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Research at the University of York St John

Facts as social action in political debates about the European Union

Abtract

This paper focuses on the argumentative role of making factual claims and counterclaims in broadcast political debates. Despite the rise of "post-truth politics", this paper argues that orientations to issues of 'fact' and 'truth' are a live and controversial matter when debating the European Union. Using Discursive Psychology (DP) the analysis is on how politicians use fact-based (counter)claims in multi-party interactions, in the form of debates about the UK and the European Union. Three types of factual challenges are presented to illustrate the rhetorical function of claims: challenging the essence of an argument, providing another fact to re-contextualise the preceding fact and using hypothetical scenarios to undermine facts. The analysis demonstrates that the use of facts is a highly strategic, argumentative, matter. This study, understood against a backdrop of the rise of "post-truth politics", highlights that concepts of 'fact' and 'truth' are not done away with; rather they are an argumentative resource and need to be understood in their fragmentary and rhetorical context.

Keywords

European Union, political discourse, discursive psychology, political debates, post-truth politics

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Introduction

Political psychology, being a problem-focused field, has developed as a response to social issues (Nesbitt-Larking & Kinnvall, 2012). In order to stay relevant, it must be able to develop analytical frameworks appropriate to a 'globalising world' (ibid.). Indeed, as Tileagă (2013, p. 187) has noted, "one of the major challenges of political psychology rests with how best to promote alternative ways of doing political psychology". One area where something novel can be brought is in the study of political communication. The analysis and scrutiny of politicians' talk, in speeches or debates, has become particularly prominent in light of far-reaching political events such as the latest US elections and the UK's decision to leave the European Union. It is a prominent area where ideologies conflict. Much of the way these issues are framed as political, controversial, worthy of public attention and so forth are through media, of which broadcast political debates are a prominent feature. Therefore, it is crucial that one has the appropriate scientific tools, quantitative and qualitative, to analyse these debates.

The research on British political discourse covers a wide range of topics, with the work ranging from psychological (Márquez, 2010) to political science (Hay & Smith, 2010) and beyond. These studies provide a good overview of how political discourse(s) may unfold. The contribution of Discursive Psychology (DP) is to look at discourse in a detailed, situated, manner (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992), but for now it is worth pointing out that DP enables us to look at multi-party interactions in a political setting, an area so far relatively under-researched, in a detailed manner. Multi-party interactions are a widespread practice in Western democratic societies, often in the form of debates or political talk shows. Thus, even though this paper analyses debates about the relationship between the EU and UK, it also captures a practice that is common in many other countries.

There has been talk of the rise of 'post-truth politics' – that is, the increased media attention and electoral success of politicians who can be broadly defined as populist or advocates of a populist agenda. This may well indicate that the nature of political discourse is changing, but it would be an oversimplification to state that for post-truth political discourse "truth and consistency are unimportant" (Paxton, 2017, pp. 22). In fact, the case may even be the opposite, and I will return to this point later.

Being a relatively novel concept spoken in conjunction with contemporary political discourse, there is little research into 'post-truth politics' (Lockie, 2017). Some newspaper articles decry 'post-truth politics' as a move away from the realm of facts, into that of emotional appeal (e.g., Suiter, 2016). The scholarly response has been notably slower, but it has, for the most, also been more cautious in prescribing what 'post-truth politics' may mean. In psychology, Muñoz (2017) argues along similar lines; that we could to seek to understand the persuasive potential of 'post-truth politics' because of its emotional appeal (as a somatic marker) to the individual. However, this argument takes 'post-truth politics' at face value and tells us little of what is meant by it. Lockie (2017) acknowledges 'post-truth politics' as an issue, to a degree of a battle between emotion and fact. However, he argues that the matter is one of considerable complexity which cannot be resolved by 'merely' introducing more facts. What is needed is a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon itself. A very genuine attempt at this is made by Hopkin and Rosamond (2017) who look at how political 'bullshit' (Frankfurt, 2005) has permeated British political discourse on economics, treating 'post-truth politics' as a domain particularly suited for 'bullshit'. Indeed, Hopkin and Rosamond note that 'post-truth politics' is a place "where

bullshit flourishes" (pp. 4). With the term 'bullshit' they refer to a hypothetical distinction between a politician speaking an untruth unknowingly: had a politician spoken the untruth knowingly, this would have been a lie, as it orients us to what the truth is, in a conscious effort to move away from it. The rise of 'bullshit', Hopkin and Rosamond (2017) argue, has come about because of the "broader hollowing out of Western democratic politics" (pp. 11). Political 'bullshit' becomes particularly corrosive because of its abundance amongst an electorate that consists of 'cognitive misers' more likely to respond to authoritative statements that accompany the 'bullshit' content.

What Hopkin and Rosamond (2017), Lockie (2017) and Muñoz (2017) have in common is the recognition that 'post-truth politics' signifies some kind of distancing away from what could be conventionally called as truth or fact. That said, we do not need an absolute definition of what 'post-truth politics' is or is not, but, as a matter of paramount importance, we should be aware that the concern with 'post-truth politics' does not signify a straightforward move away from the concepts of 'fact' and 'truth'. While newspaper articles may claim that 'post-truth politics' implies the death of 'facts' in political discourse, scholarly work is reluctant to go that far. Such a claim would be an overstatement which does not do justice to the complexity of the matter at hand.

When talking of 'bullshit', Hopkin and Rosamond (2017) underline the importance of political discourse as a practice. They tend to ascribe 'bullshit' as a problem because it appeals to the voting 'cognitive misers'; it is an untruth that is seen to taint voting behaviour. Their work highlights the importance of discourse, but does not address two particularly relevant points. First, they do not treat political discourse as argumentative in nature. Discourse in general, and political discourse in particular, needs to be examined in its argumentative context to so that we can better understand its function (Billig, 1991; 1996).

Instead, Hopkin and Rosamond (2017) theorise that a voter is a reluctant 'miser', a subject of political 'bullshit' and, faced with the Sisyphean task of seeking for the 'truth', votes in a counterproductive manner. Second, they leave the concept of 'bullshit' a purely abstract construction. They suggest no means of determining whether a politician is "actually" lying or 'bullshitting'; a practicable method of distinguishing the two is absent. That said, to try to determine whether someone has lied or not would be to miss the point, but instead we should give due consideration to what bullshit *does* and what it *argues* for. 'Bullshit', and by extension 'post-truth politics', should be viewed less as concepts, abstract or not, in need of a clear operationalisation and measurement, and more as indicators of the rhetorical work that goes on in political discourse. 'Post-truth politics' perhaps ought to be less about what is (not) real, and more about the rhetorical action that 'facts' and 'truth' perform.

