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**Abstract**

Parliamentary discourse in the Netherlands has been characterised as “business-like” and dispassionate, with little of the theatrics and verbal duels that are such a recogniseable feature of their British neighbours. The recent upsurge in Eurosceptics seems to have infused some British-style parliamentary discourse into the Dutch political sphere. This paper focused on the question of whether Dutch Eurosceptics share a significant portion of their discourse style with British MPs, specifically in the supranational context of the European Union. Features of British discourse style were found in previous authors, such as Ilie (2004), and Harris (2010), and operationalised along Brown & Levinson’s *facework* politeness theory. A corpus of parliamentary transcripts was selected, focusing on the speeches of Dutch Eurosceptics in the European Parliament, and analysed on the basis of whether they showed a significantly higher usage of unmitigated face-threatening acts and emotional language compared to mainstream parties, and the norm for Dutch members of parliament. The results show that there are similarities between Eurosceptics and British MPs discourse styles that may indicate that Dutch Euroscepticism is in some way influenced by British political culture.

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Intercultural Communication

MA Thesis

British English

Eurosceptic Language: An Analysis of British Discourse Styles Among Dutch Eurosceptics in the European Parliament

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# Introduction

Opposition to European integration has seen an increase in Western European countries in recent years. With a British referendum on a possible exit from the EU looming, ‘Euroscepticism,’ the opposition to European integration among member states, has been gaining ground in recent years. It has begun to manifest in new political parties like the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Freedom Party in the Netherlands (PVV), as well as becoming more pronounced in mainstream parties that have historically been supportive of European integration (Hooghe & Marks 2002). These parties are not limited just to the national parliaments of their respective countries, they also take place in the parliament of the very Union they oppose. This raises interesting questions as to how they give voice to their Euroscepticism during EU debates. Considering that their Eurocritical position casts them in the role of a natural opposition to the rest of the non-Eurosceptic parties, this may well influence the style of their discourse. In fact, a brief exploration of European plenary debate videos soon gives rise to the notion that Dutch Eurocritics share little in common with the typical style of Dutch politics, but instead seem more akin to that of the British House of Commons. In Britain, for example, it is very common for MPs to engage in verbal battles with one another, testing speed of wit and sharpness of tongue at an intensity that would be deemed unacceptable among Dutch MPs. Sharp language and relentless criticism are often mitigated by intervention from the Chair in the Netherlands, and in general, the language Dutch MPs use to describe and address each other is highly formal. In recent years, however, this appears to be changing, and the discourse employed by a number of Dutch politicians in the European Parliament presents one of the clearest examples of these changes.

The main focus of this paper is to find out whether there is any truth to the notion that Dutch Eurosceptics in the European Parliament use British-style discourse during plenary debates. In order to find out, it is important first to establish what a British style of parliamentary discourse entails. This will be done by placing existing work on British MP discourse in the context of Brown & Levinson’s (1978) face-threatening acts model of studying politeness. The next section deals with setting up a meaningful definition of Euroscepticism, which will guide the selection of Eurosceptic MEPs for the remainder of the study. A corpus study is set up on the basis of EU parliamentary transcripts, which is coded to identify examples of unmitigated face-threatening acts and emotional language in the discourse of Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs. More frequent usage of unmitigated FTAs, certain British-style FTA mitigation strategies, as well as emotional appeals in plenary debate discourse supports the theory that Dutch Eurosceptics do indeed resemble British MPs, and may indicate that this relatively new political movement may be influenced by British political culture.

# 

# Theoretical Framework

## Parliamentary discourse analysis

Previous work on parliamentary discourse analysis has focused on national parliaments mainly, whereas the EU Parliament is a supranational system. This presents a number of benefits to the intercultural researcher, because it places speakers from a variety of cultures and linguistic backgrounds in a functionally identical system of politics, whereas in other cross-national studies, institutional differences between national parliaments would make such analysis difficult.

### Parliament as a community of practice

The importance of establishing a community of practice in order to allow discourse analysis has been emphasised by several researchers on this topic, such as Harris (2001), Stewart (2012) and Murphy (2014). Defining a community of practice is necessary to ensure that the discourse conducted in the chosen community is consistent enough for features to have developed naturally within this group. Harris (2001) is one of the first to propose that Prime Minister’s Question Time (PMQ) sessions in the British House of Commons should be viewed as a community of practice, noting that this “take[s] into account the historical continuity of Prime Minister’s Question Time,” meaning that the language and cultural features have evolved over the course of Parliament’s history. This has influenced the participants’ expectations of accepted conduct during parliamentary sessions and, “[governs] the linguistic behavioural patterns of the participating members and their interpretation of that behaviour,” according to Harris (2001, p.453).

Specifying PMQs as a community of practice as Harris does, albeit as part of “the larger community of practice of the House of Commons,” allows the analysis to reflect the special functions of this type of discourse in terms of the amount of media attention it generally enjoys compared to regular sessions of Parliament. A significant portion of the debate during PMQs is targeted at a “wider, if unseen, audience”, since this is broadcast on radio, television, and now the Internet (Harris 2001, p.454). Like PMQs, debates in the European Parliament are also exposed to print and broadcast media, and increasingly to media channels online as well, such as YouTube. It is likely that, just as MPs during Question Time, MEPs will sometimes try to catch the viewer’s attention during plenary debates, with any number of intentions ranging from sparking outrage to rallying popular support.

### Politeness theory in parliamentary settings

Brown & Levinson's (1978) *face-threatening acts* model forms the basis of many established politeness studies. This model suggests that speakers have a positive face, “one’s wish to be appreciated and “be approved of,” and a negative face, "one’s wish to be free from any external imposition, to have one’s own actions unhindered and one’s territory uninvaded." (Magistro, p.62). Any communication between two speakers negotiates these two faces through *face-threatening acts* (FTA), a speech act during which one or both of the hearer's faces is threatened through questions, requests, and insults. Attempts to preserve the other's face are known as face redress, or mitigation strategies. These can take the form of hedging, expressing a desire not to offend the hearer, or performing the FTA in as indirect a way as possible, or not at all (Magistro, 2012; Brown & Levinson, 1987). (2001),

Ilie (2004; 2010), Bull & Wells (2011) and Lord & Tamvaki (2013) provide additions to this model specific to the field of parliamentary discourse analysis. These in conjunction form a useful framework through which EU plenary transcripts can be put to analysis.

Defining parliaments as communities of practice has allowed analyses of *facework* in parliamentary discourse before, such as van der Valk’s (2003) analysis of parliamentary discourse on immigration in France. She follows Harris in characterising the French parliament as a community of practice, featuring “[its] own set of formal and informal rules and regulations in which intentional and explicitly face-threatening (and face-enhancing) acts accord with the expectations of its members.” She further agrees with Harris that the face strategies used in parliament are meant to “influence public opinion” through television and other media, in addition to convincing their colleagues during debates (p.316).

### Discourse style of British MPs

Ilie (2004) was able to define a number of differences between the ways British and Swedish MPs conduct themselves, primarily in the frequency of mitigated or unmitigated insults, whether they are based in pathos or ethos, and several features of oratory style. She compared speeches in the British House of Parliament to the Swedish Riksdag in terms of politeness strategies, with emphasis on insults. In addition to the differences she found, Ilie formulated a number of typical strategies used by MPs in both parliaments to attack and enhance the face of their opponents, based on a qualitative study of debate transcripts. She concluded that, while a number of strategies were evident in both houses of parliament, British MPs were often more directly adversarial, using less mitigation in their insults than their Swedish colleagues. British MPs focused more on pathos-based insults, attempting to degrade the character of their opponents and criticizing their level of competence. Their insults used more emotional language, and were more frequently presented with a great deal of showmanship, playing to audience laughs and heckles alike.

