. to the voters in twenty sixteen >is i-<
9. so why is he scared of putting this back to the ↑peo↓ple (.)
10. for their consent in a referendum.
11. PM: mister speaker >i think that is< (.)
12. i don't wish to be (.) to be u:h
13. unnecessarily adversarial today >but it seems<
14. .hh a satirical thing (.) u:h tuh for the uh party opposite
15. >((unintelligible)) gentleman opposite to say< when
16. .hh u:h THAT party is uh refuse ↑refusing to (.)
17. .hh uh concede to a general election.
18. = u:h we we are we are very happy with (.)
19. u:h i'm ↑very↓ happy to discuss (.) uh these ideas
20. u:h with or uh the honourable gentleman,
21. .hh they in ↑no↓ right honor- ((unintelligible)) there
22. they in ↑no ↓way (.) correspond (.) to the caricature
23. that he just put to the house.= this is a very .hh
24. this is a ↑very↓ serious (.) u:h way forward
25. and it and i- it gives this is uh ha- this country
26. the oppertuny to improve
27. <our environmental and social welfare standards>.

In this excerpt, the question is negatively prefaced, again with a reference to the GF agreement (line 1), similarly to Excerpt 2. In lines 1-4, the MP brings up the negative effects of jeopardizing the GF agreement, and argues that the deal proposed by the PM would complicate the relationship with Ireland and result in a *smugglers paradise.* The MP also refers to positive *regulations* and *environmental standards* created by his own party that are risked through the actions of the PM in lines 5-6. In lines 7-8, the MP argues that the PM has not delivered what he promised his voters, and elaborates on this by accusing the PM of being *scared* of letting people vote in a new referendum in lines 9-10. The PM starts his turn by calling the negative comments *satirical*, and by accusing the opposite party of not wanting a new *general election* (lines 11-17). The PM then explains that he is willing to discuss the proposal further, and that the oppositional party is putting forth a negative *caricature* (lines 18-23). Lastly, the PM brings up the possibility of improving the *environmental and social welfare standards* of the UK

(lines 24-27). This can be seen in contrast to the way the oppositional MP described the PM's, and his party's actions as harmful to the various standards already in place (lines 5-6).

Starting from line 1, the preface to the MP's question shows an adversarial dimension of *hostility,* which is described by Heritage and Clayman (2002) as the questioner being explicitly against the respondent's actions or statement. This hostility can be seen in the preface of the question in lines 1-6, but specifically in lines 5-6 where the MP portrays the actions of his own party as something positive, which the PM in turn is trying to undo with negative actions (*scrapping all of the labour regulations, environmental standards and other standards)*. The question in lines 9 to 10 is another example of adversarial questioning as it asserts a negative trait upon the PM, due to the use of the evaluative term *scared*. The question also contains a hostile presupposition, namely that the PM indeed is scared of letting the voters decide whether the UK leaves the EU in a new referendum. In comparison to the MP in Excerpt 3, the MP in Excerpt 4 does not mitigate the adversarial question through mitigating actions. The lack of mitigations gives this question an adversarial dimension of *directness*, as described by Clayman and Heritage (2002). Similar to Excerpt 2, the question-formatted turn in this Excerpt is designed as a question, but functions as a form of accusation due to the negative assessment of the PM's actions.

The PM stops the production of his initial utterance in line 11 and restarts by engaging in two operations of self-repair (Schegloff, 2013): an insertion first (*I don't wish to be (.) to be u:h unnecessarily adversarial today*, lines 12-13), followed by a replacement (with *I think that is* in line 11 being replaced with *but it seems* in line 13). These operations mitigate the potential adverseness of the response. Specifically, with the insertion, the PM characterizes himself as a person who is not willingly pursuing conflict, while the verb used in the replacement (*it seems*) projects a lower epistemic stance than the initial phrase (*I think that is*). Despite the mitigation and the replacement repair, the response is still adversarial because of the following lines 14-17 in which the PM shifts focus towards the opposite party. The adverseness can be seen in the lexical choice of *satirical* in line 14, which portrays the opposite MP and his party as non-serious, and in line 16 where the PM emphasizes *<u>THAT</u> party.* By putting emphasis here, the PM is shifting focus to the oppositional party. This can be compared to what Lee (2013) describes a counter sequence and a nonanswer (section 2.4.2). In line 17, the PM also accuses the opposite party of not conceding to *a general election.* This comment can be seen in relation to the comment in line 10, where the PM is accused of not wanting a new *referendum*, and further reflects focus from the PM's party to the oppositional party.