Fact Construction

As this article demonstrates, there is consistent competition between politicians over who-knows-what and who-knows-better. This article argues that, when politicians debate the relationship between the UK and EU, they orient their discourse on issues of 'truth' and 'fact', and that these play a very serious rhetorical part. The focus is on what is conventionally called 'confrontational' (e.g. Hutchby, 1996) and rhetorical (Billig, 1991) talk, concentrating specifically on political discourse regarding the European Union and the role that 'facts' may play in it. I am particularly interested in the discursive construction of factual 'claims' and 'counterclaims'. That is, the range and variety of rhetorical challenges that politicians belonging to different political or 'ideological' camps set for each other, and the nature of the argumentative context in which these play out. The focus is on the use of, and orientation to, 'facts' and demonstrations of 'knowledge', and the type of argumentative

work they do. Billig (1991) argues that to argue for one position is to argue against its counterpart. If we are to take his point, we must also understand the argumentative function of factual descriptions and their action orientation (Edwards & Potter, 1992) in political discourse. Edelman (1977) argued that political language is about facts and values, and there are strong orientations to issues of truth and factuality. They play a central role in political argumentation and in trying to appeal to the audience. The argument here is that this is the case in contemporary debates about the European Union. The investigative aim is to explore how, in "post-truth politics", facts are constructed and made relevant as argumentative resources.

So how can one study the social – and, in this context, political – psychological use of 'facts' and 'truths' in broadcast political debates? How do politicians construct facts when debating against an ideological opponent? That is, how is one to go about analysing the use of factual accounts *in situ*? This article advocates a serious consideration of Discursive Psychology (DP) as an appropriate method of enquiry to this end. DP seeks to understand how psychological topics in talk (such as attitudes or attributions) are oriented to, reproduced and responded to by participants in the talk in a systematic and empirical manner: "the focus is on action, not cognition" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.154). Here, DP is used to analyse how the social construction of facts does more than inform the hearers of what the politician knows – they are designed to perform specific argumentative actions. It is in this capacity that DP can provide a powerful contribution to political psychology. The analytical approach proposed here seeks to contribute to political psychology from a critical, discursive, approach (Tileagă, 2013) which is paramount in order for us to understand the situated, social, nature of where the political and psychological meet.

DP has a history of dealing with political topics (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). It offers a respecification of psychological phenomena as social psychological practices analysable in the way people talk (e.g. Tileagă, 2007). The aim is to contribute to this trend – to suggest that the mobilisation of facts in the context of multi-party broadcast political debates is, above all, argumentative and far from a non-partisan description of an objective truth. The intention is not to intimate what is going on the minds of the debaters. If one wishes to understand how people orient and respond to factual accounts in political debates, then one is to look at how it is attended to and treated *in talk*. Mobilisation of facts is a highly argumentative action.

In my analysis of politicians' talk, I contend that one can successfully marry insights from work on rhetorical aspects of argumentation (e.g. Billig, 1991; 1996; Billig et al., 1988) and more recent work on 'epistemics' (e.g. Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Heritage, 2013) from Conversation Analysis (CA). Although rhetorical aspects of argumentative discourse are paramount to understanding the organisation of what might be called 'confrontational' political discourse, rhetorical analysis in and of itself is arguably not enough. As Billig has argued, "the meaning of discourse used in an argumentative context must be examined in terms of the contest between criticism and justification" (1996, p.121) and this is a key dimension of analysing argumentative political discourse. However, one also needs a dimension that takes into account the *epistemic* work that is being accomplished in talk; on account of political talk often being characterised by facts and values (Edelman, 1977). By epistemic work I mean a range of phenomena that have something to do with knowledge claims one makes and how one orients to their rights to make these knowledge claims (Heritage, 2013). In the context of analysing debates on the European Union, the issue of how 'knowledge' is mobilised for different rhetorical purposes (including criticism and justification) takes on special relevance. The common assumption in work on adversarial

discourse is that politicians challenge each other on substantive issues, yet the focus is more on face-saving strategies (Bull & Fetzer, 2010), institutional constraints (Robles, 2011) and so forth, than on how, by way of mobilising 'facts' and 'knowledge', they jostle for argumentative positions of dominance regarding these issues. 'Fact' and 'knowledge' based claims and counterclaims derive their function as rhetorical resources from the specific argumentative context in which they are embedded.

As a whole, the focus is on what might be referred to as 'institutional' and 'broadcast' talk. Institutional talk is usually characterised by a specific aim (Drew & Heritage, 1992), and in the case of televised debates, it is to have two or more opposing sides talk about an issue of contemporary political relevance. These debates have the possibility of informing the audience, for example, on the ideological stances of various politicians in a run-up to an election. However, one must note that these debates are not only institutional – they are also broadcast. Hutchby (2006) elaborates on other features relevant in broadcast talk, namely that there can be a mixture of institutional and everyday talk. This is in part possible because certain types of broadcast talk find themselves in the unclear region between being unscripted but also having some institutional constraints (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). The argument here is that in broadcast political debates the principle applies. These debates occur within the constraints of a specific aim – that is, the topic of the debate – of the interaction, thus maintaining at least some level of institutional context, while also being, to a degree, unscripted to allow for the debate to take place. Another crucial element is that broadcast talk is directed at and orients to an overhearing audience (Hutchby, 2006). It is this overhearing audience that the speakers can be seen to appeal to. The debaters are not trying to 'persuade' each other of the veracity of their views. Rather, debaters operate in a multi-axial communicative environment, which includes different types of audiences, party constituencies, and so forth. Because these debates orient to the audience but are unscripted,

"each party's capacity to realise his or her agenda is thoroughly contingent on the conduct of the other party" (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p.6). This is part of a wider political pattern of orienting to the audience: "Political facts that disturb people and produce conflict are often reconstructed so that they conform to general beliefs about what should be happening" (Edelman, 1977, p.37).

