An analysis of fact construction in the EU referendum campaign

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The current study analysed the process of fact construction within data collected from debates during the 2016 EU referendum campaign. Using discourse analysis, this research highlighted three key ways in which facts were constructed. First, consensus and expert opinion was found to be used to both validate and undermine the facticity of accounts. Next, the claim that the UK sends £350 million to the EU was presented as representing a core reality of the debate, with this working to excuse any factual errors. Finally, speakers appealed to notions of common-sense and practicality in order to construct their anti-immigration views as being fair and reasonable. These findings corresponded with much of the current discursive literature regarding fact construction, and provide a detailed insight into political discourse in the so-called 'post-truth' era.

Table of Content

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Introduction

On June 23rd, 2016, the British electorate voted in a referendum that was set to determine the nature of the future relationship between the UK and the European Union. The current research adopts a discursive psychological perspective to analyse how facts were constructed by speakers in broadcast media debates during the referendum campaign from April to June 2016. To situate this research in its appropriate methodological context, this literature review will first identify the philosophical and sociological domains which inform discursive psychology, the key theory underpinning this analysis. This will include an overview of the anti-cognitivist views of the philosophers Wittgenstein and Ryle alongside a review of Austin's (1962) Speech Act theory and Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological approach to social interaction. The key principles of discursive psychology will then be identified, with the relativist nature of this methodology being considered in relation to the approach to knowledge and truth to be adopted in the present research. This will be followed by a review of the existing discursive literature on fact construction and political discourse. The final section will discuss the campaigning period which took place in the lead up to the EU referendum and explore the idea of 'post-truth' politics which surround it.

Discursive Psychology

The key perspective employed here to investigate fact construction in the EU referendum campaign is discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017). Discursive psychology is a form of discourse analysis, a qualitative research tool which investigates how language is used to perform social action (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Whilst discourse has traditionally been viewed as a medium through which pre-existing information is transparently conveyed, this method considers language to be generative rather than representational (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). This perspective emerged as a result of the 'turn to language' of the 1970s and 1980s, and draws on conceptual resources from a range of philosophical, sociological, and psychological traditions (Gralewski, 2011). For example, the work of the philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle was influential in the development of this theory due to their rejection of cognitive notions about the relationship between mental states and words (Hepburn, 2008). Ryle (2009) challenged the Cartesian assertion that analysis of language can be used to make inferences about the working of a speaker's mind, arguing that the lack of direct access to cognitive processes makes any correlations made between mental states and words redundant (Schoneberger, 1991). For Ryle, discursive acts are not "a clue to the working of minds, they are the workings" (Ryle, 2009, p.46). Similarly, Wittgenstein (as cited in Pitkin, 1993) proposed that the meaning of a word is derived from its usage. From this perspective, discourse is fundamentally active in that it constructs the world, rather than passively representing it (Carlson, 1985). Wittgenstein's philosophy was important in informing the principles of John Austin's (1962) speech act theory, a key precursor to the development of discourse analysis (Potter, 1996).

This thesis will next examine the ways in which Austin's (1962) research reflects the principals and practices of discursive psychology.

Speech Act Theory

Like Wittgenstein, Austin (1962) argued that language is a practical, rather than passive, medium (Potter, 1996). In the initial formation of his philosophy of speech acts, Austin (as cited in Potter, 2001) established two distinct language categories labelled 'constatives' and 'performatives' Constative utterances refer to descriptive statements that can be judged as true or false in their relation to an observed reality. Conversely, performative utterances function as a means of carrying out actions such as apologising and demanding, the truthfulness of which cannot be objectively determined (Austin, 1962). Austin (1962) then made a further distinction between types of performative utterances, grouping them into being either 'implicit' or 'explicit'. While the actions of explicit performatives can be seen to be categorical and definitive, implicit performatives are often ambiguous and context dependent, making it more difficult for the speaker's true intentions to be understood (Lyons, 1981). For example, the statement 'I order you to leave' is an explicit performative as it demands a specific action from the hearer. In comparison to this, 'Will you leave?' is an implicit performative as the interpretation of this request is subjective (Justová, 2006). However, Austin (1962) subsequently noted the existence of an overlap in criteria for what classified as constative and performative utterances. Subsequently, this led him to propose that constative utterances are not a unique class of language as had been traditionally assumed, as they too can be performative in nature and outcome (Potter, 2001).

Austin (1962) used this concept to build his theory of speech acts, a general account of language that provides a framework for how discursive acts are performed.
In order to examine the difference in 'saying something' and 'doing something', Austin (1962) isolated three basic language components which work simultaneously to form a speech act; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act refers to the

‘sense’ and ‘meaning’ of an utterance and is defined by Austin (1962, p.94) as ‘performing an act of saying something’. While locutionary acts focus on the actual words uttered by the speaker, illocutionary acts are instead concerned with the intention behind each utterance (Potter, 2001). This act is central to Austin’s theory, and introduced the concept of an ‘illocutionary force’ to our understanding of language use (Austin, 1962). Illocutionary force is defined as being a decisive factor in making an utterance a speech act, with Potter (2001) using the example that the phrase ‘Can you phone Elaine?’ can be a request or a question depending on the force used. Finally, perlocutionary acts are performed so as to produce an effect or consequence. This differs from the notion of illocutionary force as this act is only considered successful if the hearer completes the intended action (Kang, 2013).

Austin’s (1962) speech act theory, alongside Searle’s (1969) subsequent development of it, have both been influential in informing the practice of discourse analysis (Potter, 1996). The primary reason for this is that Austin (1962) both identifies and labels the rhetorical devices which result in a speech act, with this advancing the view of language use existing as an action that can be classified, and therefore analysed (Juez, 2009). In addition to this, speech act theory also provides discursive analysts with a framework for understanding how utterances are formed to create a meaningful and coherent sequence (Brown & Yule, 1983). However, both Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) have been criticised by Derrida (as cited in Potter, 1996) for overemphasising the intentional nature of performative utterances and neglecting to investigate ‘non-serious’ acts such as humour and irony in favour of analysing language use within ‘ordinary circumstances’ (Potter, 2001). Furthermore, Potter (1996) cites the problematic implications of Austin’s tendency to use made-up examples of dialogue to display the workings of his theory, and notes that advocates of his framework often struggle to account for the separation of form and function due to their oversimplification of the actions performed by speech classes such as statements. Therefore, whilst Austin (1962)

significantly contributed to our philosophical understanding of language, Speech Act theory can be seen as providing only a preliminary insight into the relationship between utterances and actions (Potter, 1996).

According to Cooren (2015), Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts shares many tenets with the ethnomethodological approach to social interaction, another theoretical framework which has informed the practice of discourse analysis. In order to understand the role of ethnomethodology in the development of discursive psychology, we must first examine its theoretical claims regarding the nature of language.

Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology is a branch of research pioneered by Garfinkel (1967) which is primarily interested in studying the methods and procedures used by members of society to navigate and make sense of social life (Heritage, 1984). Central to ethnomethodology is the idea that great insight can be gained into social processes and action through the analysis of talk in mundane, everyday interactions (Linstead, 2006). This method was developed by Garfinkel (1967), who was primarily concerned with how social order is created and sustained by individuals unconsciously following implicit rules of interaction. Garfinkel (1967) theorised that these established norms are maintained in part due to the personal benefits gained through following them in relation to factors such as status and perception. This explanation carries the assumption that individuals actively reject challenges to the status quo in favour of having certainty and stability in their everyday life (Scott, 2009). Garfinkel also proposed that these implicit rules of interaction are substantiated through the taken for granted assumption that the social order exists as a reflection of an objective reality and is therefore unchangeable (Scott, 2009). In order to obtain insight into this phenomenon Garfinkel (1967) instructed his students to carry out 'breaching experiments', in which social

processes were identified and examined through the breaking or disturbance of norms in ordinary interactions (Heritage, 1984).

From these experiments, Garfinkel (1967) made several observations about the different rules which govern everyday encounters. One such social rule identified is indexicality, which refers to the way in which the meaning and interpretation of speech is occasioned and dependent on context (Potter, 1996). This means that in talk there is an assumption that all members have a shared understanding of the situation, with this enabling speakers to use figurative language and refer to factors outside of the immediate conversation (Scott, 2009). Garfinkel (1967) found that when the rule of indexicality was broken by his students, participants they interacted with would respond with confusion and anger, often accusing the student of 'being difficult' or 'behaving strangely'. For example, when playing a game of noughts and crosses the experimenter would erase the participant's mark and move it to a new cell. This departure from the accepted norms of the game led to indignant responses from subjects (Garfinkel, 1963). These findings can be seen to represent how challenges towards taken for granted knowledge of social order result in the disturbance of individuals' self-perception and their understanding of reality (Scott, 2009). Related to this, Garfinkel (1967) also demonstrated how individuals make sense of their experiences through a process labelled the documentary method of interpretation. This method proposes the existence of a circular process in which perceived patterns of discourse are used to understand future instances of talk. This understanding then modifies expectations of social interactions, with this in turn informing how utterances are interpreted (Potter, 1996). This method embodies the ethnomethodological concept of reflexivity, which accounts for the role of discourse in shaping reality (Potter, 1996).

The study of ethnomethodology has played an important role in the development of discourse analysis, with Woofitt (2005) citing its influence in Potter and Wetherell's (1987) subsequent discursive work. Garfinkel's research highlighted the importance of social psychologists considering the role of discursive elements in the process of sense-making and social actions. As with discourse analysis, practitioners of ethnomethodology advocate the analysis of these concepts within a variety of different contexts, including mundane and institutional settings (Wiggins, 2017). Furthermore, the concepts of indexicality and reflexivity provided a basis for discursive psychologists to propose that "talk is not merely about actions, events, and situations, it is also a potent and constitutive part of those actions, events, and situations" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.21). However, despite having grounding in ethnomethodological approaches, Rodrigues and Braga (2014) argue that discourse analysis is not concerned with the same issues, nor does it share the same goals, as this method. The main reason for this is that whilst discourse analysts recognise and account for the interactive and multifaceted purposes of discourse, the ethnomethodological approach is more fixed in its view that the meaning of talk is derived from the speakers' preconceived assumptions about the social context (Rodrigues & Braga, 2014).

Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological research has informed the work of conversation analysts such as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) who also studied the structure of everyday interactions (Woofitt, 2005). I will next explore the similarities and differences between conversation analysis (CA) and discourse analysis (DA) and evaluate the extent to which CA can be said to have informed the practice of discursive psychology.

Conversation Analysis

The method of conversation analysis is primarily concerned with mapping the organised production of sequences of speech (Hutchby & Woffitt, 2008). This concern is grounded within the main tenets of this approach. One such tenet, as summarised by Peräkylä (2004) is

that talk is viewed as action due to the active role it takes in shaping social interaction. This theoretical position has substantial implications for the practice of conversation analysis as the organisation of actions such as demanding or complaining is viewed as an action in and of itself, and should therefore be analysed by researchers (Peräkylä, 2004). In relation to this, another key assumption of conversation analysis is that actions in discourse are structurally organised so as to be sensitive to their sequential role (Peräkylä, 2004; Potter, 1996). This means that in order for speakers to successfully perform actions, they must first demonstrate that what they are saying is appropriately responsive to the current conversation. The analytic focus on sequential organisation is significant to the study of discourse as it enables researchers to gain insight into language without having to make interpretative claims on behalf of the speaker (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). A final assumption made by conversation analysts is that discourse is active in creating and maintaining an intersubjective reality (Peräkylä, 2004). Intersubjectivity refers to the way in which people's different perspectives of the world converge together in order to establish a shared understanding of their circumstances (Heritage, 1984). The existence of a shared understanding is central to the function of everyday interaction, and conversation analysis has been instrumental in advancing research on this concept. As conversation analysts view talk as a medium through which intersubjectivity is established and maintained, this enables them to examine how different perspectives converge in the social world (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

The principles and practice of conversation analysis has informed discursive psychology in several ways. Wiggins (2017) provides an overview of this, noting that CA's use of Jeffersonian transcriptions, examination of details such as pitch and pauses, focus on sequential organisation and interest in naturally occurring mundane talk are all reflected in how discursive psychologists conduct research. addition to this, the early work of conversation analysts Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) foregrounded the notion that

conversation can be used to analyse how talk produces social action (Wooffitt, 2005). This set a precedent for later discursive work such as that conducted by Gilbert & Mulkay (1984) and presented a challenge to the way in which the disciplines of psychology and sociology traditionally viewed language as a cognitive or developmental process (Wooffitt, 2005).

However, despite these similarities there exists a distinct difference between certain aspects of these approaches. For example, Wooffitt (2005) notes that while conversation analysis is largely concerned with the specific details of how interaction is coordinated and managed by participants, discursive psychologists instead focus on the broader social functions performed through talk.

This distinction in analytic focus has implications for the research outcomes of these two methods as while CA presents observations about sequential organisation as central to their findings, discourse analysists instead place importance on the role of rhetorical organisation (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Whilst both approaches have been accused of being overly invested in the trivial and mundane aspects of discourse (Wooffitt, 2005), conversation analysis has been particularly criticised for its apparent refusal to engage with politically and socially relevant content (Wetherell, 1998). This criticism has been challenged by conversation analysts such as Schegloff (1999) for being disingenuous and misinformed, and in more recent years CA has been used to cover a variety of more pressing topics including feminism, racism, and poverty (Silverman, 2011). While discursive psychology differs from both DA and CA due to its analytic focus on psychological phenomena in talk, it utilises and combines many of the strengths of these approaches (te Molder, 2015). Like these two methodologies discursive psychology draws extensively on social constructionism and the sociology of scientific knowledge and is interested in investigating how categories and

descriptions can produce actions (Potter,2012). The current research is informed by these discursive principles in its approach to fact construction.