Bull & Wells (2011) analysed face-threatening acts during Prime Minister’s Question Time sessions as well, focusing primarily on the exchange of FTAs carried out by Opposition MPs and the responses of the intended target, the Prime Minister. The authors arrived at “six distinctive ways” of FTA performance and five ways of responding to them by the threatened party. FTAs among MPs were identified in terms of their structure and goals. Examples of these are FTAs taking place in the preface to a question, (“is the PM aware that, will he assure the House that”); FTAs asking for highly specific information the interlocutor may not wish to reveal, (“can [the PM] tell us when he was first warned that the prison population would go over 80,000?”); and the use of “contentious presuppositions,” such as illustrated in the example: “why is the PM so coy?,” deftly avoiding “unparliamentary language” by falling short of calling the PM a liar, which would otherwise be sanctioned. Bull & Wells’ list of FTAs among PMs goes some way in providing British cultural cues in parliamentary discourse (2011, pp. 36-46).

Bayley, Bevitori and Zoni (2004) found that German and Italian MPs differed significantly from British MPs when referring to fears and threats. They found, through a corpus-based approach, that MPs in the House of Commons often identify the EU itself as a source of threat, coupled with language playing to the fear of losing national identity in the process of EU integration. By contrast, German and Italian MPs considered *failure* of the EU integration process to be a source of threat. Finding out whether Eurosceptic MEPs from the Netherlands also characterise the EU as a threat in their discourse will factor into answering whether British parliamentary discourse style has influenced the language of these MEPs.

De Ayala (2001) investigated FTAs in Prime Minister’s Question Time sessions and found that FTAs are so prevalent in PMQ discourse as to define Question Time discourse as “a highly aggressive genre.” FTAs carried out by British MPs are, however, often formulated with just enough mitigation to avoid procedural sanctions being imposed by the Speaker in the case of any rule-breaking (de Ayala, 2001, p.143; pp.148-153). It is possible that the high frequency of insults and other FTAs between MPs in the House of Commons is due to the majoritarian nature of the United Kingdom’s political system. MPs from the two main parties will almost always be in directly opposite roles to each other, as one of the two will always be in government, and the other always in opposition. Coalitions generally only consist of one of the main parties (the Conservatives or the Labour party,) and one of the smaller parties, such as the Liberal Democrats following the 2010 elections, and they are extremely rare. The expectation to be in constant opposition to one another may have factored into making PMQ discourse such an “aggressive genre.” By contrast, the European Parliament is not a majoritarian system, but instead functions on building consensus between a considerable number of individual parties. National parliaments operating along these lines, such as that of the Netherlands, notably feature much less aggressive language (te Velde 2010). It is conceivable that MEPs who oppose the EU consensus most vehemently, particularly those characterising themselves as Eurosceptics, use language akin to that of the opposition in a majoritarian system. After all, they are essentially in opposition to the parliamentary majority of non-Eurosceptic parties in the EP. If the analysis points out that there is a high occurrence of FTAs (and specifically unmitigated FTAs) among Eurosceptics, this dynamic may partly explain the parallels with British parliamentary discourse.

Murphy (2014) approaches House of Commons PMQ sessions from a politeness perspective, in order to categorise the various ways in which British MPs and the Prime Minister engage in face-threatening acts, and the methods they use to mitigate insults and other FTAs. A summary of the ways in which MPs perform FTAs as suggested by Murphy (2014) is presented below, and will feature prominently in the discussion of FTAs employed by Members of the European Parliament (pp. 81-95):

1. “(Attempting to) have the PM make an undertaking.”

2. “Asking the PM his opinion/seek agreement from the PM.”

3. “Accusing the PM of not answering a question.”

4. “Accusing the PM of inaction/slow pace of action.”

5. “Drawing attention to an undesirable (consequence of) government policy.”

6. “Raising politically sensitive subjects.”

7. “Questioning the PM’s leadership”

As well as “FTAs performed by the PM”:

1. “Accusing the MP of lacking knowledge/not understanding.”

2. “Accusing the MP of posturing.”

3. “Accusing the MP of acting as a stooge.”

4. “Drawing attention to MP’s (party’s) unpopular policies.”

5. “Criticising the MP’s (party’s) actions.”

Murphy also covers methods of FTA mitigation:

1. “Praising another aspect of Government policy.”

2. “Asserting that negative consequence of Government action is unintended.”

3. “Minimising the criticism.”

4. “Criticising the opposition.”

5. “Making a supportive comment unrelated to the FTA.”

6. “Commenting on one’s respect for the hearer.”

7. “Acting as a mouthpiece.”

He further lists “impolite linguistic strategies:”

1. “Unanswerable questions”

2. “Personalised negative characterisations”

3. “Unrelenting pointed criticism”

4. “Accusation of hypocrisy”

5. “Patronising or condescending”

Impoliteness “is often a feature of opposition MP’s questions,” according to Murphy, and very rarely occurs among “loyal government backbenchers.” This may be a useful distinction for analysing the European Parliament. “Backbenchers” and “opposition” are essentially majoritarian concepts, and the EU is primarily a consensus-seeking body of government.

## Discourse style in Dutch Parliament

The preceding section sought to characterise British parliamentary discourse, to establish ways in which certain features of political discourse can be described as *typically* or *culturally* British. It is now important to develop a working description of Dutch parliamentary style, so that it may be contrasted with the British. The extensive treatment of Dutch political culture throughout recent history by te Velde (2010) provides many examples of the contrasts between Dutch and British parliaments. Mainly, Dutch politicians have traditionally been very “business-like,” with very little reliance on oratory theatrics. In fact, such theatre is barely tolerated in the Netherlands. Emotional appeals are rare, as opposed to the essential role they play in British parliament. The exception to this appears to be the relatively recent upsurge of populism in the Netherlands, in the form of the Pim Fortuyn List, and more recently, the Freedom Party (te Velde, 2010, p.18).

Like Ilie (2004), te Velde describes parliamentary discourse along the “classical” rhetorical system of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. Pathos in parliamentary debate is “barely acceptable” in the Netherlands, however, and appeals to ethos are restricted to “sober professionalism.” In this way, Swedish and Dutch MPs appear to be very similar, which suggests that the differences that Ilie identified between British and Swedish MPs may apply in a broad sense to Dutch MPs as well (te Velde, 2010, p.14).

Te Velde even suggests that historically, Dutch politicians have looked to the United Kingdom for inspiration when confronted with major, society-changing issues such as the abolition of slavery. In such cases, any inspiration drawn from the British would always be paired with a sense of ambivalence, as British politicians were “very loud” and the Dutch political sphere was governed by “strict rules of decency and respectability” (p.45). Whereas in Britain, great political speakers and masters of parliamentary theatre proved effective both in public and in the House of Commons, this would be “unthinkable” in the Netherlands (p.108).

In the absence of a cross-cultural study of British, Swedish and Dutch parliamentary discourse styles along the same lines as Ilie (2004), te Velde (2010)’s characterisation of Dutch parliamentary style shows that Swedish and Dutch parliaments are similar in key ways. In terms of *facework*, it is expected that Dutch MPs use fewer FTAs during debates than their British counterparts. Similar to Swedish MPs, Dutch MPs are expected to use extensive mitigation strategies whenever they do engage in FTAs, and occurrences of unmitigated FTAs should be regarded as highly atypical of Dutch parliamentary debates. These features define British and Dutch parliamentary discourse styles for the purpose of this paper, allowing EU parliamentary speeches to be tested for “cues” that have been found to be particular to British political discourse.

## Defining Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism as a concept is becoming increasingly relevant within the EU, and has been the subject of various kinds of research. Specifically, for the purposes of this project, it is important to come up with as narrow a definition of Euroscepticism as possible. Previous papers on the subject have attempted to chart the phenomenon in popular media, as well as analyse the position of Eurosceptical elements in both national parliaments and the EU itself.

Hooghe and Marks (2002) investigated how opposition to European integration was distributed along political lines. They found that, though parties both on the “Extreme Left” and “Extreme Right” shared little else in common, Euroscepticism is far more prevalent among these parties than those in the centre. Parties on the far Left see the EU as a threat to cherished national agencies, which European homogenisation may weaken or destroy altogether. Far Left parties are also wary of extent to which European integration forces market equality on all its member states, potentially harming job security in some nations in favour of those with a competitive advantage.