To have a broadcast debate implies that there is a controversy at hand. Yet, controversy over political matters cannot be simply taken for granted or understood as a rhetorical play against a background of avoiding, minimising, and mitigating threats to face. One should also be able to show how controversy is actually pursued and mobilised, and how 'facts', 'ideas', 'values' and so forth are produced as controversial. What we commonly refer to as politicians' 'agendas', or possibly their 'ideologies', are perhaps no more nor less than orientations to the various sources of political knowledge, and to how knowledge about the political world ought to be harvested, collected, and what values ought to underpin its appraisal. Whenever politicians articulate their opinions and agendas on social issues, they are doing more than merely putting forward their views, or spelling out their ready-made 'prejudices'. Politicians' agendas are perhaps never fully set in advance, "nor established from one perspective only" (Hutchby, 1996, p. 41). In argumentative talk, things like who is setting the agenda, what is the agenda, what is at stake, and so forth are not decidable in abstract or in practice, but rather are an analytic matter, and a matter of participants' orientations. Debaters must give meaning to their words, their descriptions of 'state of affairs' in a local, situated, communicative context. In order to do this, the debaters not only must argue that what they say is true, but that they possess relevant knowledge of the topic at hand and are entitled to make such assertions. As the analysis will show, the construction of both is often intertwined.

Method & Data

The corpus of data consists of a collection of broadcast political debates recorded between April 2012 and September 2014, of eight separate recordings totalling approximately three hours and fifty minutes of debates. Data was collected from YouTube and other television websites, such as the BBC, and contains either full debates or extracts from debates. The debates are collected from a variety of programmes such as *Newsnight*, *Question Time*, *The Record Europe*[1], a special edition of two debates on the European Union, to name a few. These are all in English, and where the topic of the debate is in some way related to Britain and its political relationship with the European Union. Each debate consisted of at least two politicians of opposing stances debating against each other, with a moderator. All extracts have been transcribed using the Jeffersonian system (e.g. Jefferson, 1984). The extracts presented are designed to reflect moments where, in lay terms, argumentation and disagreement are prominent. These were identified from the corpus through the process of data collection and transcription. Specifically, moments of prominent disagreement[2] were identified during the process of recording and initial transcription of the data. This is the first analytical step. These were chosen so that the argumentative dimension of political debates would be at the fore. Once enough extracts in which disagreements were prominent had been identified and transcribed in more detail, the focus shifted to looking at what these have in common with each other. The orientation to 'facts' and the way these are challenged stood out as prominent aspects of the collection. The analysis, generally speaking, draws inspiration from an amalgamation of literature relevant to DP. Specifically, Edwards and

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[1] No longer running; now replaced by *Daily Politics* on BBC.
[2] What is meant with prominent disagreement is moments where, in layman's terms, the debate turns more into an argument and there is unequivocal disagreement between politicians of opposing ideological stances.

Potter (1992), Potter (1996), and literature on rhetorical psychology and epistemics (cited earlier) have played a central part.

Analysis

In this study I take political discourse to be about facts and values (Edelman, 1977), and that there is something at stake: descriptions about states of affairs, particularly facts, carry an argumentative force. The 'knowledge work' in such debates can be bidirectional. One can use statements of facts, such as numbers, to claim the 'epistemic domain' that carries the identity of a competent politician, or one can use their uncontested epistemic domain – for example, their experiences, role as party leader, nationality – to advance an argument in the face of their opponents. This is not to say that these initially uncontested epistemic domains remain so as the debates advance. They are just as susceptible to being challenged as any other relevant topic in these debates. The general trend in the corpus is that once a politician produces something that is taken as 'fact', or as in some manner 'real', by the other debaters it is not contested *as a fact*[3]. This is not to say that claims of falsehoods do not take place, as they certainly do, but to resort to such a response too often would be counterproductive. Other methods of rhetorical undermining are needed.

Specifically, the data highlighted three ways to undermine factual claims – challenging the relevance of a claim, re-contextualising a claim, or offering a hypothetical challenge. What I contend to be a factual claim here is any type of claim by a politician about truth or reality. It can include reporting number-based facts as well as more straightforward descriptions of states-of-affairs. These ways of challenging should not be seen as an exhaustive list of the rhetorical means of making fact-based counterclaims. Rather, the point here is to illustrate

how 'facts' (factual versions of events, people, states-of-affairs, statistics, etc.) have a strongly argumentative function which warrants a closer analytical look.

Heritage points out that "when a speaker indicates that there is an imbalance of information between speaker and hearer, this indication is sufficient to motivate and warrant a sequence of interaction that will be closed when the imbalance is acknowledged as equalised for all practical purposes" (2012, p.32). When considering the context of broadcast political debates, and indeed contested political discourse, this suggests that 'imbalances of information' can be used to warrant sequences of disagreement. The implication is that to indicate an imbalance of information is to warrant further, argumentative, interaction. This action of contesting is based on the argumentative context and 'knowledge work' – to concede 'facts' or a given domain of 'knowledge' at particular points in a debate could well be rhetorically damaging; hence the need for a politician in a debate to provide counterclaims.

What is Relevant?

Arguments can often become arguments about where its essence is located (Billig, 1996), or, in other words, what is the most appropriate type of discourse for a particular matter. To challenge the essence of the argument, that the premise is not where it should be, is to argue that the matter is not talked about in a way that it should be. This carries its own rhetorical function.

Extract 1 demonstrates how the challenge over essence after a claim can be used to undermine a claim. It is from a political debate between Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom

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[3] Claims of dishonesty seem to be a rare case; consequently their discussion is left for another time.

Independence Party (UKIP) and Nick Clegg, the then-leader of the Liberal Democrat party,

who at the time was Deputy Prime Minister. Nick Ferrari moderated the debate. The sections

of analytical interest are highlighted in bold; this is also the case for subsequent extracts.