Principals of Discursive Psychology

The method of discourse analysis is largely informed through the core principles of discursive psychology as set out by Potter (2012). First, discourse is situated sequentially, institutionally, and rhetorically within the specific context of the environment. The notion that talk is situated sequentially is drawn directly from the conversation analytic theory of turn-taking, where language is understood in relation to the utterances that follow and precede it (Potter & Wiggins, 2007). The institutional situatedness of language refers to the proposition that speech both shapes, and is shaped by, the interactional context. Here, speakers orient their utterances towards the actions of their institutionally relevant role, for example manager and employee in a business meeting (Potter, 1996). Discourse is also situated rhetorically, with speakers using descriptions to construct and undermine different accounts of reality (Wiggins, 2017). The second core principle of discursive psychology is that language is a practical medium which is action oriented in terms of social outcome (Potter, 2012). In speech, these actions can take the form of behaviours such as blaming, inviting, and complementing. Discursive psychologists believe that to examine how these actions are accomplished, they must be analysed in conjunction with the utterances that perform them. This differs from traditional approaches to language which often established false dichotomies between factors such as attitude and behaviour (Potter & Wiggins, 2007). Finally, in the discursive approach language is considered to be both constructed and constructive. It is constructed in the sense that talk is produced through various linguistic resources such as words, categories and interpretative repertoires. Language is also constructive in that speakers use it to build and maintain different versions of reality (Potter, 2012). Discourse analysts are therefore interested in both identifying the specific rhetorical

devices used by speakers and examining how these devices are then used in the construction of their accounts.

The key principles of discursive psychology are informed by social constructionism and represent a relativist stance towards the nature of knowledge and reality (White, 2004). The development of social constructionism originates from the work of philosophers such as Marx, Kant, and Nietzsche who believed that our understanding of the world exists as a product of human thought, rather than as a reflection of an external reality (Burr, 2003). This concept was formally introduced in Berger and Luckman's (1966) book 'The Social Construction of Reality'. In this book, Berger and Luckmann (1966) proposed that our taken for-granted knowledge of reality is constructed and maintained through a system of social processes. These processes consist of three steps; externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. First, individuals externalise their knowledge and understanding of the world through social action such as talk. This activity is then reinforced through every-day interaction, providing a sense that this knowledge is objective and external to the self. Finally, other members of the social group internalise this knowledge and assimilate it into their subjective reality. Berger and Luckmann noted that the relationship between this process and reality is reciprocal as while individuals may construct the social world through their actions, they must also respond to it (Burr, 2003). Discursive psychology's grounding in social constructionism has implications for the analysis of factual discourse, as from this perspective language is constructive rather than representative. Therefore, rather than assessing the validity of claims made by speakers, the current research will instead analyse how they are constructed to attend to factuality.

Following this discussion of the philosophical, sociological, and psychological traditions underpinning discursive psychology, this thesis will now begin to focus more specifically on the discursive approach to fact construction.

Discourse Analysis and Fact Construction

The discursive method of analysing fact construction developed from the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), a discipline primarily concerned with examining the values and practices of the scientific community (Stokoe & Tileaga, 2015). This movement consists of various theories which often disagree on matters such as research focus and choice of analytic method. Despite this conflict, researchers in this field share a common goal of identifying the social processes which underlie how scientists construct and validate their accounts (Wooffitt, 2005). Whilst proponents of SSK believe that both scientific error and scientific 'fact' are the result of social processes, Merton (1973) argues that only scientific error can be understood as a product of these processes. While Merton's (1973) norms of science theory provides an interesting insight into the values underpinning fact construction at an institutional level, it is limited by the assumption that scientific knowledge is an objective representation of reality. As Merton didn't investigate the production of scientific facts due to this presumption of objectivity, he instead focussed his analysis on the role of social factors in scientific error. In response to this, Mulkay (1976) proposed that instead of treating scientific discourse as a descriptive process which reflects an objective reality, it should instead by analysed by sociologists as a social process through which reality is constructed (Fortes, Lomnitz & Hynds, 1994).

The traditional view of the sociology of science was also criticised by Collins (1983) who argued that to avoid reinforcing the scientific community's notion of what constitutes 'true knowledge', sociologists should adopt a relativist stance towards reality (Potter, 1996).

Relativism refers to the epistemological position that beliefs about reality are constructed in relation to historical, cultural, and personal frameworks. This differs from the realist stance of reality which instead proposes that an objective world exists irrespective of constructed descriptions or individual interpretations (Stokoe & Tileaga, 2015). The distinction between realism and relativism is discussed by Edwards, Ashmore and Potter (1995) who use the example of an individual hitting a piece of furniture. Whilst a realist may employ this action in order to demonstrate the existence of an objective and observable reality, a relativist would argue that this action is constructive rather than representative as it is the context which establishes its meaning. The 'methodological relativism' advocated by Collins (1983) proposes that research which investigates competing knowledge claims should not assume that any account is the true representative of reality (Collins, 2001). The implication of this approach to language is that taken for granted knowledge becomes an area for analysis, allowing sociologists to investigate scientific discourse without having to make judgements about its truthfulness (Potter, 1996). This relativist ontology can be seen in the discursive practice of analysing fact construction, with researchers in this field considering all accounts to be a valid area for investigation. In addition to this, both modern and traditional theories of the sociology of scientific knowledge informed the discursive view of fact construction through highlighting the value of investigating the social processes which underpin the production of 'true' or accepted knowledge (Wooffitt, 2005).

This rejection of traditional views regarding the validity of scientific claims, alongside the adoption of a relativist stance towards the nature of reality, has informed the procedures used by discursive researchers analysing fact construction. I will next provide an overview of the discursive devices used in fact construction by examining previous literature which has employed these principals.

Previous Research

Potter (1996) provides an overview of the discursive procedures used in fact construction, and how these rhetorical devices are involved in producing actions. Here, he identifies two key strategies which speakers can utilise to establish the factuality of their account. First, Potter (1996) argues that for speakers to produce a believable account, they must prove that they are a credible source of information. The second strategy identified refers to how speakers construct their accounts as existing independently from themselves. One way in which the first strategy can be performed is through the invocation of 'category entitlement' (Sacks, 1992). This device is described as the means through which individuals justify their opinions through their membership of a specific social group (Reardon, 2013). This categorisation is not neutral and carries with it many cultural expectations regarding how group members will think and behave. These expectations then become an 'inferential resource' which is used to anticipate and interpret the claims of a particular person (Wooffitt, 2005). This is illustrated in Smith's (1978) investigation of descriptions of mental illness. In this research, Smith conducted an interview with 'Angela', who provided an account of how she came to define her friend 'K' as mentally ill. Throughout the interview Angela frequently employs forms of category entitlement, with perhaps the most effective for fact construction being her status as a witness to the 'odd' behaviour displayed by K. When developing the concept of category entitlement, Sacks (1992) was particularly interested in how the witnesses of traumatic events such as car crashes are granted the entitlement of having feelings about the accident (Potter, 1996). In Smith's (1978) work, Angela bases her characterisation of 'K' on her direct observations of her actions. This constructs the factuality of her description by providing her with the entitlement to make such judgements.

In relation to this, Angela builds her credibility as a reliable witness to K's behaviour by invoking a sense of corroboration in her account. She achieves this by using an 'additive formula' in which she introduces a succession of accumulated witnesses who through observation have all come to the same conclusion about K's mental illness (Smith, 1978). This works to further reinforce the notion that Angela's account of events is undeniable, and an objective representation of reality. However, as noted by Edwards and Potter (1992), the invocation of consensus in fact construction can be potentially damaging if unanimity is seen to be evidence of collusion rather than agreement. Here, the speaker negates this risk by establishing both the independence of the witnesses, and their relationship to 'K' (Smith, 1978). First, Angela presents herself and the other individuals in her account as having a good relationship with K and invokes the positive characteristics associated with friendship. Through this she inoculates against any accusations that the objectivity of her description is hindered by any negative motivations or beliefs (Potter, 1996). This device falls under the umbrella term labelled by Potter (1996) as 'stake and interest'; claims which are used to discredit the factuality of accounts on the basis that the speaker is in some way invested in its outcome. Managing what Edwards and Potter (1992) refer to as the 'dilemma of stake' is important for self-presentation, and by successfully navigating this issue speakers establish their ability to be objective and fair (Potter, 1996). In addition to this she presents her description as being reluctant and uncertain, stating "I refused to acknowledge the fact that there was anything wrong with K" (Smith, 1978, p.33). This is an example of a counterdispositional construction in which speakers attend to the facticity of their accounts of sensitive events by indicating that their conclusion was reluctantly arrived at (Edwards, 2005).

Smith's (1978) report on the construction of 'K' as mentally ill demonstrates the importance of speakers presenting themselves as reliable sources of information. This piece

of research is also demonstrative of how categorisations, in this case the label of ‘mentally ill’, can be constructed and validated through reference to social relationships, with Smith (2001, p.177) later describing her analysis as documenting “discourse performing local organisation of consciousness among people”. Despite the focus here on issues such as category entitlement and stake management, the primary focus of Smith’s research was the identification and analysis of the various contrast structures used in Angela’s account. The term ‘contrast structures’ is used to describe how the speakers organised their accounts so as to juxtapose ‘normal’ and ‘expected’ actions with K’s anomalous behaviour (Speer, 2004). Wooffitt (1992) argues that this analytic focus is a weak point of Smith’s work, criticising the notion that contrast structures play a significant role in K’s behaviour being presented as unusual when there are other more clearly defined devices present in the account. Despite such disagreements over the analysis of rhetorical structures, Smith’s (1978) paper remains a highly influential piece of early discursive research into the process of fact construction. Its analytic focus on constructions of mental illness is particularly relevant to the principles of discursive psychology because, as noted by Smith (1978), it is likely that K has a different account of the events described and may not define herself as being mentally ill. The implication of this is that that there are multiple versions of the factual accounts which reported the events surrounding K. This reflects the relativist underpinning of discursive psychology as the meaning of K’s behaviour was constructed in relation to the personal expectations and cultural norms of the individuals involved. These findings also highlight the need for researchers analysing factual discourse to treat all accounts as a valid area for investigation.

Wooffitt’s (1992) research on accounts of paranormal experiences provides a further insight into the role of self-presentation in fact construction. In this study, Wooffitt (1992) analysed interviews with individuals who claimed to have witnessed paranormal encounters

with a view to examining the way in which their accounts were organised to warrant their claims. He noted that due to the scepticism that surrounds this type of phenomena, it is important for speakers to establish themselves as being rational and of sound mind (Potter, 1996). Drawing on previous findings from Sacks (1984), Wooffitt (1992) identified that descriptions of extraordinary occurrences often followed an 'I was just doing X, when Y' structure. This structure developed from the 'At first I thought X, then I realised Y' format that Sacks (1984) observed when analysing the witness reports from events such as car crashes and shootings. He found that reports from these events were often organised so that speakers began by recounting what had been their context appropriate 'first thought' of the situation, and then went on to correct this with their 'realisation' of what was actually happening (Jefferson, 2004). Through presenting their initial assessment of extraordinary events as being reasonable and ordinary, speakers attend to fact construction by positioning themselves as reliable narrators (Sacks, 1984).

Similarly, in Wooffitt's (1992) research participants were seen to emphasise the normality of their actions and behaviours prior to the paranormal experience. This was used to construct their experience as unexpected, making their immediate reaction to the reported incident appear as rational and relatable (Potter, 1996). By describing the lead up to the occurrence of the event in mundane terms, speakers pre-emptively discount alternative explanations such as mental illness which could be used to discredit their account (Potter, 1996). In his work, Wooffitt (1992) recognised the possibility that this format may simply reflect speakers either reporting their account in a sequential order or indicate the existence of what cognitive psychologists refer to as a 'flashbulb memory' in which witnesses experience a vivid recollection of events (Potter, 1996). However, Wooffitt discounted this explanation on the basis that the detailed nature of paranormal accounts suggests that mundane characteristics are constructed rather than representative (Haenninen, 2009). In addition to this, Wooffitt

(1992) argued that aspects of the 'X/Y' structure being identified in a variety of research into extraordinary accounts (see Neisser, 1982) indicates that the organisation of mundane formulations is informed through cultural conventions and expectations for reporting paranormal events.

The second strategy that Potter (1996) identified as being necessary for the production of a factual account is that speakers must establish their accounts as existing independently from their personal biases and subjective perceptions. This strategy differs from previously discussed rhetorical devices such as category entitlement as it is employed with the purpose of de-emphasising the identity of the speaker (Potter, 1996). By distancing the speaker from the production of their account this approach works to construct descriptions as having what Potter (1996) refers to as 'out there-ness', meaning that accounts are seen to be grounded in the external world rather than personal biases. A basic form of 'out there-ness' construction can be seen in research conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), who investigated discourse in scientific disputes. In this study, they analysed and compared the language used by biochemists in both formal academic writing and semi-structured interviews. Their primary concern was to document the diverse methods that participants used to construct and deconstruct accounts of chemiosmotic theory. From this, Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) identified two interpretive repertoires that scientists selectively drew upon when constructing facts. Potter and Wetherell (1987) define interpretive repertoires as "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (p. 203). These repertoires are drawn upon in talk in order to construct a shared understanding between speakers (Duits, 2008). The empiricist repertoire refers to the use of impersonal and neutral language which works to distance the speaker or author from the content of their findings or theoretical conclusions. This repertoire was found to be most commonly used in formal academic writing as it allows authors to present their accounts as "following

unproblematically and inescapably from the empirical characteristics of an impersonal natural world" (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984, p.56). In contrast to this, the contingent repertoire describes how speakers justified and explained discrepancies between accounts by referring to social factors such as personality type and group membership. This repertoire was found to be most evident in informal contexts and was often used by scientists as a way to discredit the legitimacy and beliefs of other scientists who they disagreed with (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). Potter (1996) identifies the empiricist repertoire as a fundamental way through which speakers can construct 'out there-ness', with Woolgar (1988) labelling this approach to fact construction an example of an 'externalising device'.

In his analysis of paranormal experiences, Wooffitt (1992) observed the use of another externalising device referred to as 'active voicing' in which speakers included sections of quoted speech in their accounts of extraordinary events. An example of this device is present in a participant's account of a reported paranormal disturbance in which they make explicit reference to their friends' statement that "somehow the atmosphere in this house has changed" (1992, p.167). The use of active voicing attends to fact construction by establishing the existence of external witnesses to the event, therefore indicating that their account of the experience is grounded in an accessible and objective reality (Potter, 1996). As previously discussed in relation to Smith's (1978) paper, involving independent witnesses in the building of descriptions invokes a sense of corroboration and consensus. Potter (1996) argues that these elements can also act as another crucial factor in constructing out there-ness.

In Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) research, the issue of scientific consensus was highlighted as a key area for analysis of fact construction due to the variations between accounts that documented seemingly identical theories, procedures, and results. Through this they challenged traditional sociological approaches by suggesting that consensus in science is at

least in part discursively constructed and is therefore not an objective measure or reflection of 'absolute truth' (Samuels, 1990). Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) evidenced this claim by referring to the multiple explanations of chemiosmotic theory each scientist in their study operated with. They found that scientists presented the same simplified account of this theory to establish their description as factual, with this enabling them to attribute any later disagreements to other scientists misunderstanding the more complex details of chemiosmosis. From this they concluded that speakers employed the 'appearance' of consensus in their discourse for the purpose of presenting their diverging account as having grounding in objective scientific knowledge (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984).

The form of discourse analysis proposed by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) has been criticised for several reasons. First, their view of fact construction may only be applicable to the sociology of scientific knowledge. For example, Shapin (1984) argues that their approach to talk is too restrictive for the study of history in which establishing the 'best' or most accurate account of a historical event is often the aim of research in this field. Shapin also rejects the implication that seeking to offer a definitive version of events necessarily entails dismissing alternative reports or engaging uncritically with 'facts', noting that historians routinely acknowledge that all accounts are fundamentally interpretative in nature. In addition to this, Potter and Wetherell (1987) have criticised Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) for proposing that researchers can gain insight into the cognitive processes which underly specific social groups. They instead advocate that categorisations such as 'scientist' should be critically investigated as something which is constructed, rather than assuming that it is static and predetermined (Wooffitt, 1992). Despite such criticism, Gilbert and Mulkay were significant in influencing Potter and Wetherell's (1987) development of discourse analysis as a critical method in social psychology. Wooffitt (1992) highlights two key ways in which the findings and conclusions of their research informs the work of analysts in this field. First, through aiming to analyse

conflicting scientific reports Gilbert and Mulkay recognised the variable nature of discourse. This intrinsic variability in talk has led discourse analysts to examine how diverse accounts among speakers are fashioned to construct different versions of reality. Next, Gilbert and Mulkay's interest in exploring the function of descriptions has remained a key feature of much discursive research which has aimed to examine the constructive and performative nature of language.

Having set out the background to the focus on factual discourse, I will now turn to consider fact construction in relation to the specific arena that is the focus of the present study – political discourse.

Political Discourse Analysis

The relationship between discourse and politics is an important area of analysis for researchers as it is through rhetorical means that political actions are mobilised and codified (Kirvalidze & Samnidze, 2016). Although sociologists have traditionally been interested in the social consequences of political discourse, discourse analysis is instead concerned with how it is structured to perform specific functions such as justifying policy and blaming opponents. Public political discourse can be seen to provide researchers with ample opportunity to analyse discursive fact construction as in this arena it is particularly important for politicians to present themselves as being credible and informed (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This notion relates to Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action in which it is argued that intersubjective understanding in talk occurs as a result of speakers agreeing what conditions must be fulfilled for an utterance to be deemed valid and rational. These conditions are referred to by Habermas as 'validity claims'. These claims can be said to particularly relevant to political discourse analysis because, as Edelman (1977) argues, political language is centred around speakers constructing factual and valid accounts. The

first validity claim identified is in regard to truth. In ordinary conversation assertions made by speakers are typically presented as being truthful and reflective of an objective reality. When the factual accuracy of an account is directly challenged, the only way in which speakers can 'redeem' their claim to truth is by engaging in further discourse (Zuidervaart, 2016). A second validity claim which is inherent to speech relates to sincerity. If the speaker is thought to have biases that motivate their account, this can undermine both their claim to sincerity and the validity of their description (Habermas, 1984). If the speaker is not seen to have 'the right' to provide an account, this affects their perceived credibility (Cukier, Bauer, & Middleton 2004). Habermas (1984) argues that it is when these claims are successfully achieved that rational and factual discourse is produced. Examples of these claims are apparent in previous discursive research which has analysed fact construction in a political context.

One such study conducted by Edwards and Potter (1992) analysed a dispute between the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, and ten political journalists. Following an 'off the record' meeting, the journalists had reported that Lawson had announced that the government planned to introduce controversial changes to the pension system. This claim was denied by Lawson, leading to both parties defending their account of events through various media of communication including written articles and verbal statements. A key analytic finding of this study was that participants in the conflict had differing suggestions on how their information could be fact checked. For example, whilst the journalists presented their corroborating notes as evidence for their description of events being accurate, Lawson used this unanimity to suggest that the journalists were colluding together to fabricate a story (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This accusation was justified by the implication that due to the nature of their career, the journalists had conspired together to fabricate a more interesting

article (Wooffitt, 1992).This demonstrates how consensus and corroboration can be invoked in both the construction and deconstruction of factual accounts (Potter, 1996).

A further key finding of this research was that parties to the dispute were observed to establish a distinction between fact and interpretation (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This enabled certain speakers to construct the differences in accounts as being a result of a misunderstanding rather than due to purposeful deceit. The fact-interpretation distinction was primarily invoked in response to a disagreement over the Chancellor's use of the term 'targeting'. Whilst the journalists claimed that this term indicated that the government had planned to specifically redistribute pensioners' benefits, Lawson argued he had instead been referring to their policy of providing target welfare recipients with extra resources. As a result of this, it was the interpretation of the reported quote rather than its content that became a matter for factual dispute. This led to both parties attempting to warrant their account by appealing to external sources of written notes and independent reports in order to construct their interpretation of events as being the most rational and objective (Edwards & Potter, 1992). These findings provide an insight into the rhetorical devices used by speakers in order to maintain their claim to truth in an adversarial political context. This study has informed subsequent discursive research on memory. This is because whilst traditionally memory has been viewed as a cognitivist process based in realism, here it is seen as a social process that 'does things' that are reflected through language (Shepherd, 2011).

In relation to Habermas' (1984) claim to sincerity, much contemporary research surrounding migration discourse has been concerned with how speakers construct anti-immigration views. Van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman, & Troutman (1997) found that in migration discourse speakers would construct their accounts as being fair and objective by combining a negative representation of immigrants with positive self-presentation. This

rhetorical strategy was achieved through the use of apparent disclaimers which took the form of a concession, denial, empathy, or ignorance (van Dijk et al, 1997). An example of an apparent denial identified in van Dijk et al's (1997) analysis is 'I have nothing against Muslims but…', which works to present the speaker as being tolerant and unbiased whilst simultaneously providing a negative account of Muslims. Kleiner (1998) argues that these apparent disclaimers are 'pseudo-arguments' through which any negative inferences about the speaker are immediately negated to avoid accusations of bigotry and enable the construction of a fair and rational account Although van Dijk et al's (1997) research employed the method of critical discourse analysis, an approach that is often in conflict with the theoretical and analytic concerns of discursive psychology, his findings provide a valuable insight into how identity management relates to fact construction in the context of controversial talk. In addition to apparent disclaimers, research into immigration discourse has also identified various externalising devices which are used by speakers to ground their views in empirical observations and data (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). In their analysis of political interviews, Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos (2010) noted that opposition to Sudanese refugees in Australia was often attributed to reported and first-hand accounts of refugees' problematic behaviour. This allocation of blame was used to justify discriminatory policies on the basis that they are a 'natural response' to the objective and observable reality of immigration.

These findings are reflective of the rhetorical strategy labelled by Augoustinos and Every (2007) as 'discursive deracialisation' in which speakers deemphasise the role of race in their negative representation of the outgroup and instead emphasise alternative factors such as nationality and lack of resources as being the primary motivating factor. Examples of discursive deracialisation have also been identified in EU immigration discourse. Using data

collected from political debates, Gibson and Booth (2017) analysed the discourse of the radical-right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2015 General Election.

They found that speakers representing UKIP employed the idea of an 'Australian style points system' to warrant their support for a reduction in immigration. This was presented as being fairer than the current system as it would enable the public to 'take back control' and make decisions on immigration on the basis of merit rather than race or nationality. This worked to counter potential accusations of prejudice by both appealing to liberal values such as tolerance and by minimising the relevance of race to the construction of speakers' accounts of immigration (Gibson & Booth, 2017).

Further research which analysed political discourse relating to the EU was conducted by Goodman (2017) who examined immigration talk in the lead up to the EU referendum. It was found that definitive statements such as "TURKEY (population 76 million) IS JOINING

THE EU" (Goodman, 2017, p.41) were frequently employed by both the leave and remain campaign in order to construct their claims about migration as being factual and unchallenged. This in turn enabled participants in the Brexit debate to present proposals such as "Vote Leave, take back control" (p.41) as being the obvious response to the reality of immigration. This finding is reflected in research from Rowinski (2017) who analysed newspaper coverage on the eve of the 2016 UK referendum. From this it was found that coverage of the referendum was dominated by emotive discourse, and that claims made by newspapers were often evidenced through reference to 'common-sense', rather than objective data (Rowinski, 2017).

As explicit racism has become less accepted in general society, it is important that politicians construct themselves as being fair and tolerant to maintain authority and respect (Rose, 2014). It will therefore be important to examine how speakers manage both fact

construction and identity in the EU referendum campaign where the topic of immigration remained a central and divisive issue. In addition to this, Edwards and Potter (1992) note that the processes of fact construction in public political discourse differs from those present in everyday talk due to politicians being acutely aware that the validity of any claims made will be examined. This is particularly relevant to the current study as allegations of campaigners engaging in 'post-truth politics' resulted in the facticity of accounts being increasingly scrutinised. As a result of this, it is possible that the analysis of political discourse can also provide an insight into the subtleties of fact construction in everyday conversations as it is likely that these processes are reflected and amplified in the public sphere (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Much of the existing literature on political discourse in the EU referendum can be said to have adopted a critical discursive approach which is largely focused on issues relating to power, ideology, and identity management (i.e. Bamfield, 2016; Thommessen, 2017). The current research therefore aims to fill this gap in the study of political discourse by providing an insight into fact construction in the EU referendum campaign.

Research Context

In February 2016, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union would be held later in the year (McCann, 2016). This announcement came in response to the growing British Euroscepticism marked by the insurgence of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) at both the 2014 European Parliament election, and the 2015 general election (Towler, 2017). Two official campaign groups were established and worked to advocate for their desired outcome to the question:

"Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" ("EU referendum question assessment", 2015). The central position of 'Vote Leave' was that British national sovereignty had been eroded through the 'over-reaching' and 'undemocratic' nature of the EU ("Our Case", 2016). It was therefore argued

that voters should ‘take back control’ from this institution, enabling them to have greater power over the legislative process (Meyer, 2016). This regaining of control was emphasised in particular in relation to immigration, with great emphasis being placed on concerns that the EU’s ‘open border policy’ was unsustainable and dangerous (Crines, 2016). In contrast to this, the

‘Stronger In’ campaign focused on trade benefits gained through access to the single market and stressed the damage that would be done to the financial infrastructure of the UK if it were to leave this arrangement ("The Economy", 2016). Furthermore, this campaign highlighted the advantages of the free movement of people and ideas throughout Europe and commended the contribution of immigrants in the British workforce (Crines, 2016).

The three-month campaigning period that followed Cameron’s announcement was marred by controversy, with research subsequently labelling it the ‘most divisive, hostile, negative and fear-provoking of the 21st century’ (Bulman, 2017). ‘Vote Leave’ faced accusations of racism and xenophobia, in part due to their calls for the UK to implement a more controlled immigration system. For example, the ‘breaking point’ poster published by UKIP was criticised for scaremongering due to its depiction of refugees crossing the Croatian border as an invading force (Hopkins, 2016), and for its conflation of matters of refuge and freedom of movement. Advocates of Britain remaining in the EU also faced accusations of scaremongering, with the former London Mayor Boris Johnson labelling the ‘Stronger In’ campaign ‘agents of project fear’ due to their emphasis on the risks of leaving the EU (Stone, 2016). Despite the adversarial nature of this period, pollsters consistently predicted that the UK would decide to remain an EU member state (Cooper, 2016). It was therefore unexpected when on the 23rd June 2016 the British electorate voted in favour of leaving the European

Union by 51.9% to 48.1% (Withnall, 2016). The result was hailed by then UKIP leader Nigel Farage as a ‘victory for real people’ (Richards, 2017), whilst pro-EU activists such as

the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron, bemoaned that “today we wake to a deeply divided country” (Freedman, 2016). Following the referendum, analysts attempted to explain why the leave campaign had resonated with voters. A survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research identified that concerns about immigration, dissatisfaction with mainstream politics, and a perceived threat to national identity had all acted as key motivating factors (Curtice, 2016). However, regardless of why the Brexit campaign had been successful, for many the victory in itself represented the global emergence of a new set of political norms (Rose, 2017).

These new norms have been connected to the emergence of an era of ‘post-truth’ politics, a term used to describe a political culture in which "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Flood,

2016). This term became the Oxford English Dictionary’s ‘international word of the year’ in

2016 in part due to its increased usage following the referendum result, and the election of Donald Trump in the USA (Flood, 2016). Many aspects of the EU referendum have been pointed to as evidence that British political discourse has entered a post-truth era, and both campaigns have been subjected to accusations of dishonesty (Rose, 2017). Most notably the figure displayed on the so-called ‘Brexit bus’ (“We send the EU £350 million a week let’s fund our NHS instead”), which was central to the Vote Leave campaign, has been routinely challenged, with the UK Statistics Authority describing the claim as “potentially misleading” (Sparrow, 2016). Crines (2016) argues that whilst Leave advocates appealed to emotion through the invocation of nationalist sentiment and exploitation of pre-existing fears about immigration, ‘Stronger In’ instead used logic driven arguments such as statistics and economic reports. The failure of the Remain campaign may therefore be indicative of the public placing higher value on emotion than facts in political discourse. However, claims that

the rhetoric of the EU referendum campaign was reflective of post-truth politics have been criticised for being both dismissive of the grievances of Leave voters, and for being partisan in accepting that the Remain side provided an objective and accurate representation of reality (Fox, 2016).