In lines 18 to 19, the PM shifts from the first-person plural pronoun *we* and replaces it with first-person singular pronoun *I*, which is another instance of replacement repair. This shift could reflect a desire to take responsibility for the statement, which also entails responsibility over future discussions. The question-formatted accusation is followed by a denial in the response, which can be seen in lines 19-23

where the PM denies the *caricature* put forth by the MP. There is a contrast between the lexical items *satirical*, *caricature* and *serious*, which further indicates a shift in focus from the government party and the oppositional party. Specifically, the PM tries to portray himself as serious and willing to compromise and discuss, while trying to portray the oppositional party of being non-serious and satirical. Line 25 provides another instance of self-repair, where the PM stops his initial *this ha-* and replaces it with *this country*. This is likely a repair of a factual error, however, as *ha-* likely stands for *house*, a phrase often used when referring to the MPs in the HoC.

In summary, this question-response sequence is adversarial in several ways. Firstly, there are hostile presuppositions throughout lines 1-9, which can be considered as face-threatening as described by Tolson (2012). The adversarial dimensions of *directness* and *hostility* can also be seen (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). The lexical choices of the verb *peddled* and the adjective *scared* also convey hostility since they aim to describe the actions and characteristics of the PM in a negative way. The adversarial question is answered to with the initiation of a counter sequence, shifting focus to the oppositional party.

To summarise the excerpts presented, there are noticeable patterns regarding adversarial strategies seen in questions in the HoC. Hostile presuppositions can be seen in Excerpts 2, 3 and 4, both in questions and in prefaces to questions. The adversarial dimensions of hostility, assertiveness and directness can also be seen as adversarial strategies used in questions by members of the opposition. As has been exemplified through the excerpts, the dimension of hostility is the most common feature found in adversarial questions. Excerpt 3 is a noticeable example where the MP mitigates adverseness by conveying a K- stance. This sequence can still be seen as adversarial, however, especially compared to Excerpt 1 where the question is asked by a government member. Answer resistance can also be used as responses to adversarial questions by the PM. As seen in Excerpt 2, 3 and 4, the PM can challenge the base on which the question was founded, or produce a counter sequence to evade answering the question.

5. Conclusion

To conclude this essay, this section will discuss the research questions. The limitations of this study are also presented and discussed. The findings are then interpreted and discussed in the light of the previous research on adversarial questioning. The first and second research question aimed at analysing how often adversarial questions are formulated, and what kinds of adversarial strategies are being used. This essay concludes that adversarial strategies are commonly formulated by oppositional MPs, in 18 out of 25 questions, and that there are several adversarial strategies that can be found and compared with other studies on adversarial questioning. Excerpts 2, 3 and 4 in the qualitative analysis shows strategies of hostile presuppositions, which are described by Hayano (2013). Excerpt 2, 3 and 4 also show a dimension of hostility, as described by Clayman and Heritage (2002). This also shows how common the

dimension of hostility is. In Excerpt 2, one can also find the assertion of negative traits, something described by Tolson (2012) as another strategy. Assertive statements in prefacing sequences, which can be seen in Excerpt 3 for example, is another assertive strategy frequently being used.

The third research question aimed at answering whether questions from the oppositional party are more adversarial than questions from the government party. This essay finds that this indeed is the case, and that this can be seen in two aspects. The first aspect is frequency, which is shown by the number of adversarial questions from the oppositional parties in relation to the questions from the government party. As adversarial questions only can be found in questions from the oppositional parties, this paper concludes that the role of being an oppositional party is reflected in question design. Secondly, the questions are more adversarial in their degree of adverseness, which can be seen in the different adversarial strategies being used and in the adversarial dimensions of the question-turns.