Extract 1

```
 1    CLE: let's bear down on the loopholes let's make sure people do
 2         play by the rules but let's not scare peopleby [by ]
 3    FAR:                                               [( )]
 4    CLE: claiming things that are not true which would ↑have the
 5    CLE: consequen[ce↓        ]
 6    FAR           [(alright)]
 7    CLE: of making us poorer and putting more people out of work
 8    FAR: [[yeah you didn't]
 9    CLE: [[t h a t      su]rely cannot be right.
10    FAR: =you [↑didn't answer the question did you↓]
11    FER:      [( )  Nigel  Nigel  Farage           ]
12    FAR: [[you didn't an]swer the question
13    FER: [[Nigel Farage ]
14    FAR: you try to do trickery with the twenty nine million saying
15         there aren't twenty nine you know why cos ↑two million have
16         left ↑already↓
17    AUD: {((laughter)
18    FAR: {.h ↑um they've gone
19    AUD: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxx x x x x x x x x x x x} x x
20    FAR: and they've gone to Italy and to ↑Spain↓}
21    FAR: =Nick you didn't answer the basic question
22         (.2)
23    FAR: .h I'm not claiming twenty ni:ne million people (.) have the
24         right to come to Britain.
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        (Approximately 10 lines of transcript omitted.)

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47    CLE:                                   it is it is] not the t-case
48         that anyone can m[ove] to this country
49    FAR:                  [hhh]
50    CLE: and simply claim benefits simply u-
51    CLE: [[live here ]
52    FAR: [[↑didn't me]ntion [benefits]
53    CLE:                    [let me  ] let me
54    CLE: [[let me l- let me]
55    FAR: [[I didn't=y- y-   ] you keep doing be[nefits]
56    CLE:                                       [no    ]
57    CLE: let m[e     ]
58    FAR:      [we're] talking about the free movement of people and
59    FAR: the [ability]
60    FER:     [could I]
61    FER: could I just [make ( )  could I ( )]
62    FAR:              [in John's industry   ]
63    FER: [[mister Farage  ]
64    FAR: [[to get a ↑jo:b↓]
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65   X: [[( )   ]

At the start of the extract Nick Clegg argues for the positive influence of immigration, further implying that the anti-immigration side of the debate is not being truthful (lines 2, 4). It is at this point that Farage begins to repeatedly challenge Clegg on not having answered the question or straying off topic (lines 8, 10, 12). Rather than pick on any particular aspect of Clegg's talk as contestable, Farage instead challenges Clegg by way of denying that Clegg's claim is within the bounds of the topic at hand. The 'knowledge work' ranges from the use of negative interrogatives ("you didn't answer the question did you", line 20 – Heritage, 2002), which strongly indexes and projects agreement to the overhearing audience, to unmitigated assessments ("I'm claiming four hundred and eighty five million people have the total unconditional right to come to this country", lines 36-38 – Heritage & Raymond, 2005) and extreme case formulations that orient to a potentially disagreeing audience as well ("you keep doing benefits", line 55 – Pomerantz, 1986). As a rhetorical act, claiming what has been said is off point does the work of challenging the entirety of the claim without honing in on any particular aspect of it.

By way of claiming that Clegg's claim is off point, a larger stretch of talk is rhetorically undermined, and Farage portrays himself as knowledgeable of both the topic of the debate and how the debate should be conducted. Crucially, Farage does so without offering an explicit counter to the claim of having got his numbers wrong, beyond such claim being 'trickery' (line 14).In this way, the debate on the legitimacy of 29 million is left relatively short as Farage moves quickly to challenge Clegg on the grounds of relevance. Of course this is a crucial part of providing a counterclaim to having spoken an untruth but it is done by the indirect route of challenging the relevance of the claim as a whole, thus glossing over the accusation of dishonesty. Furthermore, in doing so, it projects a potential, though in this instance unrealised, accusation of dishonesty as something not fitting for the matter at hand.

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Facts Matter

The focus of this section is on how politicians will produce versions or states-of-affairs by drawing upon 'facts' or factual information, and how these 'facts' are contested. When a politician described something in a factual manner in the present dataset, it was rarely treated as untrue. One strategy for the opponent, then, is to focus on the more contestable aspects, such challenging their relevance (above). However, the debates would not be debates if some of the 'facts' were not challenged in some ways. The crucial difference is context. The facts that do become contested, or otherwise rhetorically undermined, are often ones that can have a strong argumentative impact. If some facts are not treated as contestable, but equally cannot be heard to be left unchallenged, how can a politician provide a counterclaim against these?

One strategy is to produce another 'fact' that in some manner undermines the previous one, mostly by way of challenging its relevance to the claim made. Consider the following example, from a debate over the UK's EU rebate. It is an episode of *The Record Europe*, in which Nigel Farage is arguing against the EU, Graham Watson and Dan Jørgensen (absent in extract below) in favour of the EU and presented by Shirin Wheeler:

Extract 2

```
1   FAR: but=y'know this argument about what it cost British people .hh
2        whether we talk gross or net this year our net contribution to
3        the EU is gonno be <nine billion> pounds. and what people see
4        (.2) .h is (.) they see in their own lives at the moment y'know
5        the local gravedigger or sweep streete- being sAcked as a
6        result of local government (.) ah cUts and ↑what they see ↓here
7
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(Approximately 70 lines of transcript omitted)

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77  WAT: where Nigel's argument falls down is he's said it's terrible
78       that the UK is paying nine billion .h every every year to to- in
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79       net to the European Union which will be case next year. .h ↑but↓
80       what he doesn't point out is that we're paying sixty billion a
81       year for health .h we're paying a hundred and thirty two billion
82       a year for social security and b[enefits    ]
83   X:                                          [(coughs)]
84 WAT: ↑for nine billion↓ it's all that's costing us we're ↑getting a
85       fantastic [deal↓ from the European] Union
86 FAR:          [what are we ( )  about ]
87 WAT: we're getting the solidarity of being part (.) of an association
88       of twenty seve[n    nations ]
89 FAR:              [hehhehhehheh]
90 WAT: =we're getting the diplomatic clout that it gives us we're
91       getting the clout that it gives us in trade talks
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Here, Watson quotes Nigel Farage's figure of £9 billion but changes the context in which it was originally expressed. Quoting the opponent is a particularly useful way to establish something as void of interest or unchallengeable by the opposition (Antaki & Leudar, 2001). Watson's counterclaim not only treats Farage's 'fact' as uncontested, but relies on its factuality to make it look less problematic when compared to the £60 billion for health services and £132 billion for social security and benefits. While the numerical facts go unchallenged, rhetorically there is a competition between particularisation and categorisation (Billig, 1996). Farage attempts to make the £9 billion stand apart and suggest that it is problematic due to it being a large amount, while Watson puts it into the same category as other necessary governmental costs as well as being much less in terms of cost. Further to highlighting the disparity in terms of cost, which in itself is a strong push towards the affordability and desirability of remaining in the EU, another implication to Watson's counterclaim is that, by listing the cost of the EU alongside other essential costs, to take issue with the EU is to take issue with other crucial parts of government spending. Farage does not challenge Watson's numerical facts, but he does resist (e.g. lines 86, 89) Watson's formulation that the UK is "getting a fantastic deal" (lines 84-85) – and marks a shift away from 'uncontested facts' in order to challenge Watson. In this way, the battle for primacy over the epistemic domain of the EU remains a live, and unresolved, issue in the debate, as both speakers attempt to present themselves as more knowledgeable of it for rhetorical ends.