Parties on the “New Right” are mostly concerned with “perceived threats to the national community,” such as “foreign cultural influences, cosmopolitan elites, and international agencies,” to which European integration adds a threat to national sovereignty (p.976). The more centre-leaning parties on the Left show much greater support for integration than the centre-leaning parties on the Right. There is less ambivalence on the Right, which may indicate that left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptics express their concerns differently in discourse.

Harmsen (2004), investigated Euroscepticism in the Netherlands, noting that although the country has always been one of the strongest supporters of integration, the preceding decade had seen a considerable upswing in “Eurocriticsm”. Pro-integration sentiment is no longer “automatic” (p.99), and besides a more Eurosceptical discourse from mainstream parties like the VVD, fringe parties such as the Pim Fortuyn List and the Socialist Party added considerably to the rise of Euroscepticism in the early 2000s. Although the Pim Fortuyn List is no longer a force in Dutch politics, Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party (PVV) is by many seen as its most direct ideological descendant. (van Gent & Musterd 2010; p.37). Harmsen’s findings for the Netherlands appear in line with Hooghe & Marks’ (p.37) suggestion that most Euroscepticism is to be found on both the extreme ends of the political spectrum, singling out the Socialist Party and right-wing populists, specifically.

These characterisations of Euroscepticism in Western Europe show that the phenomenon is most prevalent among parties on the fringes of the classic Left/Right political axis. Specifically, the most strident opposition to European integration can be found among single-issue and protest parties, as they have the most to gain from Eurosceptical discourse and the least to lose from antagonising centrist parties (Taggart 1998). They are by definition uninterested in furthering pro-European integration goals. Historically, the Socialist Party, the Green Party, and the religious reformed parties that now form the SGP have been the most opposed to European integration, although in recent years they have been joined by the Freedom Party (PVV).

Having identified key features in the discourse styles of British and Dutch MPs, as well as having established a consistent definition of Euroscepticism both in Western Europe and in the Netherlands specifically, the main question driving this project presents itself:do Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs employ a discourse style that bears significantly more similarities to that of British MPs than typical Dutch MPs?

# Method

A coding study was conducted in order to analyse the discourse styles of Eurosceptic MEPs for the Netherlands, using transcripts of plenary debates in the European Parliament as the corpus. 83 transcript fragments form a corpus of over 14,500 words, categorised per speaker, and the political grouping to which they belong. The entire corpus was coded by the researcher, which will form the basis of the analysis. Two external coders were asked to apply codes to a subset of the complete corpus, to ensure that the coding method used produced reliable results. The codes identify FTAs, whether they are mitigated (MIT+) or not (MIT-) and whether the speaker makes use of emotional language (EM). The coding resulted in two different corpora, both of which will be discussed separately. The first is the main corpus, comprising all of the gathered transcripts, coded by the researcher. The second is a subset of the first, where the two independent coders overlap with the main corpus, and give an indication of agreement between the coded corpora.

## The Corpus

### Overview of MEPs appearing in the transcripts

The focus of the present analysis is the discourse style of Eurosceptic MEPs, and speeches made by these MEPs form the majority of the corpus. The selection of Eurosceptics as defined in previous sections was done using the following criteria: by focusing mainly on MEPs on the far Left and Right ends of the political spectrum (Hooghe & Marks 2002), focusing in particular on “single issue Eurosceptical parties” and “protest parties with Euroscepticism” (Taggart 1998, p.368). This brought the selection down to MEPs from the Socialist Party (SP), Reformed Political Party (SGP), and Freedom Party (PVV) (Taggart 1998; Harmsen 2004). The overarching political blocks are the ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists Group), GUE/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left), and NI (Non-Inscrits). One MEP from the ALDE group (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), MEP J.C. van Baalen, also appears in the corpus, mainly for the purpose of comparing the discourse styles of the Eurosceptic MEPs to a more *mainstream* speaker. The full selection of MEPs is presented in Table 1:

**Table 1 – Overview of selected MEPs in the corpus**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Political Party** | **EP political block** | **# transcript fragments** | **Sitting** |
| Peter van Dalen | CU | ECR | 1 | 2009-present |
| Bas Belder | SGP | ECR | 7 | 1999-present |
| Johannes Cornelis van Baalen | VVD | ALDE | 5 | 1999-present |
| Anne-Marie Mineur | SP | GUE/NGL | 2 | 2014-present |
| Dennis de Jong | SP | GUE/NGL | 7 | 2009-present |
| Kartika Tamara Liotard | SP | GUE/NGL | 4 | 2004-2014 |
| Marcel de Graaff | PVV | NI | 16 | 2011-present |
| Louis Bontes | PVV | NI | 1 | 2009-present |
| Laurence J. A. J. Stassen | (former) PVV | NI | 16 | 2009-2014 |
| Olaf Stuger | PVV | NI | 7 | 2002-present |
| Hans Jansen | PVV | NI | 4 | 2014-2015 |
| Vicky Maeijer | PVV | NI | 8 | 2012-present |
| Daniël van der Stoep | PVV | NI | 1[[1]](#footnote-1) | 2011-2014 |

Using the search feature on the EU Parliament website, a list of all MEP speeches during plenary debates was created, encompassing *all* speeches given by members of the PVV, SGP and SP for the current parliamentary term (2014-present), and all speeches of the previous term (2009-2014), going back to 2013. A portion of the transcripts found using these criteria included written statements by the MEPs, rather than transcripts of actual speeches delivered verbally. The choice was made not to include these in the corpus, as written statements are a different genre of communication, lacking spontaneity and the opportunity to see one’s opponent during speech. This had the unfortunate side effect of reducing speeches by SP MEPs to 4. To counterbalance this, more speeches were selected from before 2012, to ensure that SP transcripts were more adequately represented in the corpus, while also ensuring that the corpus remained workable. Despite these efforts, it appears that speeches by PVV speakers are overrepresented in the corpus. This is not by design. It appears that, during the selected parliamentary terms, PVV MEPs provided more verbal contributions to plenary debates than their SP and SGP colleagues. This is partly due to the PVV having a larger presence in the EP during the selected time period. Hooghe & Marks’ suggestion that Far Right parties are more “strenuously opposed” to matters of European integration than their SP or SGP counterparts may also factor into their greater prominence (p.977).

Two important changes in the Dutch EU political landscape since the gathering of the corpus should be noted: firstly, MEP Laurence Stassen, who appears in the corpus several times as a PVV MEP, has broken off from that group since elections in 2014, to eventually join the new ‘VNL’ party, (For The Netherlands) which shares some ideological similarities with the PVV, but has yet to gain seats in the European Parliament. The other development is that the PVV is no longer a Non-Inscrit party, having joined Marine Le Pen’s Front National in a group called Europe of Nations and Freedom. This occurred after the corpus for this study was gathered, and does not impact the results.

### Selecting transcripts

Searching the European Parliament website resulted in an initial number of 110 downloaded MEP transcripts. These transcripts are readily available to all EU citizens with an Internet connection, and open in a browser window with formatting that clarifies who the speaker is at any given time, what her or his political affiliation is, and whether or not they are responding to a question through the EU’s “blue card” queries. The transcripts do not take simultaneous interpretation into account, presenting each speech in the language in which it was given.

Each MEP has her or his own page, presenting their personal details, political affiliation and roles, and crucially, a complete archive of their activities in the European Parliament. Speeches in Parliament are a subset of these activities, which also includes written questions, motions for resolutions and official documents authored by the MEP in question. Transcripts were consulted for all PVV, SGP and SP MEPs who served during the present parliamentary term (2014-present), as well as the previous (2007-2014). All of the available current-term transcripts (at the time of writing) were included in the corpus. A selection was made among transcripts from the previous parliamentary term, to preserve relevance and limit the volume of the corpus for practical reasons.

Eurosceptic MEPs from the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) comprise the majority of the corpus, while a number of speeches by MEPs from the EFDD (Europeans for Direct Democracy) and ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) were consulted to provide comparison material and in some cases, context. This necessarily smaller number of transcripts was chosen at random, regardless of theme or subject. This random selection was done in an effort to achieve representativeness despite the smaller overall number of transcribed speeches in the corpus. A more ideal situation would take into account a larger number of non-NI speeches, and the recommendations for further research take this into account.