The final research question sought to answer whether answers to adversarial questions show signs of resistance. This essay finds that answer resistance is common in responses to adversarial questions. A common pattern is seen where adversarial prefaces or questions are being challenged, which can be seen in Excerpt 4 for example. In these cases, the focus can be shifted from the government party to the oppositional party in a counter sequence, as described by Lee (2013). The premise on which the questions are founded can be debated by the respondent, which also functions as a form of answer evasion. Self-repairs can also work as a way to mitigate potentially adversarial responses, which is also exemplified in Excerpt 4.

There are various aspects that should be brought up considering the limitations of this study. Firstly, this study analyses one particular instance of HoC interaction, that being the ministerial statement. Since there are other activities within the HoC which this study does not cover, like question time, the study does not analyse interaction within the HoC in its entirety. Secondly, this study cannot reach a generalizable conclusion. The sample being studied is limited to one HoC meeting, which means that the sample size is small. One of the reasons for this is that ministerial statements are not as common as other activities in the HoC, so the amount of data available is limited. Comparing different instances of ministerial statements regarding the same topic could yield interesting results, in case of future studies.

The findings of this study are that adversarial questioning is not just a strategy used by journalists in political interviews. Instead, adversarial questioning can be seen and applied to the parliamentary domain. The conclusion is that the questions from the oppositional party are more adversarial, and that this most likely is because of the role of being an oppositional party member. This is concluded because of the difference in frequency of adversarial questions between government and oppositional party members, as well the adversarial features found. Explicitly expressing disagreements on policies is part of the role as a member of the opposition, which is why hostility is the most common feature found in

the data set. Lastly, one important finding is that the dimension of initiative is not as common as the other adversarial dimensions. This could be one important difference between political interviews and interactions in the HoC. As interaction is moderated in the HoC, there is less of a chance to take speaker initiative.

The findings of this study are therefore in line with previous studies that focus on adversarial questions. For example, Tolson's (2012) study focuses on how neutral interviews are becoming less common in favour of challenging interviews with adversarial elements. In my study, however, the interviewers asking adversarial questions are members of the opposition, and are therefore explicitly against the government party. This shows that the adversarial strategies being used in adversarial interviews also can be found in the parliamentary domain, where there is a clear opposition. The adversarial dimensions of hostility, assertiveness and directness, which can be seen in political interviews (Heritage & Clayman, 2002) cannot only be found in interviews, but also in the parliamentary domain with an explicit opposition. The adversarial dimension of initiative, however, is not as frequent as the other dimensions, which could be because of how speakership is moderated by the Mr Speaker. Lastly, the answer resistance found in the excerpts is also in line with previous literature. For example, the production of a counter sequence has been described by Lee (2013). As a conclusion, the two domains of political interviewing and parliament interaction share similarities regarding adversarial questioning.

It is perhaps easy to conclude that the oppositional parties should challenge the government parties during question time, but it is also important to further define how this is managed in practice. This paper has aimed to be a step in that direction. As for future studies, it would be interesting to look at other question-response sequences with other interactants in parliament, as well as to further investigate the question design and action of questions from different parties. Lastly, this paper aims at contributing to the existing research on adversarial questioning, and it is my hope that future CA research will analyse the parliamentary domain in terms of adversarial strategies further.

References

Clayman, S. E. (2013). Turn-constructional units and the transition-relevance place. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 150-166). New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Clayman, S. E. & Heritage, J. (2002). Questioning presidents: Journalistic deference and adversarialness in the press conferences of U.S. presidents Eisenhower and Reagan. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4), 749–775. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2002.tb02572.x

Drew, P. (2013). Turn design. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook or conversation analysis.* (pp. 131-149). New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Fetzer A (2014) I think, I mean and I believe in political discourse: Collocates, functions and distribution. *Functions of Language* 21(1): 67–94, doi: 10.1075/fol.21.1.05fet

Fox, B. A. & Thompson, S. A. (2010). Responses to wh-questions in English conversation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction.* 43(2), 133-156, doi: 10.1080/08351811003751680.

Fraser, B. (2010). Pragmatic competence: The case of hedging. In Schneider, S., Mihatsch, W., & Kaltenböck, G. (Eds.). *New Approaches to Hedging.* (1st ed., pp. 15-34) Bingley, UK: Brill.