Speakers do not always manage to introduce a new 'fact' into the debate without resistance from other speakers. In the extract below, the 'fact' that Britain is not a European country but is a global nation instead, is not treated as factual. In order to do this I will revisit a section that took place immediately before the start of Extract 2.

Extract 3

```
1    WHE: ah saying you know you've given you've sold it=
2    WHE: =[[down the river you've sold us down the river]
3    FAR: [[wh-  the rebate     is     because     ] the rebate was
4         put in place for Brit'n because we are not a European country
5         .h we are different .h our far[ming system was different]
6      X:                               [   (European) ( )   you ]
7    WHE: =£O:H [£that's a new one]
8    FAR:      [and  we are      ]
9      X:      [        ( )      ]
10   FAR: and=and unlike your countries ((addresses Jørgensen))
11   JØR: okay
12   FAR: unlike your countries. we're a globa[l nation]
13   JØR:                                     [  .hhh  ]
14       (.2)
15   FAR: we do a bigger proportion of=of our trade and our business .h
16        with the rest of the world than <any other> European country
17   JØR: [[((scoffs))]
18   FAR: [[we always ] have and=and=and my hope is that we'll go on
19        doing that
20   WAT: =°Den[mark is a glo]bal nation?°
21   FAR:      [so that's why]
22   WAT: Germany is [a global nation?]
23   FAR:           [no       Germ ]any
24   FAR: is not a global natio[n compared (with)] compared with
25   WHE:                      [the  Netherlands?]
26   FAR: Britain. (.) they're not none of them are we have a much
27        greater- proportion of trade across the world but=y'know this
28        argument about what it cost British people .hh
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Here, Farage is resisted on two claims: that Britain is not a European country, and that it is a global nation whereas other European countries are not. The first statement of 'fact' is resisted, uncharacteristically, by the moderator[4]. This is done by the use of 'oh' to signify a change of her mental state (Heritage, 1984), adopting a less serious tone to downgrade the seriousness of the claim, and voicing the claim as unexpected. The latter point indexes the notion that such a claim is potentially beyond the bounds of the debate. The second claim,

that other nations are not global, is resisted by Watson and the moderator with both of them listing countries as examples. It is crucial that Watson is the one offering the resistance, although Farage's claim is visibly addressed to Jørgensen. This is because Farage has invoked his 'British' identity by the use of 'we' (line 12) when addressing Jørgensen which simultaneously projects (Zimmermann, 1998) a 'non-British' identity on him, making salient a category-bound inappropriateness for Jørgensen to question the nature of Britain. Any reply by Jørgensen would index an 'exposure' of his interest (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). Watson, on the other hand, can offer the resistance as someone who the comment was not addressed to and, especially, as another British person. Having another British person respond to Farage's claim resists the notion that his view is a British one, and as such, challenges Farage on having exclusive rights to the epistemic domain related to Britain or 'Britishness'. This demonstrates how identities can be invoked to perform an occasioned form of action (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998), national in this instance, and how a similar invocation by another person present can be used to challenge this. Farage orients to this challenge by Watson by interrupting his conversational trajectory to respond to Watson (lines 21, 23). He has to offer some form of proof for his claim (proportion of trade across the globe) to someone with equal access to the same epistemic domain where his claim is rooted before it is accepted. A simple claim to know more, in this case, is not enough.

Hypotheticals

The previous section focused on how debaters in broadcast political debates produce new information by way of facts, to provide a new context to the previously stated fact by their

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[4] Moderators are, generally speaking, expected to follow an image of neutrality (Clayman, 1992).

opponent. Another way to produce a new piece of information is by way of hypotheticals. That is, a politician, in their counterclaim, will state something that *could* happen rather than something that is a stated fact. It may seem counterintuitive to discuss hypothetical scenarios in conjunction with those that orient to 'facts', but, as this section demonstrates, a functional construction of a hypothetical scenario still rests on 'factuality' in the sense that hypotheticals have to be feasible. It is the orientation to 'facts' that lends this feasibility to them.

Of relevance here is Conversation Analytic research into if/then formulations, where these are treated by other speakers as part of the same 'unit' even in extended turns (e.g. Lerner, 1991, Mazeland, 2007, and Kitzinger, 2008). That is, an 'if' formulation will project a (presumably) relevant 'then' segment to follow it. This can have a rhetorical dimension too, in that it can be used for claims and counterclaims. For example, a politician in a debate can use an 'if' to project that what they are saying is not the whole part of their claim without the 'then'. This can be particularly useful when there is a fight for the floor and the debater is interrupted. In argumentation, there need not be only the use of these words. In using a hypothetical, this kind of paired structure is implicit. In producing a hypothetical scenario, the onus is on the debater to also explain the meaning of the hypothetical to the interaction at hand. Hypothetical scenarios can be a particularly effective rhetorical device in another sense too, as they allow a politician to put out an argument without having to offer accountability for its factuality at the time. Furthermore, this device allows the politicians to continue to battle to present themselves as more 'knowledgeable' in the face of having to counter a seemingly uncontested statement of 'fact'.

Extract 4 is from the first of two debates between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage in early 2014. The debates, taking place on the 26[th] of March and 2[nd] of April, between the two then

party leaders, in the run up to the 2014 European parliament elections, focused particularly

on the relationship of the UK with the EU. The first debate was moderated by Nick Ferrari.

At this particular point, the topic of the talk is about the laws related to tourism set by the

EU. The audience in these debates have been selected based on their position in the EU

debate, ensuring that there is an even split between those who might support Clegg or

Farage. As such, audience participation and support by applause occurs in reaction to both

speakers.

Extract 4