The popularisation of the term ‘post-truth politics’ in mainstream culture has brought an increase in public awareness about the issue of factuality in political discourse (Freedland, 2016). The academic response to popularisation of this concept has been to employ caution in relation to its meaning and application (Demasi, 2018). Following their exploration of debates surrounding British economic policy, Hopkins and Rosamond (2017) came to the conclusion that post-truth politics is an environment in which the production of political ‘bullshit’ is enabled (Frankfurt, 2005). Frankfurt (2005) used the term ‘bullshit’ to refer to speech which is performed with the intention of persuading rather than informing. This ‘bullshit’ is distinct from other types of persuasive talk in that it is primarily characterised by its indifference to facticity (Hopkins and Rosamond, 2017). This takes place in the form of speakers seeking to convey a certain impression of themselves with little regard for the accuracy of their claims. Hopkins and Rosamond (2017) suggest that this type of ‘bullshit’ has become more prevalent in recent years due to the “broader hollowing out of Western democratic politics” (p.652) in which voters are more likely to respond positively to such rhetoric. This increased prevalence and awareness, alongside the on-going repercussions of Brexit, makes analysis regarding the issue of factuality in the EU referendum campaign particularly relevant to the modern British political system.

The present research seeks to explore these issues through an analysis of the fact construction in broadcast media debates during the EU referendum. Specifically, it addresses

the question of how fact construction is attended to during the so-called ‘post-truth’ discourse that has been said to characterise the referendum campaign.

Method

Data

The dataset for this analysis consists of 10 episodes of the BBC television series Question Time, all of which were broadcast within the dates of the official EU referendum campaign (15th April to the 23rd June 2016). *'Question Time'* is a long-standing topical debate programme in which a panel of politicians and public figures answer pre-selected audience questions regarding political and social matters. Episodes within the period of the official EU referendum campaign were selected for inclusion so to provide a comprehensive overview of political discourse concerning the referendum, as well as to observe any developments in fact construction strategies throughout this period. These episodes were accessed through the BBC website and YouTube. To maintain the current research focus of the referendum debate, only discussions which were deemed relevant to the topic of the European Union were selected for analysis and extracted from the wider data set. Table 1 displays the broadcast date of each episode selected for analysis, the panel members present, and the time dedicated to discussing EU-related matters. The total amount of material sampled was thus 6 hours and 59 minutes.

Table 1
Episodes of Question Time

Broadcast Date	Panel Members	Duration of EU-related Discussion
21/04/2016	Liam Fox; Paddy Ashdown; Kate Hoey; Leanne Wood; Tim Martin.	32 minutes 11 seconds
28/04/2016	Greg Clark; Andy Burnham; Alex Salmond; Jill Kirby; Paul Marshall.	28 minutes 37 seconds
05/05/2016	Nigel Lawson; Lisa Nandy; Michael O'Leary; Isabel Oakeshott; Benjamin Zephaniah.	26 minutes 30 seconds
12/05/2016	David Mundell; Humza Yousaf; Kezia Dugdale; Jim Sillars; Merryn Somerset Webb.	18 minutes 21 seconds
19/05/2016	Amber Rudd; Tim Farron; Yvette Cooper; Paul Nuttall; Paul Mason.	32 minutes 28 seconds
26/05/2016	Ed Miliband; David Davis; Caroline Lucas; Steve Hilton; Dreda Say Mitchell.	21 minutes 50 seconds
02/06/2016	Elizabeth Truss; Frank Field; Neil Hamilton; Liz Saville-Roberts; Owen Jones.	55 minutes 12 seconds
09/06/2016	Chris Grayling; Hilary Benn; Nigel Farage; Allison Pearson; Eddie Izzard.	57 minutes 10 seconds
15/06/2016	Michael Gove.	42 minutes 8 seconds
19/06/2016	David Cameron.	42 minutes 36 seconds

Analytic Procedure

This research employs discursive social psychology in accordance with the methodological guidelines set out by Wiggins (2017). As discussed in the introduction, this social constructionist approach facilitates the investigation of the construction, function, and meaning of language in relation to specific social contexts (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Before analysis took place, ethical concerns were first attended to. As the selected episodes of Question Time are available in the public domain, the use of these data do not represent a risk to the confidentiality of people who took part in the programmes. Nevertheless, the anonymity of members of the audience who contributed to the debate was ensured through the use of pseudonym codes (A1, A2, etc.) for the purposes of transcription and writing up.

This data was then transcribed using a simplified from of Jeffersonian transcription notation (see Appendix).

Following Wiggins's (2017) guidelines, the first stage of this analysis involved ensuring that transcripts accurately reflected the dataset. As a part of this process, selected episodes of Question Time were watched carefully so that key visual and auditory features of these videos could be identified. From this, factors such as the intonation and body language of speakers was noted in relation to the corresponding extract. These notes were then referred to throughout the analytic process in order to establish the context of each interaction. This stage also involved reading transcripts thoroughly so to both correct errors, as well as to become familiar with the sequence, organisation, and content of the discourse in each debate (Wiggins, 2017).

The second stage of this process was conducted with the aim of identifying the potential ways in which discourse was constructed and situated within the dataset (Wiggins, 2017). This was achieved through the examination of specific details in each interaction. The features of talk that were of particular interest for this analysis included what words and phrases were used, how they were used, and where they were situated within the debate. This focus on the type of language speakers used provided an initial insight into what content (e.g. facts, identities, categories, etc.) was being constructed within the dataset. In relation to this, by identifying how speakers employed language, this highlighted various key ways in which their talk was constructed. Finally, examining how talk was situated was useful in gaining an understanding of how each interaction was organised in relation to its context (Wiggins, 2017). This stage of analysis was important as by focussing on only what was present in the data, this prevented unwarranted assumptions being made about meaning and significance.

The third stage of this analysis involved explicitly employing the principles of discursive psychology in order to examine the relationship between social actions and psychological constructs within the dataset (Wiggins, 2017). As well as being interested in how talk was constructed and situated, at this stage in the analytic procedure the way in which talk was orientated towards action was also a key concern. To examine this, the various discursive devices used by speakers were identified. Examples of devices which were found to be present in the data include extreme case formulations, metaphors, and category entitlement. The function of these devices was then analysed to gain an understanding of what social actions were being performed within the debates. Devices which were especially prevalent in the data were made note of, and analytic areas of interest began to emerge (Wiggins, 2017). From this, the process of fact construction in EU debates was highlighted as a general analytic concern for the current research. Fact construction was selected as an area of interest due to discussions about truth and bias being prominent in the data set.

After identifying fact construction as an area of analytic interest, all instances of discourse relating to truth and facticity were extracted from the wider dataset. This process was as inclusive as possible in order to ensure that all instances of factual discourse were considered for analysis. For the purpose of this research, factual discourse was defined as any information presented by speakers as accurately reflecting an objective reality. This included, but was not limited to, the use of statistics, detailed description and first-hand accounts. Also included were instances in which fact constructions were undermined and/or treated as secondary to some other concern, such as when subjective terminology (‘I think’, ‘I feel’) was presented as taking precedent over factual information. In accordance with Wiggins’s (2017) guidelines, during this stage of analysis existing discursive literature on fact construction and political discourse was referred to in order to identify important or missing areas of research. From this, three specific areas of interest within the broader analytic

concern of fact construction were identified. These areas were expert opinion and consensus, practicality and common sense, and the claim that the UK sends £350 million to the EU.

Finally, several steps were taken to establish the validity of findings from this analysis. One way in which this was achieved was by maintaining transparency throughout the methodological process. This involved making note of any analytic decisions made so that readers can fully understand and judge the conclusions of this research. In addition to this, the findings of the current research were also validated by what is referred to as the 'next turn proof procedure' (Wiggins, 2017). This procedure involves ensuring that all analytic interpretations are evidenced in the dataset through how speakers interpret and respond to each other's talk . Furthermore, whilst seeking to provide a coherent and organised analysis, this research also accounted for any deviant cases which did not correspond with observed discursive patterns. The identification of such cases helped confirm the validity of the findings by ensuring that data analysis was not driven by a desire simply to confirm the emerging analytic narrative (Wiggins, 2017).

Analysis

This analysis highlighted three ways in which factual discourse is constructed and used within the debates. This analysis begins by reviewing how expert opinion and consensus is employed in the construction of factual accounts. Next, it examines how different speakers attend to the facticity of the claim made by the Vote Leave campaign that the UK sends £350 million to the EU in payment for membership fees. Finally, this analysis investigates how notions of practicality and common-sense were used by some speakers to construct the facticity of their account.

Expert Opinion and Consensus

One way in which factuality is constructed within the debates is through reference to economic experts. As economists are seen to hold authority and knowledge about the topic of the economy, certain speakers validate their account by presenting it as being supported and informed by the opinions of economists. This can be seen in extract 1 in which Hillary Benn responds to an audience member who asked if the public should base their vote in the referendum on their view of immigration.. Hillary Benn is a Labour politician who represents the constituency of Leeds Central in parliament. During the referendum campaign he acted as Shadow Foreign Secretary and was outspoken about his support for Britain remaining in the EU. Benn's answer is in response to the first audience question of the episode.

Extract 1; Question Time, 09/06/2016

1 HB T-to come to that directly (.h) I don't think it's wise to make

2 your decision just on that basis for this reason (.hhh) the
3 price we pay for leaving will be the damage to our (.)
4 economy(0.4) there – you know – it's very rare to get so many
5 economists to reach an agreement (.) nine out of ten (.) to get
6 all the surveys of business opinion (.) the IMF (.) the OECD
7 (.) the world bank and the governor of the bank of England
8 (.1) °Now° if you think they're all wrong you have to be pretty
9 confident that they're all wrong (.hh) how does damaging our
10 economy (.) making life more difficult for people (.) putting
11 up prices if the pound falls (.h) how is that going to help
12 deal with the problem of immigration (.) it isn't (.h) and I
13 make one other point (.h) one in five our care workers in this
14 country (.) come from outside the United Kingdom (0.3) we have
15 a demographic time bomb (.) more of us are getting older (.)
16 we're gonna need care (.hh) so that is why we will continue to
17 need immigration (.) and what most people will say is (.) as
18 long as people come here (.) they work (.) they pay their taxes
19 (.) and Eddie is absolutely right (.h) they contribute more
20 into our economy than they take out (.h) you know what that
21 money goes on ? (0.2)helping to pay for our schools and our NHS

In response to the audience member's question, Benn states 'I don't think it's wise to make your decision just on that basis' (lines 1-2), with his reasoning being 'the damage to our (.) economy' (lines 3-4) that would be caused by the UK leaving the EU. To give credibility to this prediction he goes on to make reference to the various business and economic experts who support his view. This can be seen in lines 4 to 7 where Benn asserts 'you know – it's very rare to get so many economists to reach an agreement (.) nine of out ten (.) to get all of the surveys of business opinion (.h) the IMF (.) the OECD (.) the world bank and the governor of the bank of England'. In doing this the speaker establishes the existence of a consensus regarding the economic impact of Brexit, with this working to construct his own

account as factual on the basis that it is shared and supported among professionals in the field. Benn presents this consensus as being extraordinary in lines 4 to 5 through the use of the extreme case formulations (‘very rare’; ‘so many economists’), which work to further add to the apparent magnitude of the event (Pomerantz, 1986). While Edwards and Potter (1992) note that such consensus can work to discredit the legitimacy of accounts through accusations of collusion or dishonesty, here it is used to imply that the unusualness of this wide-spread agreement indicates that there is robust evidence supporting the assertion that Brexit will result in negative consequences for the UK. Further credibility is granted to this consensus view due to the category entitlement of respected institutions such as the IMF [International Monetary Fund], who are deemed to have the skills and knowledge necessary to make an accurate prediction about the economy. In lines 8-9 Benn employs the authority of these organisations as a way in which to undermine opposing accounts, stating ‘°Now° if you think they’re all wrong you have to be pretty confident that they’re all wrong’. This works to suggest that it is unlikely that all these various institutions will be collectively incorrect in their assessments, with the implication of this being that anybody who challenges the consensus needs to be confident in their view due to the improbability of their position. By presenting economic experts as being a credible source of information within the Brexit debate, Benn attends to the fact construction of his own account as it is seen to coincide with, and thus be supported by, these external reports.

Benn goes on to relate this issue of the economy to his initial statement in which he disagreed with voters making their decision about the EU based solely on immigration, asking ‘how does damaging our economy (.) making life more difficult for people (.) putting up prices if the pound falls (.h) how is that going to help deal with the problem of immigration (.) it isn’t’ (lines 9-12). As this argument has been preceded by the speaker establishing his prediction of economic damage as being objective and accurate, this provides

these questions with a factual backing which in turn validates his concerns. By immediately answering his own question with the assertion that 'it isn't' helpful (line 12), Benn can be seen to employ the rhetorical device of hypophora. Hypophora refers to instances in which speakers raise and respond to their own question in order to highlight the 'correct' answer (Behnam & Moghtadi, 2008). Here, this is used to present Benn as being so confident in his conclusion that it isn't necessary for the audience to consider alternative views (van Eemeren, 2010). This also works to position immigration as being a less important issue than the economy, and suggests that leaving the EU will not be helpful in addressing concerns regarding migration. Through this, Benn's opposition to the public basing their vote on immigration is constructed as being a response to the reality of Brexit rather than personal opinion.

Further reference is made to statistics in lines 13 to 14, with Benn noting that 'one in five of our care workers in this country (.) come from outside the United Kingdom'. The use of data here is important for fact construction as his following description of the UK being a 'demographic timebomb' (line 15) injects a sense of urgency into his account which could be dismissed as being hyperbolic if it were not grounded by the presence of 'objective' information. This validates his claim that 'we're gonna need care (.hh) so that is why we will continue to need immigration' (lines 16-17) by presenting it as a natural response to the reality of the UK's situation. As with his earlier economic prediction, Benn also invokes consensus to provide his view on immigration with support stating 'and what most people will say is (.) as long as people come here (.) they work (.) they pay their taxes' (lines 17-18). Although he previously specified the institutions which share his economic forecast, here he employs the more ambiguous phrase 'most people'. By moving away from expert opinion, this enables Benn to construct his claim about immigration as being common-sense. Therefore, a key way in which expert opinion is employed in fact construction is to validate

speakers' claims by presenting them as being supported by respected institutions such as the IMF. Extract 1 also highlights a key rhetorical device observed within the data in which certain speakers establish an 'extraordinary' consensus existing between experts, something which is presented as being both unprecedented and unique to the EU referendum. The apparent scale of this consensus is often used to undermine and discredit information which challenges the factuality of the economic reports and opinions presented by speakers. This is evident in extract 2.