### Re-formatting the gathered transcripts

The digital corpus was formatted using the following steps: The full list of transcripts per MEP was manually accessed in a web browser. Each passage was briefly surveyed for context, such as whether the MEP is responding to a question, or following a colleague’s line of thinking. The formatting of the transcripts on the EU website allows easy selection of passages belonging to a single speaker. After checking for relevant context, the speech was selected and added to the Evernote web-based note-taking service. Evernote enables the user to gather web-based content from anywhere with very little “friction”.

The searchable archive in Evernote was used to provide a basis for the corpus that, in turn, would be used for coding. An archive of selected speeches formed quickly, preserving the formatting, image content, and links to video recordings that are present on the website. The final distillation of the corpus, in “hard copy” form, was achieved by placing the text from Evernote into a table, formatted in such a way as to provide space for manual annotations between lines, as well as columns for the relevant codes. An example of the coding table used is presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Example of coding sheet formatting (shortened)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **11** | **NI** | **Marcel de Graaff** (NI). - De burger wil vrede en welvaart, maar wat wil deze Commissie?1 De pensioenen van burgers afpakken en belasting heffen op spaarcenten. Er moet niet meer Europese integratie komen, maar minder. | 1 FTA, MIT+  (EM) |  |

Each speech fragment is numbered, sorted according to political grouping, and annotated for quick identification of important sentences. The chosen formatting for the coding sheet and corpus relies heavily on Saldana’s (2008) manual for qualitative coding.

### Operationalising British parliamentary discourse cues

Features of British political discourse found by Harris and Ilie were condensed to simple codes, allowing them to be identified in a systematic way. Critics have thus far established that British parliamentary discourse is characterised by more frequent use of FTAs, of which a significantly larger portion is unmitigated, or show only very limited mitigation, compared to other national discourse styles. In order to represent this in codes, coders were first asked to tag sentences as “FTA” if they encountered a face-threatening act.

Accounting for mitigation in MEP insults and FTAs was done by coding either “MIT+,” which denotes a greater amount of politeness mitigation, or “MIT-,” which denotes limited mitigation, or no mitigation at all. These two simple codes used in aggregate over a considerable corpus provide relevant insight into the amount of mitigation used by the MEPs in question, when performing FTAs.

British MPs also employ comparatively more emotional language compared to Dutch MPs (te Velde, 2010), are sometimes theatrical in their dealings with one another, and generally attempt to outwit their opponents with language games and fast-paced quips (Ilie, 2004; Murphy, 2014). To account for situations where this occurs among Dutch MEPs, coders were finally tasked with coding sentences with highly emotional language, or in another sense, appeals to the audience’s emotions, as “EM”. The expectation was that this code would be used primarily in conjunction with FTAs where there was very little mitigation, and to a certain extent, this was borne out in the results.

### Coding the transcript fragments

In addition to the coding done by the researcher, two independent coders were asked to participate as well. This was done to ensure reliability in identifying FTAs in the text, and checking whether an FTA is mitigated or unmitigated, and whether it is based on emotional appeals. Both coders were selected because they were graduate students of English, leading to the expectation that they were familiar with dealing with considerable portions of English-language text in a considered, structured manner. Other factors were more practical, namely that both coders had been aware of this project ahead of time, and have been part of discussions on the topic during its formative stages. This means that less explanation would be required in order to begin coding the corpus, somewhat streamlining the process.

Although both coders were familiar with politeness theory, a short introduction to Brown & Levinson’s politeness framework was given prior to coding, allowing them to identify face-threatening acts in the corpus, and code them accordingly. Examples of each code were also incorporated in the coding sheet, which was used as reference material during the coding process. This document is included in Appendix A.

The independent coders were presented with a limited version of the overall corpus to provide a workable coding task. This means that 18 of the 79 transcribed speeches were processed by both independent coders besides the full corpus coding, (overlap of the main corpus, coder A and coder B) and 38 of 79 speeches were processed by at least *one* independent coder (overlap of the main corpus and coder A). The omissions were made at random, while attempting to keep the composition of MEPs from different political groups broadly the same.

# Results

The coding analysis resulted in a large number of codes for each of the selected political groupings. In order to answer the question of whether Dutch Eurosceptics in the EP employ a more typically British style of discourse, these results will answer three sub-questions: Firstly, is there a higher frequency of FTAs among Eurosceptic MEPs than mainstream MEPs? Secondly, are these FTAs more often unmitigated (MIT-) than is typically the case for Dutch MPs? And finally, do Eurosceptic MEPs show more instances of appeals to emotion (EM) than typical Dutch MPs?

Table 3 presents an overview of the general figures from the main corpus, coded by the researcher. The first column describes the political grouping, and the second, the total number of transcripts coded per group. The third column describes how many FTAs were found in total. The fourth and fifth columns show how many of these FTAs were unmitigated (MIT-) or mitigated (MIT+). The final column describes the number of emotional language codes (EM).

**Table 3: Code frequencies per political grouping**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political group | n | # of FTAs | # of MIT- | # of MIT+ | # of EM |
| **NI** | 53 | 142 | 77 | 54 | 65 |
| **GUE/NGL** | 5 | 12 | 3 | 8 | 3 |
| **ALDE** | 5 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| **ECR** | 8 | 14 | 2 | 12 | 0 |

Although it appears that there is some support for the notion that Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs use uncharacteristically high frequencies of FTAs, these totals are not sufficient to draw any conclusions. Instead, the codes will serve to highlight examples of FTAs in discourse that will be discussed in-depth in separate sections, in a manner similar to Ilie (2004).

## Comparisons of Eurosceptic discourse

The comparisons are organised in a manner similar to the discussions in Ilie’s work on Swedish and British parliamentary styles, and Harris’ work on discourse styles during PMQs in the UK. The examples illustrate which strategy from Harris or Ilie they resemble most closely, followed by a brief explanation of how they are similar, key differences (if any,) and the underlying theme or intention that can be derived from the example.

After exploring the examples, the discussion will shift to a speculative exploration of what may be driving MEPs to shape their discourse in the way that they do. The examples presented here are only a small portion of the complete corpus, an annotated (coded) version of which is included in Appendix B.

### Comparison: FTAs in Eurosceptic and Mainstream party speeches

The following example shows MEP Anne-Marie Mineur of the Dutch Socialist Party, performing a number of FTAs in the form of questions:

**a) Anne-Marie Mineur, (GUE/NGL)**. –Deze overeenkomst geeft de macht aan de grote bedrijven in Europa en Canada. Zij hebben uitgebreid de gelegenheid gehad om precies te vertellen wat zij willen en de 150.000 reacties van de Europese bevolking op het ISDS-mechanisme worden terzijde geschoven. Dat zijn de mensen die samen dit Parlement hebben gekozen en die uiteindelijk ook úw baas zijn, mijnheer De Gucht. Het is duidelijk dat de bevolking deze overeenkomsten niet wil, en terecht. Er zijn steeds meer voorbeelden van bedrijven die in beroep gaan tegen democratische besluitvorming. Kunt u garanderen, mijnheer De Gucht, dat Canadese bedrijven zoals Lone Pine Resources niet ook Europese landen gaan dwingen om schaliegas te winnen, zoals zij dat in Canada doen? Kunt u garanderen dat Europese landen kunnen besluiten om kernenergie te bevriezen zonder dat zij aangeklaagd worden? Kunt u garanderen dat onze Europese werknemers het stakingsrecht behouden en dat onze collectieve arbeidsovereenkomsten onverminderd geldig blijven?

Many of these FTAs are formulated as questions directed at the EU Trade Commissioner, whereby she repeatedly calls him by name. The FTAs are all mitigated, however, as Mineur consistently uses the Dutch formality marker “mijnheer” at the start and/or end of every question. Despite the (perhaps exaggeratedly) formal language on display here, Mineur employs a number of strategies reminiscent of British MPs. Her pointed questioning, some of which clearly rhetorical, plays to the hearer’s emotions, and may well be intended for the audience, very similar to British parliamentary discourse. The next example, from the same MEP, contains a larger number of unmitigated FTAs and more emotional appeals.