```
1    CLE: I chuckle no:w >but it< wasn't funny then. .hhh They got
2         caught up in the Greek (.) legal system.=They ended up (.) <in
3         Greek jail.> (.) .hh They had n:o id>ea what was being< told
4         them, They had No >idea what w- charges were being< brought
5         against them, .hh They had <no legal assistance.> .hhh The
6         EUropean ↑Union has now pa:ssed ↑new rules, ↑new laws, .hh
7         which means that if Any of you ((gestures to audience)) (0.6)
8         Go on holiday,=ELsewhere in the European Un°ion° and you find
9         yourself on the ↑wrong side of the law, .hhh you'll get help
10        with interpre↑tation, .hh you'll get legal help, >you'll get
11        as<[sistance,=
12   FER:   [All: right.
13   FAR: [(H)Ehhh              [#hehhh        [#heh  [#↑hahhh
14   CLE: =[<↑Guess what> UKIP [did.    They [voted [against=
15   FAR: [#hehh          [#hehh
16   CLE: =[All of those [measures,
17   FAR:: [(I di- you-)]       [h e h=.h h h ]
18   CLE: [<   A No  t]her ex[ample> of the] European U[nion
19   FAR:                                               [Yeah,
20   CLE: <Keeping u[s     safe   ]and pro[TECting ou:r [rights.>
21   FAR:          [Ah(h)yeah hah]        [heh]        [hehehahhh=
22   FAR: =But if you get [arres[ted in Spai:n
23   FER:                 [Nigel-
24   AUD:                      [xxxxxxxxxxxxx=
25   AUD: =[xxxxxxx
26   FER:  [Nigel Farage,=
27   AUD:  [xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
28   FAR: =[If you- if you get arrested in Spai:n, Ni:ck,
29   AUD: xxxxxx=
30   FAR: =You get arrested in Spai:n, (0.2) >for something you<
31        haven't do:ne, (0.2) you may be left, (.) up to eighteen
32        ↑months in prison, (.) without even facing a charge. .h
33        We have a system of common law in this country, .hh
34        We've had it for eight hundred ye[a:rs,
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(Approximately 35 lines of transcript omitted.)