In extract 2, an audience member and Lisa Nandy discuss the value of input from economic experts in the referendum campaign. Lisa Nandy is a Labour MP who favoured Britain remaining in the European Union. This discussion makes reference to an earlier audience question in which the panel were asked to consider if moral principles, rather than economic figures, will determine the outcome of the vote.

Extract 2: Question Time, 05/05/2016

A1 The problem I've got with this referendum (.) if you listen to the Brexit camp and you listen to the Remain camp (.) like the question says (.) it's all about economics (.) no matter what they do they always throw money at you (.) its money this money that money this money that (.h) Lisa pointed out all these financial bigwigs that have er (.) pointed out that we have to stay in cause this is going to happen (.) they weren't (.) they didn't want to listen to them when the Government (.) when everybody wanted to go into the euro (.) which f-for them (.) going into the euro was the best decision that we could do (.) so they ignored them (.) and it turned out th-they was wrong (.) with what they said they was wrong

LN But actually when we went into-when we had the debate about whether we were going into the euro and we decided not to do it (.) there were voices (.) credible voices on both sides of the

argument (.) making different cases (.h) and now what you see (.) when you look across the economic world is you only really find people making the case to remain (.) and I'm not asking you to vote for Europe on that basis (.) I'm just saying (.) think about it (.) really (.) that we're part of this enormous trading bloc so we can negotiate better deals with other countries (.) if we come out would it be the same

The audience member begins by implicating both sides of the debate in his criticism of the referendum campaign, stating 'The problem I've got with this referendum (.) if you listen to the Brexit camp and you listen to the Remain camp (.) like the question says (.) it's all about economics' (lines 1-3). This presents the speaker as being fair in his assessment, framing his contribution as even-handed and as not motivated by political bias. In lines 3-5 the speaker goes on to criticise the campaign for being overly focused on the economy: 'no matter what they do they always throw money at you (.) its money this money that money this money that'. Here his use of the verb 'throw' alongside his repetition of the phrase 'money this money that' diminishes the importance of economic factors within the debate. The audience member then refers to the financial institutions identified as supporting the UK remaining in the EU, labelling them 'all these financial bigwigs that have er (.) pointed out that we have to stay in cause this is going to happen' (lines 5-7). As seen in extract one, the ECF 'all' (line 5) is used here to indicate a consensus of expert opinion. However, the description 'financial bigwigs' works to emphasise the shared social status of these experts, with the implication being that it is a cause for suspicion. This undermines the credibility of these experts by suggesting that their agreement is motivated by a shared interest, rather than by factual information.

The speaker further discredits the credibility of expert opinion on the economy in lines 8 to 10 by highlighting economists' support for adopting the Euro as the UK currency in the

late 1990s, stating ‘when everybody wanted to go into the euro (.) which f-for them (.) going into the euro was the best decision that we could do’. The extreme case formulations ‘everybody’ and ‘the best’ work to emphasise the scale and magnitude of this support. The effect of this is that it heightens the sense of failure portrayed by the speaker in his statement that ‘and it turned out th-they was wrong (.) with what they said they was wrong’ (lines 11-12). This undermines the credibility of ‘experts’ by presenting them as having been unreliable in the past. In drawing parallels between this situation and the present debate on the EU membership the speaker also attends to the facticity of his own account, as his mistrust of expert opinion is constructed as being informed through observation rather than through bias.

To counteract the audience member’s claims, Lisa Nandy first differentiates between the two events, stating ‘there were voices (.) credible voices on both sides of the argument (.) making different cases’ (lines 15-16). By highlighting the existence of these ‘different cases’ made by economists, Nandy challenges the assertion that ‘everybody’ (line 9) wanted to adopt the Euro. This deconstructs the legitimacy of the audience member’s account by calling into question the facticity of the claims on which it is based. Nandy goes on to establish a distinction between the eurozone and EU referendum debates by emphasising the scale of support for Britain staying in the EU, arguing that ‘when you look across the economic world you only really find people making the case to remain’ (lines 17-18). The phrase ‘across the economic world’ suggests that a diverse group of people share the same view about the economic impact of Brexit. This works to undermine the audience member’s insinuation of a collusion occurring among ‘financial bigwigs’ (line 6) and suggests that for a variety of groups and individuals to reach an agreement the evidence for their conclusion must be indisputable. Furthermore, this distinction works to construct a ‘then vs. now’ narrative which Nandy uses to emphasise the uniqueness of the EU referendum in comparison to

related past events. The result of this is that the audience member's scepticism concerning economic experts due to their previous failures is dismissed on account of it being irrelevant to the current debate. In addition to referring to the difference in the scale of expert support for remaining in the EU in comparison to adopting the Euro, Nandy also makes a distinction between the type of support in both cases. This is achieved by her assertion that previously 'there were voices (.) credible voices on both sides of the argument' (lines 15-16), implying that this is not the case in the current EU referendum debate. This undermines the facticity of claims put forward by those challenging this consensus by suggesting that they are unreliable sources of information.

In lines 18 to 20 the speaker clarifies her position; 'I'm not asking you to vote for Europe on that basis (.) I'm just saying (.) think about it (.) really'. Through this she presents herself as simply providing the audience with information to consider while making their decision. Craig and Sanusi (2000) note that the discourse marker 'I'm just saying' is used by speakers in discussions of controversial issues to clarify their position, construct their argument as being consistent, and deflect counterarguments from other speakers by avoiding being overtly challenging. Here, the word 'just' minimises what Nandy is asking of the audience; she is not trying to persuade them, simply asking them to 'think about it'. This also presents her argument as being rational in that (a) its logic is so inescapable as to not require overt persuasion, and (b) anyone would arrive at the same conclusion through the simple process of thinking about it. This also works to further reinforce her position as being someone who is simply passing on relevant information, with the implication of this being there is no need for her to engage in persuasive arguments as the audience can reach the same conclusion by themselves. This notion is reiterated in line 22 with the rhetorical question 'if we come out would it be the same' through which the speaker indicates that the answer is so obvious it doesn't need to be stated.

Therefore, in this extract Nandy can be seen to construct the purported high level of consensus between economists as being unique to the EU referendum debate. This attends to fact construction by undermining any criticism of expert opinion which is grounded in observation of previous EU debates by suggesting that as the current situation is so distinct, they cannot be compared. This creation of a 'then vs. now' narrative works to maintain the credibility of economists within the debate, which in turn provides Nandy's position on the EU referendum with legitimacy. The invocation of the European currency debate was identified as being a common tool through which certain speakers would justify their mistrust of economists as stemming from political precedent. In addition to the 'then vs. now' device, extract 3 features alternative ways in which this criticism is undermined, and the facticity of expert opinion is attended to.

In extract 3 Paddy Ashdown, Kate Hoey and an audience member debate the role of financial institutions within the EU debate. This conversation occurs following a disagreement between various panellists about the cost of EU membership. Whilst former Liberal Democrats leader Ashdown asserts that leaving the EU will bring about economic damage, Labour MP Kate Hoey instead believes that Brexit would be financially beneficial for the UK.

Extract 3: Question Time, 21/04/2016

A1 I did some urm (.) maths on the back of an envelope as well >I should say< I'm an economist and a financial advisor (.h) and I took the 10 billion of net savings we would make if we left urm (.) Europe and I multiplied those by 14 which is the number of years obviously up to 2030 (.) I then used the economic credit multiplier because of course you have the benefit of spending that 10 billion (.) the taxes raised on it some economic growth and so on and do you know the figure I came up with? the figure I came up with was 1.5 trillion

(.) which means that if we leave the European Union we will be able to fund and repay the national debt by the time 2030 comes

AU [((applause 0.6))]

KH [I THINK YOU SHOULD BE IN THE TREASURY]

PA let me [explain -]

DD [Kate Hoey] thinks you should be in the treasury

PA can I explain

DD yes Paddy (.) briefly if you would

PA first Kate (.) you were asked to name one of the international accredited institutes (.) [there are many of them]

KH [no I wasn't tonight]

PA you have named none so far so >it will be interesting to see< that challenged

KH they all got it wrong in the Euro Paddy you know that

PA hang on a second (.) ok fine I accept they could all be wrong (.) these guys (.) could be right (.) are you going to bet the whole country on that possibility

AU YES

PA fine (.) that is fine (.) if you're willing to bet the entire entire country on a pious hope rather than serious studies from the international institutions that are respected around the world (.) then you're right to vote Brexit

To begin with, rather than referring to expert opinion in order to construct his economic argument, the audience member instead presents himself as being responsible for the data produced within his account: 'I did some urm (.) maths on the back of an envelope as well' (line 1). 'Back of the envelope' calculations refer to reasonable mathematic approximations made with the intention of quickly reaching an accurate estimate. By using this phrase, the audience member indicates that the economic impact of Britain leaving the EU can be calculated easily and without the input of economists, with this in turn working to undermine their significance and expertise. Despite this implication, in line 2 he claims category

entitlement (Sacks, 1992), adding '>I should say< I'm an economist and a financial advisor'. As an audience member, the speaker lacks the credibility accorded to panel members on account of their status. It is therefore important for the fact construction of his account that he asserts himself as having in-depth knowledge about financial matters which enables him to contradict reports from established institutions such as the Bank of England. This use of category entitlement is also important for building the validity of his data as his reference to using 'maths on the back of an envelope' (line 1), while useful in working up the simplicity of the thinking involved, carries with it the risk of appearing to be too simplistic and uninformed if it wasn't grounded in his financial expertise. The speaker proceeds to provide an overview of how he conducted his calculation, explaining 'I took the 10 billion of net savings we would make if we left urm (.) Europe and I multiplied those by 14 which is the number of years obviously up to 2030' (lines 3-5). This detailed summary works to demonstrate his knowledge about the economy and the European Union, with this level of detail working up his credibility. By explaining the mathematical process behind how he reached his conclusion, this also enables the audience to follow this procedure in order to validate the facticity of his final figure independently. This works to construct the economics involved in the EU referendum as being simple and accessible, with the speaker's use of discourse markers such as 'obviously' (line 5) and 'of course' (line 6) functioning to present this information as being common knowledge.

In response to Ashdown's challenge, Hoey discredits the value of expert opinion by arguing 'they all got it wrong in the Euro Paddy you know that' (line 24). Here, Hoey's reference to economic experts being in favour of Britain adopting the Euro in the late 1990s attends to the fact construction of her account in several ways. First, it undermines the suggestion that as economists support Britain remaining in the EU, that this necessarily means that the leave campaign is factually incorrect. This is because as 'they all got it wrong

with the euro' (line 24), there is a possibility that they are also mistaken in this situation. Next, this also works to present Hoey's non-response to Ashdown's question as being due to the lack of importance of this type of information within the debate, rather than due to her being unable to support her position. Finally, her claim that 'Paddy you know that' positions Ashdown as wilfully ignoring the failure of past economic predictions, and in doing so misleading the public about the fallibility of these financial institutions. This also works to construct her argument that experts 'all got it wrong in the euro' as being a 'known' fact that people from all political sides agree on, with this in turn presenting her mistrust of economic institutions as being grounded in an objective reality.

Whilst Hoey presents the possibility that experts could be incorrect as being a cause to doubt their input within the debate, Ashdown instead uses this possibility to further undermine the leave campaign, employing the apparent agreement 'ok fine I accept they could all be wrong (.) these guys (.) could be right (.)' (line 25-26). By dismissively referring to the panel members who support Brexit as 'these guys', the speaker presents them as lacking the support, status and significance awarded to 'all' the financial institutions who favour remain. Through this, he establishes a diametrically opposed contrast between the two groups in which the suggestion that expert opinion could be wrong is constructed as being improbable and even mockable. Ashdown therefore implicitly measures the likelihood of each group being incorrect before encouraging the audience to use their own judgement, asking 'are you going to bet the whole country on that possibility' (lines 26-27). The extreme case formulation 'the whole country' works to increase the stakes involved in this choice, with the implication being that ignoring expert opinion due to a small possibility that they are wrong is not worth the risk. This use of a betting analogy also works to construct leave voters as being unreasonable as their decision is presented as being taken on the basis of chance rather than informed through evidence and careful consideration.

The following response of 'YES' from several audience members (line 28) is criticised by Ashdown who argues that 'if you're willing to bet the entire country on a pious hope rather than serious studies from the international institutions that are respected around the world (.) then you're right to vote Brexit' (lines 29-32). The use of religious language such as the word 'pious' further constructs those rejecting expert opinion as being irrational by indicating that they are making a faith-based decision which is antithetical to objective factual information. By stating that individuals who share this view are 'right to vote Brexit', Ashdown not only criticises the audience members and panellists who expressed this view, he also undermines the credibility of the leave campaign as a whole. This is because as the 'serious studies from the international institutions that are respected around the world' are presented as supporting remain, the implication is that there is no valid reason to favour leaving. Therefore, in this extract Ashdown works to construct any scepticism surrounding financial institutions as being irrational and not to be taken seriously.

'£350 million a week'

One of the key economic disputes central to the European referendum debates was the claim made by the 'Vote Leave' campaign that the UK sends £350 million to the EU in payment for membership fees. While this statistic was presented by some speakers as a factual basis for leaving the EU, it was dismissed by other speakers as evidence that certain members of the Leave campaign were being dishonest in their use of information. A example of this is evident in extract 4 in which Conservative MP Amber Rudd responds to a question from the chair, David Dimbleby. This discussion occurs in response to an audience member commenting on the discrepancy between the economic statistics put forward by the leave and remain campaign.