**b) Anne-Marie Mineur (GUE/NGL ).** - Vandaag kreeg ik antwoord op mijn vraag over Gaza van 27 juli jongstleden. U gaat niets doen aan de permanent voortdurende vernietiging van Gaza, behalve dan door het kenbaar maken van uw betrokkenheid bij de mensenrechten. Tjongejonge, dat zal helpen. Wat gaat u doen? T-shirtjes dragen met "I love human rights"?

Here, Mineur voices discontent with unsatisfactory answers from the government, employing a scornful tone and playing to a dark sense of humour (“What are you going to do? Wear T-shirts with ‘I love human rights’?”) which is another example of emotional language, as is the equivalent of “well now, *that’s* going to be effective,” that precedes it.

FTAs in a non-Eurosceptic speech are considerably more nuanced, featuring more mitigation strategies and more formal language overall. Consider the following examples of FTAs by MEP van Baalen:

c) J**ohannes C. van Baalen, (ALDE)** – Madam President, the ALDE Group wants to make the problem not bigger, but smaller, and we can only do this by referring to international law.

Note that MEP van Baalen is conducting his side of the debate in English. This could be explained as a mitigation strategy in itself. The MEP wishes to preserve the hearer’s positive face by making sure she does not have to wait for the interpreter to translate what he said. Overall, van Baalen does not engage in FTAs very often in the corpus, and only once engages in unmitigated FTAs:

d) J**ohannes C. van Baalen, (ALDE).** – Madam President, one has to be objective. What has happened since Minsk? Did Russia really try to show good will? Did Russia really try to help broker peace in East Ukraine? Did Russia really try to monitor its border and prevent irregular troops and others from entering eastern Ukraine? No, that has not happened. Has there been any positive sign from Putin concerning the Crimea? None. Nothing has led to a positive outcome up till now. There will be no Astana Conference because Minsk did not produce anything substantial…. and the sanctions are working – together with the low oil prices – so the Russian economy is in trouble. I am not happy because of that, but I hope that it will hurt Putin enough to be sensible and indeed go to the negotiating table…

The above example shows MEP van Baalen use quite aggressive language for a non-Eurosceptic speaker. Interestingly, it is mostly directed at an outside target who is not present. Van Baalen also uses repeated rhetorical questions to enhance the effect of his argument, asking whether Russia has relented in any way and giving the answer immediately, somewhat coloured by his personal opinion. Van Baalen’s use of emotional language is not meant as an attack on anyone present, rather, it is meant to rally support of his fellow MEPs in opposition to an outside force, President Putin. This presents a significant difference from Eurosceptic appeals to emotion. In Eurosceptic discourse, emotional language is most often meant to present the dangers of European integration, instead antagonising non-Eurosceptic MEPs instead of asking them to unite. Comparing van Baalen’s appeals to emotion to those in example e) shows how they are used differently by Eurosceptics:

**e) Laurence J.A.J. Stassen (NI)**.- Voorzitter, de prioriteiten van Ierland als voorzitter van de Raad zijn stabiliteit, groei en banen. Tja, wie wil dat niet? Dat is net zoiets als elke dag zonovergoten weer en aangename temperaturen. Wij hebben dit soort ambities allemaal al eerder gehoord. Wie herinnert zich niet de Agenda van Lissabon en de Europa 2020-strategie, die van Europa de meest concurrerende en dynamische kenniseconomie in de wereld moesten maken?  En wat is er van al die mooi klinkende plannen terechtgekomen? In plaats van groei heeft de Europese Unie ons in een economische recessie gestort. …. In plaats van groei heeft de Europese Unie ons in een economische recessie gestort. Je kunt nog zo veel strooien met strategieën. Wij hebben een molensteen om de nek van de lidstaten en hun burgers. Alles en iedereen moet inleveren, niets of niemand wordt gespaard, behalve de EU. Die krijgt alsmaar meer geld en meer macht. Het is zoals ze zeggen: *all pigs are equal, but some are more equal than others.*  Voorzitter, als ik een suggestie mag doen, de enige manier om dit continent nog hoop te bieden is door de stekker uit de Europese Unie te trekken. In plaats van dit bureaucratische monster moet het in de toekomst weer draaien om nationale staten en burgers die vriendschappelijk samenwerken waar dat echt nodig is. Het is de vrijhandel binnen Europa en met de rest van de wereld die de economische groei aanjaagt. Doorgaan met de Europese Unie is trekken aan een dood paard. Laten wij Europa redden uit de handen van de Europese Unie.

In e), MEP Stassen uses little mitigation in her verbal attacks directed at the EU. She employs emotional appeals in the form of rhetorical questions such as “well, who doesn’t want [stability, growth and jobs]. That is just like [wishing for] sunny days and pleasant temperatures year-round.” Comparing this speech to the list of ways in which British PMs perform and mitigate their FTAs provided by Harris (2001), there appear to be clear examples of accusing the leadership of “inaction/slow pace of action,” as well as “personalised negative characterisations” in the form of insinuating that the Irish president is naïve to set such lofty goals as economic and job growth. This is also an example of a pathos-based insult Furthermore, and perhaps most obviously, this speech shows clear parallels to the “unrelenting pointed criticism” with which British MPs attack one another. Very few opportunities for mitigating the FTAs in this speech were used; most of the criticisms are direct and unconditional. There is no mention of, for example, the MEP’s respect for other aspects of the government’s policy, nor is any attempt made to assert that any negative consequences of the EU’s policies are “unintended.” The only mitigation feature is the ritualised addressing of the chair that is a common feature in Dutch parliamentary discourse in general.

### FTA Mitigation strategies among Dutch MEPs

The corpus analysis shows that mitigation strategies were used in a considerable number of FTAs. Relatively speaking, however, they were less common among Non-Inscrit MEPs when compared to MEPs from other Dutch parties. Additionally, the mitigation strategies that *are* used by non-Inscrit MEPs follow patterns very similar to British MPs’ mitigation patterns. The following example shows PVV MEP Marcel de Graaff attacking EU President Juncker, using a number of mitigation strategies, such as, among others, (unanswerable) questions:

**f) Marcel de Graaff** **(NI).** - De heer Juncker komt met een plan om de groei van de EU te bevorderen. Dit plan betekent dat Nederland nog eens voor 8 miljard van zijn eigen burgers moet roven om in een structuurpot te stoppen. Daar worden dan ongetwijfeld weer vliegvelden voor aangelegd waar geen hond komt, geluidsschermen langs wegen door onbewoonde gebieden geplaatst en onzinnige energieprojecten van betaald.  Gaat de heer Juncker daar ook schimmige achterkamerdeals voor sluiten, zoals hij ook deed als minister-president van Luxemburg? Het initiële bedrag van 21 miljard dat ingelegd wordt door de EU en de ECB, moet immers aangroeien tot meer dan 300 miljard, met name uit de private sector. Zitten hier voor bedrijven weer mooie belangvoordeeltjes aan, meneer Juncker?  Nog steeds gelooft deze Commissie in de *fata morgana* van een groot Europees imperium, maar de economische verschillen tussen de EU-lidstaten zijn te groot. De prijs voor dit imperium wordt betaald door de burgers in de vorm van keiharde bezuinigingen, loodzware belastingen, afnemende welvaart en groeiende werkloosheid.  In plaats van een onzinnig groeiplan moet de heer Juncker in de Europese Raad pleiten voor het opbreken van de EU en de euro. We moeten de nationale soevereiniteit herstellen, zodat elke lidstaat weer welvarend kan worden, weer een eigen munt kan voeren die past bij de eigen economie, weer de grenzen kan sluiten. Dan kunnen de lidstaten ongewenste immigranten buiten houden die miljarden per jaar kosten en jihadisten die onze veiligheid bedreigen. Daar zou de heer Juncker voor moeten zorgen en anders moet hij opstappen.