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71   FAR:                          [°Yea°]        [I've been in >the European
72        Parliament< now FIFteen years. They're getting a bit <cheesed
73        off> at me over there I've gotta tell you. .hhh And I:=
74   AUD:  [heh (h)ahah(h)ah[ah
75   FAR: =[.hh have not,   [I have not voted, (0.2) In fifteen years,
76        (0.2) for one (.) single piece of
77   FAR: legislation, (.) [That has=
78   FER:                  [#↓All right,
79   FAR: =added to the power base of the >European Commission in
80        Brussels,< [<and I never,>
81   CLE:           [Even when it m- <even wh[en it mea:ns,>]
82   FAR:                                    [I  n e v e r   ](.)
83   FAR: Ev[er
84   CLE:   [British to[urists,
85   FAR:              [will.
86   CLE: Even [when it means British tourists,] (0.2) Who get=
87   FAR:     [<I   n e v e r   e v e r> will. ]
88   CLE: =cau:ght
89   CLE: up, (.) [on the wrong side of the l]aw:, (.) When on=
90   FAR:         [< I  nev e r  w i:l l_ > ]
91   CLE: =Holid[ay, who need] (.)Translation,=
92   FAR:      [<I believe>]
93   CLE: =They need help¿ they l[aw:y ers,=
94   FER:                        [All right
95   CLE: >They need< as[sistance,
96   FAR:              [Nick I: belie[ve (I mean)
97   CLE:                            [Why is it that UKIP dogma is ↑so
98        strong now, .hhh You [<won't eve]n help,> .hhh
99   FER:                      [(        )]
100  CLE: British [tou:rists when they're on the >wr[ong side]
101  FAR:         [I'll tell you-                    [let me- ]
102  CLE: o' the< law:,
103  CLE: [[.hh
104  FAR: [[I'll [>tell you what th-< >>I'Ll TELl you WHA-<<]
105  CLE:       [O n :   ho li day   e l s e w h e r e ]
106       (.)
107  CLE: [[I just
108  FAR: [[I can- [I'LL TELL WHAT THE DOGmer is, The DOGmer is=
109  CLE:         [((shakes head with grimace))
110  CLE:  [((shakes head))
111  FAR: =[I believe (.) the best people to govern Brit'ain: are the
112       British people themsel:ves, (0.2)
113  FAR: not [the European [Union.
114  CLE:     [I'm ↑talking [about the British-
115  AUD:     [xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
116  FER:                   [Okay.=We should-
117  FAR: [That's (   )  ]
118  FER: [Let's move on,]
119  AUD: [xxxxxxxxxxxxx]xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
```

In this extract, Clegg is going to some lengths to describe the work done by the EU in favour

of the people. Note the delicacy regarding agency and action he uses when speaking of why

'these laws' might be of relevance to the audience (lines 7-11). Why would Clegg use an expression "wrong side of the law" instead of, say, "breaking the law"? If choice of words regarding descriptions is indicative of one's argumentative interest and stake then this softening around a sensitive topic is revealing. Not only does Clegg have to manage his argumentative claims in regard to someone who is challenging him, but he must do so in a way that orients and appeals to the overhearing audience. Furthermore, this orientation does the work of portraying the issue as one that is relevant to an audience member. Here, a hypothetical is used for rhetorical work but not by way of challenging Farage directly. The use of a hypothetical allows for a more delicate approach to making a point when its validity is reliant on the notion of an audience member – in other words, someone the speaker seeks to affiliate with – doing something socially undesirable. This way, Clegg is able to put forth his position without insinuating that members of the audience are in some way inclined to break the law. In terms of challenging Farage, it is done by arguing that the EU is acting in the interests of the audience and it is something that UKIP voted against.

In broadcast political debates the person who is argued with is not necessarily the one who is to be persuaded. This, arguably, has a consequence in the way these debates unfold. It allows a politician to be much more assertive in the debates, especially where hypothetical scenarios are concerned. For example, later on in Extract 4, on lines 97-98, 100 and 102, Nick Clegg poses a question. This is directly addressed toward the UKIP/Farage 'ideological' side of the debate. Such a strong assertion about Clegg's opponent would do little by way of 'persuading' them. This, understandably, may not be the aim in the first place. Such a separation between who is argued with and who is appealed to can be understood to make available certain argumentative resources – such as making direct assertions regarding the ideological opposition that may otherwise be less frequent; here by way of claiming that UKIP are governed by dogma against the interests of the British audience. This separation

23

adds to the ability of a debater to make certain pushes into the epistemic domain (Heritage, 2013) of their opponent. Clegg is stating that UKIP does not support the legislation implemented by the EU in aid of tourists. The way this claim is weaved into the argument is significant. It comes after having described at length the positive work brought about by the EU, and brings about a sharp contrast (lines 14, 16).

Here, the very nature of Clegg's hypothetical scenario carries with it the implication that UKIP has some sort of "dogma" that dictates their behaviour. Of course this descriptive word carries its own implication, namely that UKIP are acting out of 'ideological principles' that contrast with reason and the interest of the people, and not in accordance with the 'real' state of affairs. One must note the way it is weaved into the argument, as this is crucial for the argumentative work it does. It can be viewed as the 'then' part of the pair, where the 'if' is the hypothetical scenario of British people getting caught up on the wrong side of the law. Importantly, the 'then' part here is framed as an accusatory question (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). Rather than conceding Farage as the 'more knowledgeable', by being an accusatory 'then' formulation, the question pushes for Clegg as the 'more knowledgeable', as the phrasing of it presupposes the right to assert a particular state-of-affairs – one where the descriptive term attributes blame (Edwards & Potter, 1992) to UKIP.

The if/then contrast implies an element of surprise by the use of "guess what" and, as such, frames UKIP's action as unexpected – in the face of the positive action by the EU and, not coincidentally, common sense. The use of extreme case formulation – "*all* of those measures" – to bolster the argument, to imply intentionality by Farage, and to orient to a potentially disagreeing audience (Pomerantz, 1986), portrays this resistance as relatively enduring rather than a singular case. This type of use of an extreme case formulation, to indicate consistency of action, is used to build up an image of interest (Antaki, 1998) which,

in turn, carries the association of intentionality. As such, both the earlier descriptive talk and the statement about what UKIP has done are rhetorically, as well as contextually, co-dependent. This sort of exposing of the other debater's[5] action takes a first position – rhetorically, "epistemically" and sequentially – leaving the other person having to orient their talk in some way to what has been said.

If the persuasion is directed at the overhearing audience gives stronger argumentative resources for one debater, it will also do so for the target of the stronger claim. When Clegg speaks of UKIP's 'dogma', the directness of his claim allows an equally forceful response. In a sense, Farage – in lines 108, 111-112 – reclaims primacy of his (arguably) own epistemic domain by restating the dogma in terms of believing in the notion of 'British people ruling Britain' – precisely the main selling point of his political party which, then, would imply a positive thing for him and his supporters. This kind of stake confession (Potter, 1996), where Farage explicitly voices his interest in the matter, does the work of undermining the moral culpability of the said interest. It also ignores the hypothetical used by Clegg by orienting only to the 'then' part of the pair. In this way, Farage resists having to respond to the hypothetical scenario of British tourists on the wrong side of the law, which could be a rhetorically damaging notion to respond to, as UKIP voting against legislation to help tourists is treated as 'fact' by both debaters.

Returning to an earlier stretch of the debate, Clegg's claim (lines 14, 16) has to some extent pushed into Farage's epistemic domain, insofar as he has oriented to having primary access to the public actions of UKIP members, and Farage does not directly challenge it. Farage's counterclaim begins by the use of laughter, but the verbalised rhetorical challenge comes later, starting from line 22, by way of hypotheticals: *If* (lines 22 & 28) someone gets arrested

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[5] In argumentative terms, in these debates there is a degree of interchangeability between a person and a

in Spain, then they *may* (line 31) be left *up to* eighteen months in prison (line 31) without facing a charge. It is the avoidance of extreme case formulations in this instance that allows Farage to put out a hypothetical argument. In argumentative cases, extreme case formulations can be particularly contestable (Hutchby, 1996), so opting for the opposite approach, particularly to contrast with Clegg's claim, is designed precisely to resist undermining. In arguing for his position in this manner, without overtly challenging Clegg, Farage still manages to argue against Clegg, insofar as arguing for one position argues against its rhetorical counterpart (Billig, 1996).

Not all hypotheticals are as clearly structured as the 'if/then' formulation, but often they will follow along similar lines. Consider the following example, following from Extract 2.

Extract 5