Extract 4; Question Time, 19/05/2016

DD right (.) so the vote remain every pound we put in we get ten pounds back vote leave put three hundred and fifty in and only get half of it back (.) so somebody is not telling the truth (.) Amber Rudd

AR what remain is doing is focussing on the benefit to the economy so (.) the fact that we have a single market the fact that we get investment into the UK because we're part of the platform of access for the EU which is what international investors say (.)it's working out the benefit ten to one of having that investment of being out having access to the single market (.) but the leave are comparing it to is how much it costs because they're simply looking at (.) the bill for being a member of this club (.) then they're netting the rebate which Margaret Thatcher got and any other money that's >equivalent of what we get back< and they're looking at the cost of that and saying this is the cost of your membership (.) and they're not looking at these enormous benefits we get from the single market

In lines 1 to 3 Dimbleby presents the contrast in the statistics between the Vote Remain claim that 'every pound we put in we get ten pounds back' and the Vote Leave claim that the UK 'put three hundred and fifty in and only get half of it back'. From this discrepancy, he comes to the conclusion that 'somebody is not telling the truth' (line 3) . In response to this, Rudd states 'what remain is doing is focusing on the benefit to the economy' (lines 5-6). By attributing her account to the 'remain' campaign rather than her own opinion, Rudd adopts the position of the 'animator' (Goffman, 1981) in which she is seen to be a nonpartisan observer relaying objective information. In distancing herself from the production of this information, she also avoids culpability for any factual errors which would otherwise work to undermine her credibility as a speaker. Furthermore, the use of the verb 'focusing' (line 5) presents this difference as being due to a variance in perspective, rather than intentional deceit. This enables Rudd to dismiss data which falls outside the narrow scope of economic

benefits as being irrelevant to the specific claims put forward by the remain campaign. This attends to fact construction by legitimising the exclusion of conflicting information from her account, something which may have been pointed to by other speakers as evidence of dishonesty. In lines 6-8 Rudd presents the economic benefits of EU membership as being 'the fact that we have a single market' and 'the fact that we get investment into the UK because we're part of the platform of access for the EU'. This repeated assertion of 'the facts' constructs these points as being established and indisputable within the debate. The validity of these factual assertions are further built upon by Rudd attributing the source of this information as being 'what international investors say' (lines 8-9). Here, the speaker distances both herself and the remain campaign from the production of this account of the economy. This works to pre-emptively defend against immediate accusations of bias as it is more difficult to characterise a diverse group of 'international investors' as being politically motivated to lie. The 'ten to one' (line 9) economic benefit of Britain remaining in the EU is given credibility through the speaker's construction of 'out-there-ness' in which the factuality of this data is presented as existing within an independent and objective reality (Potter, 1996).

Although Rudd constructs the facticity of the 'ten to one' statistic by focusing on specific economic factors, she goes on to criticise Vote Leave for 'simply looking at (.) the bill for being a member of this club' (lines 12-13). The adverb 'simply' is used to undermine the credibility of the '£350 million in' claim made by the leave campaign on the basis that their method of data collection is reductionist and shallow. This establishes a contrast between the validity of the different economic concerns of the two campaigns as while 'Vote Remain' are presented as having made an informed decision to focus on the 'benefits to the economy', Vote Leave are presented as choosing their economic approach due to its simplicity. Rudd then provides a narration of how the leave campaign reached their conclusion stating, 'they're netting the rebate which Margaret Thatcher got and any other money that's

>equivalent of what we get back< and they're looking at the cost of that and saying this is the cost of your membership' (lines 13-16). This constructs the speaker as having insight into Vote Leave's process of producing the '£350 million' statistic, with this perceived knowledge giving her criticism of the statistic more credibility. Finally, Rudd accuses the leave campaign of 'not looking at these enormous benefits we get from the single market' (lines 16-17). The emphasis of the ECF 'enormous' suggests that these economic benefits are so significant that they are difficult to ignore, therefore making it important that they are accounted for. As the leave campaign are presented as neglecting this information, this undermines the factual accuracy of their claims. Furthermore, by suggesting that the benefits of EU membership are obvious and undeniable, Rudd implies that Vote Leave are purposely failing to report this information. This relates back to Dimbleby's initial assertion that 'somebody is not telling the truth' (line 3) as Rudd constructs the £350 million a week statistic as being deliberately misleading without making this claim explicitly.

This extract reflects a trend within the data set in which certain speakers worked to undermine the facticity of the '£350 million a week' claim by presenting the calculations behind it as being over simplistic and motivated by bias. The current analysis identified various key ways in which the credibility of this figure was constructed as credible in the face of such criticism. One interesting finding was that despite often acting as a common criticism of this claim, the idea of simplicity was also used by some speakers in order to justify any apparent factual errors related to the production of this statistic. This can be seen in extract 5 which follows a disagreement between David Dimbleby and journalist Alison Pearson about the accuracy of the £350 million a week figure, and the nature of EU rebates. This dispute centred around Pearson's argument that the EU had control of where the treasury spent the money they gained back through rebates, a claim which Dimbleby disputed. The extract begins with then leader of UKIP Nigel Farage being asked to provide clarity on this topic

.Extract 5; Question Time, 09/06/2016

DD Can you just fact check what she said (.) is it true that the rebate (.h) That the EU tells us where to spend the rebate (.) I've never heard you [say that]
NF [No] No it doesn't (.) but the rebate is up for constant discussion (.3) our rebate keeps being chipped away away at as the price of other deals (.) but can we just get to the truth of this (.) three hundred and fifty million a week is wrong (.) its higher than that
HB Come on
NF If you look (.) I think the trouble we've got here is we're expressing things in billions and hundreds of millions and people get confused (.) FACT (.) absolute fact (.h) from the last (.) from the 2014 official yearly statistics cross checked with the EU we pay fifty-five million pounds a day as a contribution (.) some of that (.) David is the rebate which doesn't go but our gross (.) contribution is fifty-five million a day (.) in rebates (.) and money that comes back in terms of grants (.) and agricultural support (.)twenty-one million pounds a day gets knocked off that fifty-five million (.h) I think maybe the easiest thing for us to do on the Brexit camp is just to talk about the NET figure (.) and the net figure is thirty-four million pounds every single day ten billion pounds a year (.) and I say that's too much and we should spend that money here in our own country (.) on our own people

In this extract Nigel Farage attends to the facticity of his account in three separate ways. Firstly, he constructs this account as being informed by objective statistics that provide an accurate insight into how much the UK spends on EU membership fees. Next, he presents his potentially controversial interpretation of this data as being subjective, with this making it difficult to contest on factual grounds. Finally, he suggests that any confusion regarding this

matter is a result of overcomplication, with this working to build his ‘simplified’ overview as being an unadorned representation of reality.

In lines 1 to 3 Dimbleby asks Farage to ‘fact check’ Allison Pearson’s claim that ‘the EU tells us where to spend the rebate’, stating ‘I’ve never heard you [say that]’. This works to present Farage as an authority on this matter as his opinion is treated as a significant factor in determining the validity of this claim. This inadvertently prefaces the facticity of his account by indicating that he is a credible speaker. In response, Farage confirms that ‘no it doesn’t’(line 4), indicating that he does not share Pearson’s belief. Although Farage was not part of the official ‘Vote Leave’ campaign responsible for the production of the £350 million statistic, as Pearson shares his view on the EU the implication that she has provided inaccurate information could reflect negatively on his position. To navigate this, Farage employs the apparent concession ‘but the rebate is up for constant discussion (.3)our rebate keeps being chipped away at as the price of other deals’ (lines 4 to 6). This presents the EU’s relationship with the UK’s rebate as being subject to frequent change due to it being ‘up for constant discussion’, therefore not making it a predictable basis on which to plan for the future. This is used to suggest that although the EU does not currently control how the UK spends rebates there is a high chance it will in the future, maintaining the credibility of Pearson’s claim. Farage goes on to dismiss the factual importance of this clarification, stating ‘but can we just get to the truth of this’ (line 7), indicating that this discussion is acting as a distraction from the ‘true’ debate. In lines 7 to 8 he appears to agree with earlier criticism that the ‘three hundred and fifty million a week is wrong’. However rather than using this to undermine the legitimacy of the data put forward by the leave campaign, he instead uses this concession to support his claim that ‘its higher than that’. This works by distancing Farage from the criticism of this statistic and presents him as reasonable for accepting criticism

towards the campaign he supports. This constructs the facticity of his account by indicating that it addresses the factual errors present in the £350 million a week claim.

In response to Hilary Benn's incredulity ('Come on', line 9), Farage asserts 'If you look (.) I think the trouble we've got here is we're expressing things in billions and hundreds of millions and people get confused' (lines 10-12). First, the statement 'if you look' is used to indicate that the 'trouble' with the economic debate surrounding the EU referendum is so obvious that it can be gleaned from observation alone, with this constructing Farage's claims as being grounded in an objective and accessible reality. Next, although he previously seemed to accept criticism of the £350 million statistic, here he attributes any 'trouble' with the figure to people's confusion with the way in which it is presented. This undermines the legitimacy of criticism towards this figure by suggesting that it is a result of misunderstanding rather than factual errors. Farage then presents his own statistics, stating 'FACT (.) absolute fact (.h) from the last (.) from the 2014 official yearly statistics cross checked with the EU we pay fifty-five million pounds a day as a contribution' (lines 12-15). The emphasis and repetition of the word 'fact' is used to mark this information as established and undeniable, therefore making it important to the debate. He further supports the factuality of this account by referring to the '2014 official yearly statistics' (line 13). By presenting this data as having an 'official' source, he provides his claim with legitimacy and authority.

Furthermore, his mention of these statistics being 'cross checked' by the EU is significant for fact construction. One reason for this is that it presents him as being diligent in his research as he is seen to have considered multiple sources of information before concluding that they supported his claim. Another reason for this is that as it is well known that Farage and the governing bodies of the EU are often in conflict, it may be expected that they would disagree about these statistics. As they are instead confirmed by EU data, this indicates that they must be objectively true. Throughout this account Farage provides the audience with

various sums and figures, explaining that ‘twenty-one million pounds a day gets knocked off that fifty-five million’ (lines 18-19). This is presented to the audience as being a simple and transparent equation that can be used to validate the facticity of his conclusion that ‘the net figure is 34 million pounds every single day 10 billion pounds a year’ (lines 21-22). Despite constructing his account as transparent, it is interesting to note that Farage only provides the daily and annual figures of UK contribution fees and avoids giving a weekly figure. A potential reason for this is that according to his own calculations, the weekly sum of money paid to the EU is lower than the £350 million statistic being debated. This seemingly contradicts his earlier claim that the discussed figure is wrong because ‘its higher than that’ (line 8). If this discrepancy was to be identified, it could be used to undermine the facticity of his entire account on the basis of it containing errors or mistruths. Through this Farage can be seen to selectively avoid attending to information which would highlight questionable elements of his account, with this enabling him to maintain credibility as a speaker.

Farage therefore constructs this figure as factual by providing the audience with simple economic sums which when completed provide an answer which corresponds with his account. The effectiveness of this ‘simple’ approach to fact construction may explain his reiteration of his earlier point regarding the complexity of statistics in lines 19 to 21 where he suggests that ‘I think maybe the easiest thing for us to do on the Brexit camp is just to talk about the NET figure’. This suggestion is used to further indicate that the issues surrounding the 350 million a week figure are a result of it being overcomplicated and misunderstood by people outside ‘the Brexit camp’. The implication of this is that by providing a simplified account of the net figure, Farage is enabling the public to look at the basic facts of the situation without any unnecessary information that may detract from the truth.

This analysis also identified a further way in which the facticity of the ‘350 million a week’ figure was attended to in response to accusations of it being misleading or incorrect. It

was found that certain speakers would present this claim as being only a general reflection of the EU's control of the UK's economy rather than as being an absolute figure central to their economic arguments. This enabled them to avoid directly responding to factual challenges on the basis that the accuracy of this statistic was constructed as being trivial in comparison to the wider issues that it represents. In extract 6, Conservative MP and leave supporter Michael Gove discusses the validity of this statistic:

Extract 6; Question Time; 20/06/2016

A1 Does vote leave regret using the three hundred and fifty million pound a week figure on its battle bus

DD Money that you claim that we give to the EU which has been roundly criticised not by the (.) er advertising (.) agencies they're not allowed to say anything about political campaigns (.h) but it has been described as being misleading to put it generously

MG Some have er (.) but I stand (.) by that figure >because that< is the amount that the European Union controls (.h) ultimately (.) this debate is about control (.) who do you think would spend our money better (.) people who you elect and whom you can kick out (.) or people you have never heard of and over whom you have no control (.h) that three hundred and fifty million pounds >yes some< of it comes back here (.) some of it comes back through rebate (.) but you can't count on a rebate (.) it has been cut in the past (.)and if you vote to remain it will be cut in the future (.) some of it comes back we heard from the lady in the third row (.) to spend money on science and on farming (.) and of course (.) it is a good thing that we invest in those areas and we're going to carry on investing in those areas (.) but at least half of that money (.) goes into the European Union and we never see it again (.) I think that if we vote leave and take back control (.) we spend that money on our priorities

In lines 4 to 5 David Dimbleby is vague when identifying who has criticised the £350 million a week figure, only reporting that it was ‘not by the (.) er advertising (.) agencies they’re not allowed to say anything about political campaigns. Gove employs this vagueness in his own account, agreeing that ‘some have’ (line 8). This lack of specificity, alongside his use of hedging through the term ‘some’, works to minimise the credibility of this criticism by constructing it as stemming from a limited number of people without notable status or credentials. This apparent concession is followed by the statement ‘but I stand (.) by that figure >because that< is the amount that the European Union controls’ (lines 8-9). By providing a specific reason for why he supports this statistic, he indicates that he acknowledges that other factors may be involved in calculating how much the UK pays the EU in contribution fees. He goes on to justify his focus on ‘the amount that the European Union controls’ (line 9) by arguing that ‘ultimately (.) this debate is about control’ (lines 9-10). This constructs the £350 million statistic as representing a core reality of the debate, regardless of other factors which may be involved. The concept of control is expanded upon in lines 10 to 13 through the rhetorical question ‘who do you think would spend our money better (.) people who you elect and whom you can kick out (.) or people you have never heard of and over whom you have no control’. The answer to this question is presented as being obvious, therefore making it unnecessary to explicitly discuss alternative options.