Hayano, K. (2013). Question design in conversation. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 395-414) New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Hepburn, A. & Bolden, B. G. (2013) The conversation analytic approach to transcription. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 57-76) New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Heritage, J. (2013). Epistemics in conversation. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 370-394) New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Heritage, J. & Clayman, S. (2010). *Talk in action: Interactions, identities and institutions.* Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Heritage, J. & Raymond, G. (2012). Navigating epistemic landscapes: Acquiescence, agency and resistance in responses to polar questions. In J. De Ruiter (Ed.), *Questions: Formal, Functional and Interactional Perspectives* (Language Culture and Cognition, pp. 179-192). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139045414.013

House of commons Hansard. (2019). *Brexit negotiations 03 October 2019 volume 664.* Retrieved 2019-12-11, from https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-10-03/debates/585F872D-9372-4448-A32F-5CEC0FD49FB7/BrexitNegotiations

Ilie, C. (2010). *European Parliaments under scrutiny: Discourse strategies and interaction practices.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V.

Jefferson, G. (2004) Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In Lerner, G.H. (Ed.). *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation.* Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Lee, S. (2013). Response design in conversation. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 415-432). New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Lethinen, E. (2013). Hedging, knowledge and interaction: Doctors' and clients' talk about medical information and client experiences in genetic counseling. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 92 (1), 31-37, doi: 10.1016/j.pec.2013.02.005

Levinson, S. C. (2013). Action formation and ascription. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 103-130) New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Meyer, P. G. (1997). Hedging strategies in written academic discourse: Strengthening the argument by weakening the claim. In Markkanen, R., & Schröder, H. (Eds.). *Hedging and discourse: Approaches to the analysis of a pragmatic phenomenon in academic texts*. (pp. 21-41). Berlin: De Gruyter.

Mondada, L. (2013). The Conversation analytic approach to data collection. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 32-56). New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Schegloff, E. A. (2013). Ten operations in self-initiated, same-turn repair. In Hayashi, M., Raymond, G. & Sidnell, J. (Eds.). *Conversational repair and human understanding*. (pp. 41-70). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stivers, T. (2013). Sequence organization. In Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (Eds.). *The handbook of conversation analysis.* (pp. 191-209). New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Tolson, A. (2012). ''You'll need a miracle to win this election'' (J. Paxman 2005): Interviewer assertiveness in UK general elections 1983–2010. *Discourse, Context and Media*, 1 (1), 45-53, doi: 10.1016/j.dcm.2012.05.003

UK parliament. (2019a). *Ministerial statements*. Retrieved 2019-12-08, from https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/statements/

UK parliament. (2019b). *Question time*. Retrieved 2019-12-08, from https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/questions/

UK parliament. (2019c). *House of Commons Thursday 3 October 2019* [Video]. Retrieved 2020-09-12, from https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/fd3b2d1f-a6b6-447e-ade3-4cc4c43e08d7

Appendix

Transcription conventions in conversation analysis, based on Jefferson (2004)

- The left margin of the transcript shows abbreviations for speaker identity.

PM:	Abbreviation of identified speaker.
PP:	Multiple speakers talking at the same time.

- Symbols

[ ]	Speech in bracket signals overlapping speech between two speakers.
=	A contiguous utterance, there is no gap between two turns.
(.)	A slight pause in speech lasting less than a second.
yes.	A period signals falling intonation.
yes,	A comma signals low-rising intonation, indicating a continuation.
?	Question mark signals rising intonation.
¿	Up-side down question mark signals rising intonation, stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark.
!	Exclamation mark signals emphasis and falling intonation.
↑	Upwards arrow signals marked rising intonation.
↓	Downward arrow signals marked falling intonation.
well-	A hyphen signals a speech that is ending abruptly.
<u>may</u>be	Lines signal stress on underlined letters.
WHY	Capitalized letters signals loud speech.
.hh	This signals audible in-drawn breaths.
<this is why>	This signals hastily delivered speech, compared with surrounding speech.
>this is why<	This signals speech delivered slowly, compared with surrounding speech.
almost	Asterisks signal a raspy or creaky voice.
((unintelligible))	This signals speech that is unintelligible.