```
1   WAT: ↑for nine billion↓ it's all that's costing us we're ↑getting a
2        fantastic [deal↓ from the European] Union
3   FAR:           [what are we ( )  about ]
4   WAT: we're getting the solidarity of being part (.) of an association
5        of twenty seve[n   nations ]
6   FAR:              [hehhehhehheh]
7   WAT: =we're getting the diplomatic clout that it gives us we're
8        getting the clout that it gives us in trade talks such as our
9   FAR: =zero
10  WAT: =free trade [agreement   with    with    eh     ]
11  FAR:            [↑zero we don- w- we don't ↑exist↓]
12  WAT: India for example?
13  FAR: =>↑we don't exist↓<
14  WAT: we are getting all of the benefits
15  WAT: of all of the Eu[ropean   ] policies
16  FAR:               [I'm sorry]
17  WAT: which [( ) money in the ( ) cons]tituency every ye[a r]
18  FAR:      [**Graham outside of the EU** ]              [**out**]**side of**
19       **the EU we could negotiate our own trade deal**
20  FAR: with [India   ]
21  MIT:     [(I- In-)]
22  FAR: as part of the EU we're banned from
23  FAR: doin[g so    and you talk about influence?]
24  WAT:    [**outside of       the        E:U:**     ]
25  WAT: **we would be like Norway [we would ha]ve to pay more**
26  FAR:                         [it's   n- ]
27  WAT: **money to trade** [( )]
```

particular side or organisation they may be representing. For example, to argue against a politician's competence in one area also does implicit criticism of their 'ideological position' and vice versa.

Here, Farage is introducing an example of something Britain could do outside the European Union: trade with India based on British interest rather than EU (lines 18-20). Note how in describing the hypothetical, British options are juxtaposed with the EU ones, creating an image of incompatibility between the two. Furthermore, Farage states what Britain *could* do outside the EU. The hypothetical carries with it what could be called an option to act without the necessary obligation to do so. By including this option in the hypothetical claim, it also implies that with the EU this is not the case, and, in fact, Farage goes on to state precisely that in lines 22-23.

Watson, in this case, opts to challenge Farage on his terms. As the contested point here is a hypothetical one, the use of a fact may not do enough rhetorical work of counterclaiming Farage's point. If Watson was to say, for example, something like "we are not outside the EU" it would do little by way of challenging Farage. Instead, he provides a similar hypothetical, which keeps the contested issue alive. In effect, Watson turns Farage's formulation into an 'if' of an 'if/then' pair and provides his own 'then' version of events, which suggests that being outside the EU is not necessarily a desirable matter. The important difference in Watson's resistance is that, while Farage speaks of available options ("we could negotiate" – line 19), he formulates his 'then' in deontic terms (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012) by speaking of a negative imperative ("we would have to" – line 25).

In suggesting that outside the EU Britain could do its own negotiations, Farage is claiming more than that. It is a situated response designed to challenge Watson, but it also does the wider rhetorical work of arguing for Farage's anti-EU stance. It is this notion that Watson is challenging as much as the situated response: "When speakers say something, they are often doing several different things at once" (Billig, 1992, p.40). The switch from 'could' to 'would' recognises this; it is designed to point out that Farage's argument comes at a cost. In

this case, it is an economical one, and it is one that can be generally used for both sides of an argument (ibid.). Just as Farage is arguing for more than "UK-outside-the-EU can negotiate its own trade treaties", so Watson is arguing for more than saying that this would cost Britain more. These claims and counterclaims orient to wider questions, such as if Britain should leave or stay in the European Union and why.

Conclusion

The aim has been to provide an overview of how politicians in broadcast political debates challenge fact-based claims; to highlight that facts play a rhetorical role. An approach that takes inspiration from the rhetorical work of Michael Billig and epistemic work of John Heritage and colleagues is advocated. Working with the notion that political discourse is about facts and values (Edelman, 1977), analysing the mobilisation of, orientation to, and responses to knowledge in talk, has a strong rhetorical function. By looking at how knowledge is treated in interaction in multi-party debates, it gives us an idea of how a politician will aim to present their views as the one that is 'correct' and how the others are in some way lacking.

Various ways of doing disagreement, counterclaiming, were analysed where the 'fact' claimed by a speaker was challenged by an ideological opponent. These methods of challenging orient around three questions in particular: what is relevant, which facts matter, and, finally, what is hypothetically possible? These are cases where the act of challenging a 'fact' has an argumentative role, and the challenge serves to undermine the other side of the debate and its advocates. The issue of relevance focuses on how a claim is challenged by questioning its relevance. The issue of which facts matter looks at how politicians can challenge 'facts' that are in and of themselves not contested. A common way of doing this is

to provide some other fact to alter the context in which these facts are to be debated over, and, as such, give a different rhetorical function to the fact. The dynamics of introducing new facts can change if a person with an arguably similar epistemic domain, such as a speaker of the same nationality challenging another on a nation-relevant issue, puts forth the challenge. Finally, hypotheticals are discussed. This is the introduction of potential scenarios based on certain actions, namely by way of using an 'if/then' approach. This is particularly useful for keeping a given issue live in the debate, because a factual response to a hypothetical claim may not be an effective counterclaim.

The aim has been to demonstrate a range of ways disagreement is done in multi-party broadcast debates, and the central argumentative role fact construction plays in it. It is by no means intended as an exhaustive collection of rhetorical work that is done in broadcast political debates. Rather, it is to give an idea of the range of ways claims and counterclaims can be made, and how orientations to knowledge and facts play a role in contested political discourse. What this article has demonstrated is that not only are factual descriptions action-oriented, as Potter (1996) demonstrates, but also highly rhetorical. Constructions of facts are not neutral reflections of an objective reality; they are rhetorical means to rhetorical ends.

This paper has added contemporary empirical evidence, in the context of debates about the European Union, to Edelman's argument that "political and ideological debate consists very largely of efforts to win acceptance of a particular categorisation of an issue in the face of competing efforts on behalf of a different one" (1977, p. 25). Using DP to analyse 'knowledge work' in broadcast political debates as a vehicle for doing argumentative work is a highly fruitful approach, by way of showing that constructions of 'facts', 'knowledge', and so forth are abundant in political argumentation and play a highly rhetorical role. This should

lead to a much wider appreciation of the importance of political and ideological conflicts that factual accounts play a part in.

This highlights another issue that needs to be addressed. The suggestion that the rise of post-truth politics implies a decline in the importance of 'truth' (Paxton, 2017) needs more nuance. It is not enough to say truth no longer matters. On the contrary, 'truth' and 'facts' are rhetorical resources that are key in understanding the unfolding of political debates and the way claim and counterclaims are made. Far from seeing a decline on talk about 'facts' and 'truths', what one can see in these debates is their abundance intertwined with ideological argumentation. The limited but growing scholarly work recognises the problematic nature of 'post-truth politics'. However it has tended not to recognise the rhetorical and argumentative work that is done with 'truth' and 'fact'. The empirical support for treating political talk as concerned with facts and values has shown us the contestability of what might be treated as 'fact/truth' in order to make arguments, at least when debating the European Union. One need not treat political talk as only to do with facts, values or truths in order to appreciate the importance of these used to create political arguments. This is not to question the existence of the facts that have been spoken, but to recognise that the way they are collated and used in talk is highly strategic. Ultimately, we need to appreciate the fine-tuned and occasioned work that political talk does; the ways positions are advocated and challenged, how contested political discourse unfolds, and how knowledge orientations are all used to argue for or against various ideologies. As 'ideology' is fragmentary in its social and interactive context (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), so one needs to be willing to treat a political talk as "fragmentary, unfinished and relative to the contexts in which it is performed" (Tileagă, 2013, p.188) in order to provide for a more exhaustive understanding for political psychology.

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