

CHAPTER TWO

Asserting Interpretive Frames of Political Events: Panel Discussions on Television News

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Introduction

The evocation of social and political interpretations that legitimise a certain policy position is a basic strategy for generating support in a democratic system, and can become crucial for people's experience of political events (Fischer 2003, 55). This article explores how political actors try to establish their interpretive frames of current problems and developments in debates with political opponents on TV. Live discussions on political issues in news programs like the ones on Austrian public television (ORF) are broadly valued for their 'authenticity' because they are expected to reveal participants' supposedly 'original' political motivations more openly than interactively less demanding press conferences or interviews. Unlike the prearranged choreography of similar events e.g. on American TV, these debates are open in their setting and proceeding. Nonetheless, impressions of authenticity can be fundamentally misleading, because rhetorically trained politicians – when successful – may produce calculated effects by deliberate formulations and patterns of behaviour, which become evident through close linguistic and interactional analysis.

Conceptually I will build on the basic insight of studies in political communication and mass media that interpretive frames make up the very core and influence of political messages (Iyengar 1991; Gamson 1992; Schön/Rein 1994). While trying to compensate for conceptual/methodological shortcomings of these mostly social-psychological studies (Scheufele 1999), I will take up their pivotal point about one function of 'frames': A dominant frame can "determine what counts as a fact and what arguments are taken to be relevant and compelling" (Schön/Rein 1994, 23), and therefore also set the terms of interpretation for competing frames. Consequently, the political struggle for dominance has an intrinsically interactionistic side to it: Political positioning is always oriented to and directed towards other, competing political interpretations in the struggle for public support. So the methodological/conceptual approach of my analyses presented here may in turn have some exemplary value for other, less openly competitive, discursive events, where political actors use *heteroglot* speech forms (Bakhtin 1998) to influence politically and socially heterogeneous audiences.

In this chapter I will sketch a methodological approach for analysing the complex discursive practices used in televised panel discussions (see Gotsbachner 2008) by inspecting a range of examples from Austrian news programs. Most difficult to grasp

in any description and assessment of rhetorical devices is the interweaving of semantic and activity patterns. In order to demonstrate and explore their interrelations I differentiate three planes in the constitution of meaning: the planes of activity structure, political ‘narrative’ and social knowledge. Identifying the essential elements necessary for interactively establishing an interpretive frame on these three interrelated planes, and trying to systematize the discursive means used in such events will be the main task here.

Interpretive Frames

To begin, I will briefly explain how interpretive frames work, before going on to outline how to analyse them in televised political debates. The sociological concept of frames goes back to work by Erving Goffman (1974) and Gregory Bateson (1972), addressing a fundamental problem of communication: As most utterances in our ordinary day-to-day conversations are – and have to be – incomplete, allusive or otherwise truncated, whatever speakers leave out as taken for granted has to be added in the minds of receptive listeners. Consequently, vital to an efficient communication and to all understanding are referential frames, which organize this process of ‘filling in’ knowledge (Donati 1992; Entman 1993; Gamson 1992; Goffman 1974; Gotsbachner 2008a, b; Minsky 1975; Schön/Rein 1994). “Bateson demonstrated that no communicative move, verbal or nonverbal, could be understood without reference to a metacommunicative message or metamessage, about what is going on – that is, what frame of interpretation applies to a move.” (Tannen 1993, 3). Like other common mechanisms of understanding this can be used for tactical manipulation by political actors. Interpretive frames are important communicative devices guiding recipients’ interpretations; a) by their interactive, procedural function in local, situated communication and b) as semantic clusters of meaning and ‘social knowledge’. This double function is what makes a frame paradigm fruitful in spanning gaps between interactionistic approaches and those concerned with ideology and social knowledge.

From the latter perspective frames of interpretation are culturally and socially available and individually acquired “data structures for representing a stereotyped situation” (Minsky 1975, 212), organizing all sorts of social knowledge about social roles, settings and situations. The communicative function of frames in the production and comprehension of discourse is based on their *recognizability* “by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements” (Entman 1992, 52). Particular frames contain a series of more or less variable standard elements, or ‘*slots*’, including roles of involved persons, key situations, defining figures, processes, problem solutions etc. When recognizing a certain frame, audiences will expect these specifications to be verbalized during the talk and – while listening – actively look for them, because they are known as important parts of this frame. If in the talk or text no elements or implicit hints occur offering themselves to fill the slots, recipients will draw on the frame they reproduce from their memory and reconstruct fitting elements by default assignments (Minsky

1975, 213). "...once a frame is elicited to define a perceptive input, data or elements, which are difficult to fit, will be 'adapted' or selectively dropped out, while gaps will be filled by adding the missing elements to complete the 're-cognised' pattern. Since a frame is a known structure, the elements that are constitutive of it are implicitly considered as 'naturally' tied together. The consequence is that mentioning some elements – sometimes even one – is usually enough to recall the whole set" (Donati 1992, 141). The use of frames thus enables recipients, while listening to talk or reading a text, to consider pieces of information which (probably) are implied, but not actually being given, and continuously build up projections about what is going on and what should come next, as continually assigned and revised hypothetical assumptions.