Gove then references one of the common criticisms of the £350 million a week claim, acknowledging ‘that three hundred and fifty million pounds >yes some< of it comes back here (.) some of it comes back through rebate’ (lines 13 to 15). He again hedges this acceptance through the use of the softening description ‘some’, with this suggesting that this counterpoint is at best only minimally valid as only a small percentage of this figure is rebated to the UK. He further undermines criticism related to the rebate in lines 15 to 17,

stating ‘but you can’t count on a rebate (.) it has been cut in the past (.) and if you vote to remain it will be cut in the future’. This is used to present Gove as being justified in excluding the rebate from the total sum of the £350 million a week figure by suggesting that it is not something that can be relied upon. This also attends to the facticity of the figure itself by constructing it as being more secure and dependable than other economic accounts which may be subject to frequent change due to the uncertain nature of the rebate. In addition to this, the speaker supports his assertion that ‘if you vote to remain it will be cut in the future’ (lines 16- 17) as being informed by the past actions of the EU. This constructs his scepticism surrounding the rebate as being a result of his own observation, rather than being due to him selectively excluding data which would challenge his account. Finally, in lines 21 to 22 Gove moves on from the rebate, stating ‘but at least half of that money (.) goes into the European Union and we never see it’. Rather than directly attend to the facticity of this claim he instead presents this point as being part of a wider moral argument for Brexit, asserting ‘I think that if we vote leave and take back control (.) we spend that money on our priorities’ (lines 22-24). Here, his footing shifts to highlight this as being his own opinion. This, alongside his use of the slogan ‘take back control’, constructs his account in subjective terms, with this making it difficult to undermine on a factual basis. Therefore, in this extract Gove can be seen to defend the credibility of the ‘£350 million a week’ claim by presenting the figure in and of itself as only being a component of the wider moral problems which exist within the EU debate.

Practicality and Common-Sense

Another key theme identified within this data set was how notions of practicality and common-sense were used by some speakers to construct the facticity of their account. This was found to be especially prevalent in accounts of immigration in which speakers employed devices relating to these concepts in order to avoid accusations of prejudice, a claim which

would undermine the facticity of their view. This is evident in extract 7 in which the former Conservative Party Director of Strategy Steve Hilton discusses the practicality of the UK having 'open borders' with the EU. The extract begins with Hilton seemingly agreeing with the former leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband, who had expressed pro-immigrations views.

Extract 7; Question Time;26/05/2016

SH erm (.) like Ed I'm very pro-immigration and because I suspect also like Ed my parents were immigrants to this country I owe everything I have all my opportunities (.) to the fact that this country welcomed my parents (.) I'm also an immigrant now from this country to America so I'm very pro-immigration (.) but because of that I think we should be completely open on immigration and let me explain what I mean by that (.) it's clearly common sense that we can't have unlimited numbers of people coming to this country (.) we all agree there has to be a limit there has to be a certain number (.) beyond which it's not sustainable as we've heard (.) so the question is who comes within that limit (.) what we have right now from being in the EU is a situation where we have unlimited numbers of people coming from Europe (.) without any say or control over it what that means is that we're shutting the doors for people from beyond Europe (.) that could be fantastically valuable contributors to our economy and society (.) people from China or India or (.) entrepreneurs from all around the world who are shut out because we have to take as I put it (.) unlimited numbers of Hungarian waiters (.) now I've got nothing against Hungarians because I am one but the truth is we should be able to decide (.) who comes to our country that should be a choice for us (.) and as long as we're in the EU it's a choice we can't make

Hilton begins by emphasising his ‘pro-immigration’ stance, explaining ‘I suspect also like Ed my parents were immigrants to this country I owe everything I have all my opportunities (.) to the fact that this country welcomed my parents (.) I’m also an immigrant now from this country to America so I’m very pro-immigration’ (lines 1-4). His explicit self-categorisation as an immigrant immediately anticipates and counters any accusations of prejudice, and instead presents him as having an in-depth understanding about this topic (Potter, 1996). This category entitlement also functions as a stake confession, with Hilton attributing ‘everything I have all my opportunities’ to his parents immigrating to the UK. The highlighting of this personal investment works to construct his later criticism of EU migration as factual by implying that as he has benefited from immigration, he must have a valid reason to oppose it in this instance. This reason is provided in lines 8-9 with Hilton asserting ‘it’s clearly common sense that we can’t have unlimited numbers of people coming to this country’. The adjective ‘clearly’ paired with the term ‘common sense’ mark this as taken-for granted background knowledge, with this therefore presenting his view as rational and self-evident (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This is reinforced in lines 9 to 10 by Hilton invoking consensus, stating ‘we all agree there has to be a limit there has to be a certain number’. The use of the pronoun ‘we’ presents the speaker as simply reiterating an accepted reality about immigration, with this warranting the objectivity of his account. This pronoun is also used here to indicate a collective responsibility for resolving the potentially controversial question he raises in lines 12 to 13 ‘so the question is who comes within that limit’. By sharing the accountability, Hilton distances himself from this aspect of his account. From this, he presents himself as simply considering various solutions to the problems caused by immigration.

In lines 13 to 14 the UK is described as having ‘unlimited numbers of people coming from Europe’, with the result of this being that ‘we’re shutting the doors for people from beyond

Europe' (lines 15-16). The metaphor of 'shutting the door' has come to be associated with calls for restrictive immigration policies through the imagery of 'the door' being used to conceptualise the UK as a private property which has the right to refuse entry to certain individuals (Hart & Lukeš, 2007). The use of this metaphor may reflect Charteris-Black's (2005) finding that in immigration discourse speakers often constructed Britain as being a 'container' which needs defending from the threat of immigration so that it does not become overfilled. Barnes (1991) suggests that the use of metaphors in such contexts work to construct novel concepts as being literal, observable, and grounded in every-day life. Hilton uses this imagery to argue that the 'door' is being unfairly shut on 'fantastically valuable contributors to our economy and society (.) people from China or India' in favour of 'unlimited numbers of Hungarian waiters' (lines 16-20). This works to construct an asymmetrical juxtaposition in which Hilton's use of the extreme case formulation 'fantastically valuable contributors' (lines 16-17) alongside his selective reference to 'entrepreneurs from all around the world' (line 18) are used to emphasise the skill level of non-EU immigrants while minimising the contribution of EU immigrants in the form of 'unlimited number of Hungarian waiters' (lines 19-20). Hilton constructs this contrast as being an accurate reflection of immigration in the UK by presenting it as being the logical conclusion of 'what we have right now from being in the EU' (lines 12-13). Furthermore, through this argument Hilton reframes the immigration debate as being about fairness. This is because whilst those arguing in favour of stricter immigration control are often accused of being prejudiced, here it is the current system that is constructed as being biased and discriminatory against non-EU migrants. This enables Hilton to implicitly position his solution of allowing the public to vote on immigration laws as being the most fair and reasonable option.

Hilton's use of the extreme case formulation 'unlimited', to describe these 'Hungarian waiters' further constructs the current immigration system as being impractical. In presenting this characterisation, Hilton first shifts the footing of his speech to take on the more active role of the 'principal' (Goffman, 1981), using the personal pronouns ''as I put it' (line 19). The pronoun 'I' emphasises that Hilton is stating his own opinion, with the implication of this being that he is responsible for any claims he makes. This move towards personal rather than collective accountability reflects the likelihood that a reference to 'unlimited number of Hungarian waiters' risks inviting accusations of prejudice if it was not for Hilton's identity as a Hungarian immigrant. This identity is highlighted through the use of the disclaimer 'now I've got nothing against Hungarians because I am one but the truth is we should be able to decide' (lines 20-22). This undermines any negative inferences about his motives that could be used to deconstruct the validity of his account due to Hilton presenting himself as being a member of the group he is characterising. Through his invocation of identity and his appeal to common-sense, Hilton frames immigration in terms of an objective criteria through which subjective factors such as bias and prejudice are removed.

Alongside being used to build positive self-presentation, notions of practicality and common sense were also used as rhetorically self-sufficient arguments through which speakers would construct their account as being reflective of an unfortunate truth about the practical implications of EU immigration in the UK. These arguments are self-sufficient in that they are presented as being beyond question (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Through this, anti-immigration views were presented as being a natural response to objective facts that are undeniable regardless of the personal feelings of the speaker themselves. This is evident in extract 8 in which following a conversation about migrants using public resources, an audience member provides a first-hand account of the effects of immigration.

Extract 8; Question Time; 28/04/2016

AU no no (.2) my question is I have got no problem with the lady here about (.) erm about a political or any other asylum that's our kind of heritage and we should continue doing that (.hh) but I have worked in industries HR and trading where I have worked with a production line that has been predominately (.2) eastern European to the extent that one of our employees who was British went off with depression because nobody spoke to him (.) in his own language for a ten-hour shift (.) and that guy was totally and utterly isolated (.hh) these people are great (.) they work hard you can't say they are coming for benefits because they're not (.) they're coming because they want to work (.h) the trouble is that we don't have an infinite amount of jobs (.) we don't have an infinite amount of NHS or housing (.) we're a small country

The audience member's initial disclaimer that 'I have no problem with the lady here about (.) erm political or any other asylum' (lines 1-2) is used to introduce the speaker as being fair and tolerant, with this positive self-presentation working to foreground the objectivity of his account. This apparent tolerance is then projected onto the UK as a nation through the assertion 'that's our kind of heritage and we should continue doing that' (lines 23). This reference to heritage constructs the acceptance of asylum seekers as a traditional and immutable characteristic of the country (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), with the implication being that it is therefore irrelevant to the EU referendum debate. This enables the speaker to express anti-immigration views whilst maintaining a positive self-presentation in order to mitigate the possibility of being perceived as biased against refugees, a factor which would affect the objectivity of his account (Lynn & Lea, 2003). However, in lines 4 to 9 the speaker recounts the experience of a 'British' employee working with 'Eastern European' immigrants. He warrants the factuality of his account by invoking the category entitlement of being both a witness to the event, and as having 'worked in industries HR and trading' (line

4). This provides him with credibility as both a narrator, and as a working professional who has special insight into the effects of immigration in his field.

In lines 7 to 8, the speaker reports that his employee ‘went off with depression because nobody spoke to him (.) in his own language for a ten-hour shift’. The specific time formulation (‘ten-hour’) and the use of extreme case formulations heightens the sense that ‘that guy was totally and utterly isolated’ (line 8 to 9), constructing the speakers’ description of the employee’s mental state as a legitimate and believable account (Potter, 1996). Next, the audience member employs what Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) identify as a principle-practice distinction in which themes of ‘equal opportunity’ are presented in contrast to themes of ‘practical considerations’. He initially presents a moral argument in favour of immigration, stating ‘these people are great (.) they work hard you can’t say they are coming for benefits because they’re not (.) they’re coming because they want to work’ (line 9-12). This sentiment is reflective of liberal values such as tolerance and fairness which are constructed as being obvious and natural ideals to hold. This positive assessment of immigration works to present the speaker positively as he is seen to endorse these values, with this undermining any implications that his judgement is marred by prejudice. He then follows this with an argument grounded in practical considerations, seemingly commiserating that ‘the trouble is that we don’t have an infinite amount of jobs (.) we don’t have an infinite amount of NHS or housing (.) we’re a small country’ (lines 12-14) . These considerations are constructed as being undeniable, with concerns such as ‘we’re a small country’ seen as objectively representing ‘the nature of things’ (Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987). This invocation of imagery relating to the UK being an island works to frame immigration in geographical terms, and thus further undermines the implication that the speaker is motivated by the dislike of a certain nationality or race (Abell, Condor & Stevenson, 2006). Furthermore, by presenting ‘the trouble’ with immigration as existing independently from his

own beliefs, the audience member attends to the facticity of his account in two ways. First, this provides the account with 'out there-ness' in which it is seen to represent an objective representation of reality which is divorced from the speaker's personal biases (Potter, 1996). Next, this indicates that his anti-immigration views are reluctant, further suggesting that his account is not motivated by prejudice but rather by the acceptance of an 'unfortunate truth' about the practical implication of EU migration.

This analysis has examined three ways in which factual discourse was constructed within the Brexit debate. The first part of the analysis explored how consensus and expert opinion was used to both legitimise and undermine the validity of accounts. A key way in which speakers were observed to dismiss the credibility of expert opinion was through making reference to the previous debate concerning the single European currency. This was used to justify scepticism of financial reports on the basis that as economists had 'wrongly' supported the UK adopting the Euro, they therefore could not be trusted to provide accurate information in the current debate. In direct response to this argument, the use of a 'then vs. now' device was found to emerge. This device worked to maintain expert credibility by constructing the economic consensus in the EU referendum as being so unprecedented that it cannot be compared to previous events.

A further analytic focus of this research was how speakers attended to the facticity of the claim that the UK sends £350 million to the EU in payment for membership fees. This analysis identified two key ways in which this figure was constructed as being credible. First, certain speakers were seen to present this statistic as being a simplified representation of an overcomplicated situation. This worked to attribute any factual errors to confusion rather than malice. Next, this statistic was also found to be presented as only being symbolic of the wider issues surrounding EU economic control. This enabled speakers to construct this figure as

representing a core reality of the debate without directly responding to challenges regarding its facticity.

Finally, this analysis examined how practicality and common sense were used in the construction of anti-immigration discourse. Here it was found that certain speakers would employ these values to present their potentially controversial accounts of migration as being motivated by reason and rationality, rather than by prejudice. One way in which this was achieved was through speakers advocating the implementation of a skilled-based immigration system which would be grounded in objective criteria. This was constructed as being a common-sense solution devoid of bias. Another way in which this was achieved was through speakers presenting their negative accounts of immigration as being reluctant. This reluctance was used to indicate that their view was a natural and unavoidable response to the practical realities of migration.

Discussion

The analytic findings of this research will now be examined further. This will include an overview of these findings alongside a consideration of their potential implications for discursive psychology, fact construction, and post-truth politics. The key novel devices identified within this dataset will then be highlighted and discussed in terms of their contribution to the current discursive literature. This will then be followed by a section detailing the limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for future research. Finally, this thesis will conclude with a summary of what insight be gained from this research.