The language in this instance shows the usage of Ilie’s *“juxtaposition of opposite notions: contempt vs. respect.”* De Graaff continually addresses President Juncker with the formal pronoun “de heer” and uses the third person for his queries, ensuring enough indirectness in his insults to prevent the Chair from intervening. Fully in line with this mitigation strategy, de Graaff combines his formal language in addressing the president with various accusations of wanting to cover up past mistakes (being unreliable), being involved in shady dealings (untrustworthy, morally questionable), and prioritising “nonsensical” plans for economic growth. This strategy of juxtaposition serves to amplify the effect of an FTA that was intended to offend, and has been shown to be particularly prevalent in debates in the British House of Commons. Additionally, many of the FTAs represented in the above example are formulated as questions, which Ilie and Harris both agree is a popular mitigation strategy used in British House of Commons debates.

Further polarizing language in the example above is not directed at the President or any one person, but rather the European Commission as a whole. In declaring that the EC “believes in the fata morgana” of a European super-state, de Graaff uses another of Ilie’s described mitigation strategies, namely that of attribution transfer. The notion that the Commission intends to create a super-state is de Graaff’s own, yet, he presents it as though it is one of the Commission’s stated goals in European politics. Presenting an opponent’s presumed intentions in such a manner is a commonplace feature in the House of Commons, although some differences should not be overlooked.

For instance, House of Commons debates, and especially FTAs directed at specific persons present in the Chamber feature extensive back-and-forth sniping between MPs, often with the intention of outwitting one’s opponent. This does not appear to be the case with EU discourse, or at least less so. Looking over the corpus, it is clear that interruptions are much more heavily penalized in EU debates, with the President taking an active role in preventing MEPs from speaking out of turn. Because of this, interruptions occur only very rarely, and are not tolerated. Consider the following example:

**g) Olaf Stuger (NI).** Voorzitter, dit toont des te meer aan dat deze Commissie op de verkeerde weg is. Veel beloftes, maar weinig waarmaken in de praktijk. Normaal gesproken zou ik oproepen om ... *(De spreker wordt door de Voorzitter onderbroken.)*

MEP Stuger has just finished two paragraphs of unmitigated insults directed at the European Commission, President Juncker and finally Dutch MP Frans Timmermans. At the end of the quotation, the Chair interrupts Stuger and he is not allowed to finish his speech. The same thing happens in the following example:

**h) Daniël van der Stoep (NI). -** Tenenkrommend was het, die europarlementariërs afgelopen zaterdag op het podium in Kiev. Ik citeer de heer Verhofstadt die daar dolgelukkig "we have won, we have won" scandeerde. Maar wie zijn dan die "wij" die hij toesprak? Was het mevrouw Timotsjenko die de volgende dag al direct wraak aankondigde? Of waren het de neofascisten van Swoboda? Zijn dat de Europese waarden waarnaar hij verwees? Neofascisten, anarchie? De Europese Commissie beloofde meteen 20 miljard euro ...

*(De Voorzitter onderbreekt de spreker)*

Voorzitter, even een punt van orde, dit is mij gisteren ook al overkomen. Het is kennelijk onmogelijk om hier nog gewoon een speech te houden, waarmee misschien niet iedereen het eens is; ik vind dit volkomen respectloos. Ik hoop dat u daar iets tegen kunt doen.

In this instance, the Chair interrupts MEP van der Stoep because he is violating the EU standard of decency by comparing one of his colleagues to neo-fascists and anarchists, albeit indirectly. It is a clear example of emotional appeals used to rile up fellow MEPs, which Dutch Eurosceptics typically do not shy away from, in clear difference to Dutch parliamentary tradition.

### Emotional language in MEP FTAs

Emotional appeals in parliamentary discourse are another feature that usually signals British political style, or its influence on non-British politicians. In the following example, Laurence Stassen uses several one-liners designed to play on the public’s emotions:

**i) Laurence J.A.J. Stassen (NI)**. - De crisis in Cyprus bewijst voor de zoveelste keer hoezeer de euro niet deugt. Het is een verschrikking. Europa strompelt van crisis naar crisis, van bail out naar bail out , en het wordt van kwaad tot erger. Cyprus is alweer bail out nummer 5 en dat in drie jaar tijd! De Europese Unie blijft doormodderen en trekt ons dieper en dieper het euromoeras in. Maar de EU weet het altijd nog erger te maken dan het al is. Want niet alleen verdwijnen er opnieuw vrachtladingen met belastinggeld, ook heeft de Eurogroep bij monde van haar voorzitter Dijsselbloem het vertrouwen en de bankgarantie voor spaarders om zeep geholpen.  De euro was al ten dode opgeschreven, maar nu is zelfs het spaargeld van de burger niet meer veilig. Spaarders in heel Europa beseffen dat wat vandaag op Cyprus gebeurt de volgende keer hun kan overkomen. Ondertussen is het niet de vraag of er nieuwe bail outs nodig zijn, maar wanneer. Cyprus heeft twee weken later alweer zes miljard euro extra nodig. Slovenië lijkt de volgende kandidaat voor een bail out . Er komt gewoon geen einde aan deze euro-ellende.  Met de euro heeft de Europese Unie de totale crisis over Europa afgeroepen. Gisteren nog maakte het IMF de verwachting voor de wereldeconomie bekend: 3,3% groei. Geweldig nieuws! Maar niet voor de eurozone! Hier voorspelt het IMF geen groei, maar economische krimp. Voorzitter, het is over en uit met de euro. De eurocrisis kan alleen worden aangepakt als Europese leiders onderkennen dat de euro zelf het probleem is. Als een land zijn eigen broek niet op kan houden, moet het de eurozone verlaten en de eigen munt devalueren. Dat is dan ook de enige optie voor Cyprus.  De bail outs zijn weggegooid geld en lossen helemaal niets op. Nederland moet daar geen geld meer aan verspillen en Voorzitter, één goede raad, red Europa uit de handen van de Europese Unie.

Presenting Europe as “shuffling from one crisis to another” and “from bailout to bailout” is meant to make the audience feel tired of the supposed lack of progress that Stassen believes is being made. The emotional appeals continue with an attack on her Dutch colleague Jeroen Dijsselbloem, appealing to a sense of outrage that the latter has squandered the public’s savings. In Ilie’s terms, this is pathos-based insult. Stassen employs a great deal of aggressive rhetoric in short bursts to disparage a list of opponents in her limited speaking time. Perhaps most illustrative example of theatrical flair that is favoured by British MPs being employed by a Dutch MEP is where MEP Stassen exclaims “Wonderful news!” followed by “–but not for the Eurozone,” and “save Europe from the hands of the European Union.” This plays to the audience’s sense of irony, which is uncommon in Dutch parliamentary debate. The argument also calls for the European Union to be disbanded, which precludes any coalition-building with non-Eurosceptic colleagues.

Examples j), k) and l) also feature emotional language from Eurosceptic MEPs (from different debates):

**j) Cornelis de Jong (GUE/NGL ). -** In de Commissie INTA ging het er fel tegenaan, want je moet hier kiezen. Kies je voor onbeperkte vrijheid van diensten of kies je voor het tegengaan van allerlei wantoestanden? Het eindresultaat bevordert vooral de vrijheid van diensten. Werknemers in kleine bedrijven die niet willen meewerken aan louche praktijken, staan in de kou. Een gemiste kans. Zo wordt gewerkt met gesloten lijsten.

**k) Kartika Tamara Liotard (GUE/NGL ). -** Beste Ria, ik wil eerst graag zeggen dat je heel erg je best hebt gedaan om de desastreuze pensioenvoorstellen van de Commissie te verbeteren. Met name ten opzichte van de tweede pijler bedrijfspensioenen ben je heel duidelijk. Je zegt dat de Commissie de systemen van de lidstaten moet respecteren. Maar waarom niet ook die duidelijkheid bij de eerste pijler, in Nederland de AOW? Daar moeten wij inmenging keihard afwijzen.

**l)   Laurence J.A.J. Stassen** (NI ). - Voorzitter, vorige maand leek het de heer Van Rompuy een goed idee om de toetredingsgesprekken met Turkije te versnellen, lyrisch als hij was over de zogenaamde vooruitgang in Turkije. Hij nodigde premier Erdogan zelfs uit voor een bezoek aan Brussel. Een inschattingsfout van epische proporties!

