How to do politics with words: Analyzing the framing of political issues through the lens of speech acts

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Parliamentary debates provide a rich resource for analyzing political discourse and for investigating how political parties discuss and frame current political issues. Speakers from different political parties are given the opportunity to express their viewpoints and demands regarding these issues. The structured nature of the debates allows us to study which communicative strategies are employed by the different parties to talk about the same political issues.

Examples (1) and (2) below illustrate how the same political goal can be expressed either in a cooperative or in a confrontational manner. In (1), the request includes both the speaker and the addressees of the utterance as an invitation to work together towards a shared goal (to abolish the solidarity surcharge). In (2), however, the speaker utilizes a far more confrontational communicative strategy, making a demand directed at the political opponent (and excluding the speaker).

   (1) Lassen Sie uns gemeinsam den Soli abschaffen.   Request
   (2) Schaffen Sie endlich den Soli ab!   Demand

The goal of our work is to study *how* different parties talk about opponents, issues and their own goals. Our contributions are the following:

(i) We present a new annotation scheme with 14 classes tailored to German parliamentary debates. Our scheme draws on the seminal categorization of illocutionary acts in Searle (1976) and on Kondratenko et al. (2020).

(ii) We create a new dataset of German parliamentary debates annotated for speech acts, with more than 12,900 annotated instances.

(iii) We provide strong baselines to automatically detect speech acts. Our best classifier achieves a micro-averaged F1 close to 82%.

(iv) We showcase how our new schema and resources can be used for political text analysis. We use our best classifier to predict the pragmatic functions of utterances in German parliamentary debates over a time range of 30 years. In an initial analysis, we confirm our expectation that parties opt for different rhetorical strategies, depending on whether they are in government or part of the opposition at the time of speaking.

References: • Kondratenko, N. V., Kiselova, A. A., & Zavalska, L. V. (2020). Strategies and Tactics of Communication in Parliamentary Discourse. In *Studies about Languages*. (36), 17–29. • Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. In *Language in society*, 5(1), 1–23.