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Findings and implications

The aim of the current study was to examine the process of fact construction in the UK's EU referendum campaign. This was achieved through the analysis of data gathered from episodes of the BBC's political debate show Question Time which were broadcast between the official EU campaigning dates of the 5th of April 2016 and the 23rd June 2016. This research identified three key ways in which factual discourse was constructed and used within the Brexit debate. The first finding discussed in this thesis was in relation to how speakers employed expert opinion and consensus in the construction of factual accounts. A reoccurring theme which emerged from the analysis was that the validity of claims made by economic experts was a contentious issue amongst speakers. A common device employed in constructing expert opinion as being factual and therefore important to the Brexit debate was category entitlement. This can be seen in the multiple references made to financial institutions such as the IMF and the Bank of England which are assumed to have specialised insight into the referendum due to their status as respected experts in the economic field. By

referring to these respected institutions, speakers validated the facticity of their own account by indicating that it was informed and supported by credible expert opinion. The status of experts was also related to how speakers employed consensus in their arguments. The notion of an 'extraordinary' consensus existing among economists was used by panellists such as Lisa Nandy and Hillary Benn to suggest that the rarity of this type of wide-spread agreement indicates that their claims are indisputably accurate.

This clam of an unprecedented consensus worked to construct the EU referendum as being a unique political event which is incomparable to past situations. This apparent uniqueness was used to undermine the reoccurring comparisons made to the European currency debate that were invoked in order to dismiss the credibility of expert opinion. As seen is extracts 2 and 3, some speakers were observed to make reference to the events preceding the UK's rejection of the Euro in the late 1990s/early 2000s in order to justify their mistrust of the information provided by economists on the basis that they had been wrong before. This view was presented through the use of definitive statements which asserted that economic and political consensus had been in favour of the UK adopting the Euro, and that this had been objectively the wrong decision. A key way in which this comparison was undermined was through the use of a competing 'then vs. now' device which emphasised the uniqueness of the EU referendum. This worked to dismiss any scepticism of experts which was presented as being a result of past experience as being irrelevant to the current situation in which there is a stronger, and therefore more credible, consensus regarding the EU. While the apparent consensus between experts was used by some speakers to attend to the facticity of their claims, it was discredited by others as being suspicious. This suspicion was presented as warranted due to the shared social status of economists, a factor which was emphasised through descriptions such as 'financial bigwigs' (lines 5-6) as seen in extract two. This

undermined the credibility of these experts by suggesting that the source of their agreement is a shared interest, rather than by factual information.

These findings reflect Edwards and Potter's (1992) observations about the use of consensus in political discourse. This can be seen specifically in relation to how the scale of consensus between experts was constructed as being indicative either of robust evidence supporting one side of the Brexit debate, or of collusion motivated by self-interest. An interesting finding related to this was the frequency of speakers invoking the European currency debate in order to undermine the credibility of consensus and expert opinion. Due to the currency and Brexit debate both centring around the European Union, this device provided effective grounding on which to challenge the factual accuracy of the current economic reports. The 'then vs. now' device noted in the data was found only to be employed in direct response to this type of comparison, suggesting that this device emerged as a result of specific recurring factual pressures within the debate. This is significant in light of recent discursive work on the use and construction of history (e.g. Gibson, 2012; Kirkwood, 2018). This previous research has identified occasions on which speakers in political debate seek to construct analogies between a present situation and some past event. For example, Kirkwood (2018) found that in parliamentary debate surrounding the 'refugee crisis', speakers would employ references to the United Kingdom previously providing refuge to Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany in order to mobilise support for Syrian refugees. However there has yet to be a systematic exploration of the devices through which such analogies are challenged and/or deconstructed, and the present identification of a device that effectively amounts to speakers asserting that was then and this is now represents a novel finding in this respect. In addition to this, this analysis of how speakers constructed expert opinion within this data set directly address the question of how debates in the so-called posttruth era attend to matters of factuality. As many of the devices identified in this analysis

has been identified in previous research, this may suggest that the nature of fact construction in current political discourse does not differ noticeably from that of the past. In relation to this, although this analysis produced various examples of speakers dismissing or undermining the value of expert opinion, the notion that this equates to an absolute rejection of factual information is unsupported by the data.

The analysis then went on to examine how different speakers attended to the facticity of the claim made by the Vote Leave campaign that the UK sends £350 million to the EU in payment for membership fees. This was considered to be an important area for analysis as it was one of the key economic disputes central to the referendum. While this statistic was presented by some speakers as a factual basis for leaving the EU, it was dismissed by other speakers as evidence that certain members of the Leave campaign were being dishonest in their use of information. The most common reasons given to justify scepticism of this figure was that it didn't account for the rebates gained back from the EU. This was constructed as being a deliberate attempt to mislead the public, with this implication working to undermine the credibility of the leave campaign as a whole. The alternative statistic presented as being a 'true' representation of the economic situation was that for every pound contributed to the EU, the UK gains ten pounds back in rebates. The facticity of this claim was attended to by speakers such as Amber Rudd through externalising devices such as adopting the role of the 'animator' (Goffman, 1981) which presented this data as existing within an independent and objective reality (Potter, 1996).

The current analysis also identified two key ways in which the credibility of this figure was constructed as credible in the face of such criticism. One interesting finding was how the concept of simplicity was employed in order to justify any apparent factual errors related to the production of this statistic. This is most apparent in extract five in which UKIP leader Nigel Farage defends the production of the £350 million a week statistic by arguing that it is

a simplified representation of what is an overcomplicated and confusing situation. Through this he both presented this data as reflecting the unadorned reality of EU rebates, and implied that alternative accounts were using unnecessary information which detracts from the basic facts of the situation. The second way in which the facticity of the '350 million a week' figure was constructed in response to criticism was by speakers presenting this claim as being only a general reflection of the EU's control of the UK's economy rather than as being an absolute figure central to the leave campaign's economic arguments. This enabled them to avoid directly responding to factual challenges on the basis that its accuracy is irrelevant in comparison to the 'real' issue of the EU controlling the UK's finances. This constructed the £350 million statistic as representing a core reality of the EU debate regardless of any statistic errors.

The way in which speakers attend to the facticity of their claims regarding EU rebates is largely in line with the findings of previous discursive research on fact construction. Specifically, the prominent use of externalising devices is reflective of what Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) identified as an empiricist repertoire in scientific discourse. In relation to this, it was observed that speakers both defending and criticising the '£350 million a week' figure worked to distance themselves from the mathematics underpinning this figure through this use of impersonal and neutral language. This suggests that talk surrounding the economy shares similar fact construction processes with scientific discourse. A particularly interesting finding of this research was how the label 'simplistic' was used to both construct and undermine the facticity of this figure. This is another example of instances within the data set where critical language is seen to be adopted, modified, and then employed by speakers in order to defend the validity of their account. Furthermore, whilst these findings reflect trends in the discursive literature, it is also possible that they are representative of the political and social climate. The most prominent example of this is how in some instances the accuracy of

economic claims was presented as being less important that the issues it was meant to reflect. This theme in the data may be indicative of the Brexit debate centring on subjective moral values such as control and freedom over objective factual information

The final finding discussed was how notions of practicality and common-sense were used to construct facticity. This was found to be especially prevalent in controversial accounts of immigration in which these devices were employed to undermine accusations of prejudice and bias. The analysis of this dataset identified how certain speakers presented their support for stricter immigration control as being rational and fair. For instance, in extract 7, Steve Hilton was observed to frame migration in terms of objective criteria relating to individual skill level and contribution. This was achieved by him presenting the current policy as being biased against skilled non-EU workers, and therefore unfair. From this, he constructed his argument for allowing the public to decide on matters of immigration as being a common-sense solution which would remove such prejudice from the system.

These findings share many similarities with previous discursive research which has examined how appeals to rationality and reason are invoked in immigration discourse. In their literature review of racist discourse in Western democracies, Augoustinos and Every (2007) suggest that this discursive strategy has developed in response to the increasing stigma that is attached to individuals who openly express prejudice sentiments. As prejudice is associated with irrationality, speakers employ common-sense arguments in order to validate their potentially offensive views (Goodman, 2012). A further finding of this analysis was in relation to how speakers opposing EU migration were seen to predicate their argument on the notion that the current system is discriminatory and unfair. This device has previously been highlighted in Gibson and Booth's (2017) analysis of the 2015 General Election, in which members of UKIP were found to employ the idea of an 'Australian style points system' so to warrant their support for reducing immigration on the basis of it being the most fair and

reasonable option. Despite having been identified by Gibson and Booth (2017), this strategy has not been fully explored outside of this specific context. It is therefore interesting to note that instances of this device were evident in both the 2015 General Election and the EU Referendum campaign. This finding is potentially indicative of how the language of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) has influenced the more general Eurosceptic discourse of the 'Vote Leave' campaign. Furthermore, alongside advocating for a 'fairer' system, this device was also used to construct the immigration debate as being about control. By centring the EU referendum around the concept of 'control', this can be seen as another way in which subjective values were brought to the forefront of political discourse.

Novel Findings and Contribution

Whilst many of the discursive techniques identified in this research reflect longstanding strategies for fact construction, the current findings have also highlighted various novel devices present during the referendum debate. A primary example of this is the 'then vs. now' device which was found to be employed by speakers in response to historical comparisons which worked to undermine the credibility of expert opinion. The identification of this technique has expanded on previous research which analysed the use of historical analogies in political discourse by explicitly labelling and examining the specific ways in which these analogies are challenged. This finding has informed discursive psychology by providing an insight into the use of historical references in the process of fact construction.

A further contribution of this analysis is in regard to the '£350 million a week' claim made by the Vote Leave campaign. Previous discursive literature on the EU referendum has not sought to examine the construction of specific factual claims put forward by each campaign, therefore the current research can be said to be novel in this respect. Finally, by exploring the use of the 'Australian Style points system' outside of the context of the 2015 General

Election (Gibson & Booth, 2017), this research has also provided an insight into how constructions of migration are shaped and perpetuated by British political discourse.

Limitations

Throughout the research several limitations have been identified. First, as this dataset consists only of episodes of Question Time, this may limit insight gained into fact construction in the EU referendum. As discourse is situated, it is possible that by analysing debates which occurred within an identical context under similar conditions and expectations, variances in fact construction have been missed. Another limitation of this study is the lack of analytic focus on key factual claims which were central to the referendum campaign. The closer examination of the '350 million a week' claim in this research was found to provide an in-depth understanding of fact construction in relation to both the Vote Leave campaign, and economic accounts. Therefore, if this study had focused on the construction of specific claims made about migration during the referendum, this may have resulted in a more comprehensive insight into how rationality and common-sense were employed in antiimmigration discourse. A final limitation of this research is that only episodes of Question Time which were broadcast within the official campaigning period were selected for inclusion. Whilst this was a purposeful decision made in order to maintain analytic focus in relation to the research question, it is possible that as a result of this the development and progression of rhetorical devices throughout this period have not been considered. Despite these limitations, this analysis has provided a detailed insight into fact construction within the specific context that formed the analytic focus of the study. These limitations can therefore be used to inform the direction and focus of future research.

Recommendations for future research

A primary recommendation of this research is that a similar discourse analysis could be performed on a larger and more inclusive dataset. Such research could include data both preceding and following the official campaigning period, as well as debates from different media sources. This would provide a more comprehensive overview of fact construction in the EU referendum campaign. In relation to this, as the two-year period following the invocation of Article 50 which marked the UK's official withdrawal from the EU expires in March 2019, this provides an opportunity for further research on the impact of Brexit on fact construction in modern political discourse. Finally, the issue of 'post-truth' politics remains a pressing issue that has implications for the future of political debate in the UK. Aside from the EU referendum, prominent politicians such as Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn have been accused of employing post-truth tactics by using populism, rather than policy, to garner support (Dean, 2017). As a result of this, it would be greatly beneficial for discursive psychology to further research the process of fact construction within political discourse. Such research should focus on two key issues which relate to political discourse in the post-truth era. First, many of the devices highlighted in the present study have previously been identified as longstanding strategies for fact construction. Because of this, a further examination of the similarities and differences between the discourse of past and present political debates may provide a more detailed insight into the impact the post-truth phenomena has had on the production of factual discourse. Next, future research on fact construction could also seek to explore how claims that that individuals or groups are engaging in 'post-truth' rhetoric are in and of themselves used to perform rhetorical work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current analysis highlighted three ways in which facts were constructed during the 2016 EU referendum. First, speakers were found to employ expert opinion and consensus in both the construction and deconstruction of factual accounts. Next, the claim

that the UK sends £350 million to the EU in payment for membership fees was presented as representing a core reality of the EU debate despite challenges to its facticity. Finally, notions of practicality and common-sense were used by some speakers to legitimise their anti-immigration views as being grounded in fairness, rather than in prejudice. These findings can be seen to largely correspond with existing literature regarding the process of fact construction, especially in regard to how consensus and common-sense values are employed in political discourse. This research also highlighted various devices which are unique to the EU referendum and emerged as a result of specific factual pressures within the debate.

Due to the process of fact construction in political debates being largely unexamined by the current discursive literature, this research also contributes to DP's understanding of truth and facticity in modern political discourse. Furthermore, this research also provides insights into the ways in which matters of factuality are constructed, deconstructed, and debated in the so-called 'post-truth' era. Whilst there are clearly some novel discursive devices employed in these debates, it is nevertheless striking that many of the techniques used by participants in the debates draw on longstanding rhetorical techniques for the establishment and undermining of factual claims.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions (Jefferson, 2004)

(.) A full stop enclosed in brackets indicates a micropause.

[ ] Square brackets denote overlapping speech.

(0.2) The number inside the brackets indicates a timed pause

> < < > Arrows surrounding text indicates that the pace of the speed has increased or decreased

(( )) Double brackets denotes a description of a nonverbal activity such as ((clapping))

Underlined text indicates speaker emphasis

CAPITAL letters denote loud speech

= Equal sign represents speech latching, which refers to a continuation of talk :: Colons represented elongated sounds