MEP de Jong in example j) plays to his audience’s emotions by presenting a choice between an economically desirable result (freedom of services) and fighting problems in how businesses treat their employees. MEP Liotard in example k) addresses the hearer by her first name, which is highly unusual in and of itself, and it quickly becomes clear that it is meant as sarcasm. The appeal to emotions is intended to garner sympathy for employees of companies whose unsound business practices can now go unchecked. MEP Stassen in l) uses exaggeration (“an error of judgment of epic proportions!”) to play on the hearer’s emotions. She also specifically targets President of the European Council van Rompuy in an unmitigated characterisation as wanting to hurry Turkish EU membership along, no matter the consequences.

### Differences between Dutch Eurosceptic discourse and British parliamentary discourse

The main difference between MEPs in the EU and MPs in the House of Commons appears to be a lack of quick replies from opponents. In the European Parliament, MEPs can employ all the trappings and colourful language of an adversarial parliamentary discourse style such as that of the British, but mainly in the form of sustained attacks that take up great portions of their allotted (and limited) speaking time. Because of this, the only time when, like British MPs, MEPs can exercise verbal wit or oratory flair in confrontations with others, is when they are presented with a Blue Card question. However, the corpus only contains limited examples of Dutch MEPs engaging in confrontations using this procedure, and the few occurrences that do appear, feature these MEPs agreeing with colleagues. Refer to examples m) and n):

**m) Olaf Stuger** (NI), "blauwe kaart"-antwoord. – Er is een groot tekort aan democratisch gehalte. Dat geldt niet alleen voor dit debat, dat geldt voor alle debatten, of het nu gaat om heel eenvoudige of om heel complexe besluitvorming. Het is een godspe dat wij hier bij elkaar zitten zonder enige democratische legitimatie van uw kant. Ik ben het dus hiermee volledig eens en ik hoop dat wij hier op dit punt nog veel discussie kunnen voeren.

n)  **Vicky Maeijer (NI),** "blauwe kaart"-antwoord. – Dank u, collega, voor deze vraag. Weet u wat het probleem is van deze Europese Unie? Dat het beleid niet werkt. Dat zien we nu al jaren en toch blijven we hiermee doorgaan. We blijven doorgaan …

Both examples show the Eurosceptic MEP agreeing graciously with the questioner, instead of engaging in quick-fire debate. In i), this is because the question came from a like-minded MEP from the EFDD. The question was whether Stuger agreed that there is a democratic deficit in the discussions of the European Parliament. MEP Maeijer in example j) was asked by a colleague from the S&D (Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) whether she could provide an explanation of the difference between refugees and economic migrants. In the House of Commons, this would be an opportunity to win political points with a witty comeback, but in the case of Maeijer the questioner is thanked, and the question itself left unaddressed. This is one area in which Dutch Eurosceptics seem to differ from their British colleagues, or at the very least, the present corpus does not include enough direct confrontations to definitively judge one way or the other.

Apart from broad similarities, the analysis also indicated key differences in the way Dutch MEPs target their FTAs, compared to British MPs. Dutch MEPs performing MIT- FTAs more often target abstract bodies and concepts, such as the European Commission or the EU as a whole, whereas British MPs are most likely to go head-to-head and name their opponents directly. Consider the targets of the FTAs in examples o) and p):

**o) Vicky Maeijer (NI). -** …De EU werkt tragedies in de hand. Wat we natuurlijk al wisten, maar wat velen hier niet willen zien, is afgelopen week nog eens bevestigd door de terroristen van de Islamitische Staat. De moslimterreurgroep heeft 4 000 terroristen als asielzoekers de Europese Unie binnengesmokkeld. In reactie op mijn schriftelijke vragen antwoordde de Commissie dat we asielzoekers toch vooral niet moesten verwarren met terroristen. Het getuigt weer van een stuitende naïviteit.

**p) Laurence J.A.J. Stassen (NI ). -** In antwoord op mijn schriftelijke vraag geeft de Commissie aan de zaak Say met bezorgdheid te volgen. Welnu, ik roep de Commissie op om de daad bij het woord te voegen…Hoezeer dient de situatie in Turkije verder te verslechteren, voordat de Commissie eindelijk inziet dat Turkije niet Europees wil zijn en ook nooit Europees zal worden? … Kiest de Commissie voor doormodderen op de bestaande uitzichtloze weg of voegt men de daad bij het woord en worden de toetredingsonderhandelingen met Turkije eindelijk stopgezet?

MEP Maeijer in the first example blames “the EU” and the European Commission for causing tragedies and being naive, saying nothing about individual commissioners or MEPs. This may be explained by the fact that MEPs do not engage in direct confrontations with one another as much as British MPs traditionally do. Those cases reflected in the corpus where Dutch Eurosceptics do engage in debate with their colleague MEPs show a significant return of formalised FTA mitigation and, in some cases, the use of otherwise rare face enhancement. (“Dank u, collega, voor deze vraag.”) Whether this can be explained simply as a matter of *blue-card* questions in the corpus being posed by colleagues who are politically aligned with the MEP being questioned, would require further study.

## Assessing coding reliability

The codes in the main corpus and the overlapping corpora A and B were compared in order to check the reliability of the coding method used. The main coding document shows that FTAs were identified in 75 speech fragments. Of these, Coder A processed 39 fragments, all of which were coded as containing at least one FTA. Coder B processed 19 fragments, all containing at least one occurrence of an FTA. According to table 4, the coding saw limited success, with the greatest degree of agreement seeming to occur in identifying the number of FTAs. The lowest agreement was found in codes identifying unmitigated FTAs, suggesting that the coding method lacked uniformity. Because of this result, the coded corpora were used as a guide as to which transcript fragments bore further analysis in the form of examples in the text, than any basis to draw quantitative conclusions from. This is also reflected in Limitations, where a number of suggestions will be given on how a further study might improve reliability of the codes.

**Table 4: Average frequencies of each code for the overlapping three corpora**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Main corpus** | **Coder A** | **Coder B** |
| Avg. # FTAs | 2.66 | 2.48 | 3.4 |
| Avg. # (MIT-) | 1.55 | 2.39 | 3.07 |
| Avg # (MIT+) | 1.74 | 1.75 | 1.25 |
| Avg # (EM) | 2 | 1.75 | 3.38 |

The results from the transcript analysis show some significant similarities between Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs and British MPs in terms of unmitigated FTAs and the use of emotional appeals. The independent coders’ analysis proved that the manner of identifying FTAs and qualifying these in terms of mitigation and emotional appeals presented here is sound, though some improvement in this process is warranted before these figures can be used to draw any conclusions concerning mitigation.

The next step is to connect the findings to the theory introduced in the literature review, and to discover whether Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs employ the same discourse strategies in their EU parliamentary discourse using the style cues that are otherwise typical of British MPs.

# Discussion

The examples of Eurosceptic discourse in the previous section suggest that certain aspects of Ilie’s (2004) characterisation of British political discourse style may apply to that of Dutch Eurosceptics as well. Thus far, the analysis has shown considerable similarities between British parliamentary discourse and Dutch Eurosceptic discourse in the European parliament.

The final step is to tentatively consider motivations for MEPs to employ British-style parliamentary discourse. A number of possibilities present themselves.

Firstly, it is possible that Dutch MEPs seek to be associated with their more popular UK counterparts in the EFDD. MEPs could employ a form of speech accommodation, leading spectators to assume that they are politically connected and thereby form a larger anti-EU block without actually being part of the same political grouping in an official capacity. A data point that may point to this explanation is the fact that in certain places in the corpus, Dutch Eurosceptics code-switch to English to deliver a *sound bite,* and in at least one example, Dutch MEP Marcel de Graaff begins his speech in Dutch and continues to answer a *blue card* question from an English colleague in English. This may indicate an intention on the part of the Dutch MEP to work together, or at least appear willing to accommodate his colleagues, if not politically, then certainly linguistically.

A second possibility takes into account the British political system and the position of Eurosceptic MEPs in the present political climate. The British Parliament, (as pointed out by Lord & Tamvaki 2012) is a majoritarian system, whereas the EU and the Dutch national parliaments are both consensus-based. The latter system favours coalition-seeking behaviour, the former a strong, critical opposition and shadow governments. The goal of the opposition in both systems differs fundamentally. In the British system, the opposition dedicates most of its time to belittling and criticising government policy, so that they may ensure a majority in the following term. The Dutch and EU consensus-based systems sees independent parties banding together to at times criticise government, and at others to show support for certain initiatives to form or join a coalition. This coalition-seeking behaviour is best served by maintaining friendly cooperative relationships with fellow MEPs, expressed through the use of overt mitigation strategies in the event of FTAs, and face enhancement strategies in situations where closer cooperation is desired.

Conversely, despite Eurosceptic MEPs’ efforts to form a political block in the European Parliament, their main motivation is to cease being part of the European Union at some point. As such, their political objectives are best served by a lack of cooperation with parties that seem expressly to further the interests and influence of the European Union. Unlike their coalition-seeking counterparts, Eurosceptics in the European parliament are best served by the same kind of adversarial language favoured by majoritarian political systems. This seems a likely explanation, and may be what lies at the root of most of the similarities between Dutch Eurosceptics and British MPs.

## Campaigning during plenary speeches

One final piece of evidence indicating what the intended audience for the political discourse of Dutch Eurosceptics is, is the fact that at times, MEPs will use their allotted time to call for voters to support their party in upcoming elections:

**Laurence J.A.J. Stassen** (NI ). – (…) Voorzitter, het zogeheten onderhandelingskader stelt dat de Commissie in een dergelijk geval de Raad zal adviseren de toetredingsonderhandelingen op te schorten. De retorische vraag is nu waarom de Commissie haar verplichting niet nakomt. Het antwoord: de Commissie heeft lak aan alles wat haar geliefde Turkije project in de weg staat.  Maar, Voorzitter, de PVV blijft het herhalen tot de Commissie en dit Parlement er horendol van worden. Het islamitische, repressieve Turkije moet nooit bij de Europese Unie en de Nederlanders die hier net zo over denken, die stemmen op 22 mei op de PVV.

This is the clearest possible example of a Dutch Eurosceptic targeting the outside audience in a plenary speech, and gives credence to the notion that other discourse ostensibly addressed to the European Union, Commission, fellow MEPs or guest speakers may, in actual fact, be intended for viewers outside the EU. Whether this is effective or not is difficult to judge, and outside of the scope of this paper, but it is worth keeping in mind that British MEPs from the EFDD group feature heavily in YouTube videos, enjoying large viewership figures. For example, the top 5 search results for “EU parliament debate” sorted by view count all feature Nigel Farage, and the top result has been viewed over 1.3 million times. This is relatively unscientific, but gives an indication of the importance of online media to debating MEPs.

## Limitations & Further Research

The sheer breadth of the subject of parliamentary discourse necessitates limitations to preserve a workable thesis. In the present research, only a limited number of non-Eurosceptic MEPs were taken into consideration. Ideally, a larger number of transcripts of speeches by non-PVV Eurosceptics would be joined by a similarly sized contingent of pro-EU MEPs. It is easily imaginable that the present study can be expanded to include an even greater corpus comprising an even spread of MEPs from various political streams. Similarly, the corpus could be expanded in terms of time, going back two or more parliamentary terms. This would give greater insight into the development of discourse features over the course of years, and in so doing would answer a very different question altogether.

The coding analysis between three coders saw only limited reliability. This was mainly because of practical reasons. The coders were given only brief explanations of the theory because of how time-intensive the coding task was. This also lead to the discrepancy in corpus size between Coders A and B, time constraints prevented both coders from reviewing the same size corpus. Ideally, a coding approach in a following study would benefit from two improvements: firstly, the coders should be on an equal theoretical footing as the researcher, which should mean that coders are given a more extensive introduction to the material as was possible here, or should be co-authors of a future paper. It is also likely that the sheer amount of possible codes, and the possibility of applying multiple instances of the same code to a given fragment, influenced the low degree of inter-coder agreement in this study.

Further research would also benefit from a larger group of coders, improving reliability of results from the analysis. Ideally, they would be tasked with coding the entire corpus, necessitating multiple sessions, which were not within the practical scope of this project. The present coding analysis, in light of these limitations, may best be viewed as a pilot study. It has established a way of identifying FTAs in a comparable way and coding the degree of mitigation that could prove valuable in future research into this field.

One other area that could aid the understanding of Dutch parliamentary discourse in the wider supranational arena of the EU, is more data on the discourse style of Dutch parliamentarians in general. As it stands, this study has based its analysis on features present in Dutch MEP discourse that is similar to national discourse among British MPs. Similar research to that of Ilie and Harris in their investigation of British political discourse was more difficult to find for the Netherlands. Such data would greatly improve future cross-cultural comparisons featuring Dutch M(E)Ps, as it remains an area of personal interest.

Having described the limitations of the present project, recommendations for future research become automatically clear. A broader study of discourse styles in the European Parliament, perhaps incorporating multiple languages and the role which the simultaneous interpretation plays during debates would broaden our knowledge of intercultural discourse styles still further. There remains a considerable amount of ground to cover.

# Conclusion

The coding analysis seems to support the notion that Eurosceptic MEPs from the Netherlands employ more unmitigated FTAs than their Dutch colleagues. These MEPs also employed markedly more emotional appeals in their language during speeches, including wordplay, playing on emotions and sense of humour.

Differences were found, too, most notably in terms of who the intended target of FTAs performed by Dutch Eurosceptics are. British MPs regularly target each other by name, whereas this does not generally appear to be the case among the Dutch Eurosceptic MEPs, who more frequently target their insults at institutions like the European Commission, or people who are not present during the debate. A number of factors indicate that opposing MEPs are not always the intended audience for these emotion-based FTAs. Rather, considering that during election time, these MEPs will increase the emotional load of their FTAs combined with a call to vote for their respective parties, points toward a spectator audience being targeted, through television, radio and the Internet.

The most promising theory attempting to account for the features identified in Dutch Eurosceptic discourse, is that Eurosceptic parties should in essence not be seen as consensus-seeking parties. Whereas the European Parliament is a coalition-based electoral system, Eurosceptic MEPs present themselves as an alternative option, separate from the entire EU system. They routinely criticise the proceedings of the EU, resembling (or intending to resemble) a shadow government, such as may be found in British politics, which is a majoritarian system. Lord & Tamvaki (2010) established that this system benefits from adversarial language, British MPs are not typically interested in forming a coalition with their political adversaries, so discourse primarily concerns itself with gaining the upper hand and *scoring points*.

With the promise of a referendum on its way to British voters, it is extremely difficult to predict the future of EU parliamentary discourse. If the electorate favours the UKIP/EFDD line of thinking, the United Kingdom may well exit the European Union, thereby simultaneously fulfilling that party’s wishes and removing the most important reason for it to exist at all. What will the EU look like without the United Kingdom, and will this influence the discourse styles of other countries’ MEPs still further? Will Eurosceptics be spurred on by their success, and adopt more British discourse style cues into their debates? The small world of political discourse analysis may be headed for turbulent times over the coming years.

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# Appendix A

Please consider the following excerpts, and apply the following codes as you see fit:

* **Column 1**
  + **FTA**
    - Denotes a face-threatening act
  + **ADV**
    - Describes whether you think the marked sentence is *adversarial* in style.
      * Ex. "As per usual, the Greens have concocted a plan completely counter to intuition, common sense, and the laws of Physics."
  + **FEA**
    - Denotes face "enhancement"
  + **MIT + or -**
    - Denotes mitigation of FTA
      * Ex: "If the Honourable Gentleman does not mind my observing, the policy put forward by his party evinces some economic myopia..." is **+ MIT**
      * Ex: "Mr Juncker is corrupt and unfit to chair this Parliament." is **- MIT**
  + **(EM)**
    - Denotes emotional language
      * Ex: "Mr Speaker personally condones the slaughtering of countless babies purely for the benefit of his own makeup industry connections, which is am outrage, damn and blast it!" ... Would be **(EM)**

1. Not part of the corpus, used for illustrating the tendency of the chair to interrupt speakers in section 4.1.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)