The interactional side of establishing an interpretive frame is more delicate and has been explored only recently (Tannen 1993; Gotsbachner 2008), although there are numerous studies illuminating certain aspects in the interactional constitution of meaning. The detailed processes in the negotiation of identities are a prominent example. In fact, how Harvey Sacks (1992) describes the working of "Membership Categorization Devices" (MCDs) can also be taken as paradigmatic for the constitution of a certain frame in an unfolding interaction. Like other elements making up for the 'slots' in interpretive frames, MCDs are 'inference-rich' utterances that other participants expect to contain crucial information: the implicit positioning and (self-)description of a speaker, or of a person referred to. Like other key elements they are designed for recognizability by specific recipients (Sacks 1992, 239-259; Housley 1999; Introduction, *this volume*). And like other key elements of opening up an interpretive frame, they occur and are expected to occur in certain places of an exchange, usually first self-references in an encounter or after formally marked frame-switches (see Müller 1984, 80f.). Once introduced – however implicitly – an identity needs to be maintained subsequently by further actions.

"The sort of greeting exchanged, the sort of description offered, the sort of biographical details exhibited, (...) but also the kind of humour tendered, the style of authenticity enacted, and the degree of interactional grace commanded provide varieties of resources for negotiating identities." (Schenkein 1978, 61f.).

If and how the other participants ratify this implicit positioning or offer contesting representations will have consequences for the distribution of roles, the modes of participation and the further development of an encounter (Kallmeyer/Schmitt 1996; Gotsbachner 1999, 2001).

Let us turn to political panel discussions on television. As in all arguments, the negotiation of identities is crucial to the assertion (and also challenging) of interpretive frames in televised confrontations with political opponents. The implicitly maintained positioning of identity claims determines, who is ascribed the competence, credibility and suitable political position to talk about what types of issues, deciding about rights of definition and burden of proof. On the other side, revealing the

antagonist's 'ideological' distortions and political motivations through assignment of an ascribed identity can 'tilt' the assessment and perception of his or her whole framing.

What I am addressing here on identity claims is what I have mentioned above and what I will exemplify further on: that establishing an interpretive frame against similar, but adversarial efforts of other politicians is a complex business which requires actors to adjust their rhetorical moves on different levels. In order to be asserted successfully, self-identity-claims on the narrative level (introducing one's role according to one's definition of a social/political situation or problem) need to be enacted authentically through this actors' speech activities. Demonstrating a certain stance and behaviour, proposing certain moves etc, is important because this always carries implications for positioning – eg. transcript 5 will show a politician forgoing his advantage of being addressed as a university professor by departing from the restrained manner expected for this position. Finally, participant roles and identity claims must also correspond with what a politician stands for in public debate, the specific political positioning established on the level of common socio-political knowledge.

Methodologically this means that in examining the complex mechanisms of establishing an interpretive frame in political panel discussions we need to integrate at least three interrelated dimensions of analysis. Along with how claims and propositions are made and ratified (the first level of inquiry, the pragmatic level of speech activities) we need to consider, how they relate to frames on the second level, the level of creating a 'political narrative' or 'storyline' out of ambivalent social 'facts'. And then how these two levels relate to the third, the level of established social knowledge commonly available to broader communities of interpretation. My differentiation of levels in the 'constitution of meaning' here builds on a 'Gesprächsanalyse' in the vein of Werner Kallmeyer and Fritz Schütze (1976; 1977; also Bergmann 1994; Deppermann 2005) which in turn builds on a Conversation-Analysis-kind of 'analytic mentality' (Schenkein 1978). The German 'Gesprächsanalyse' expanded CA's basic orientation to member's 'communicative problems' – which participants have to face and can be shown to orient to themselves, in turn taking, 'doing formulations' etc., – to more specific communicative problems or requirements constitutive for certain discursive genres (like the negotiation of credibility in informal court proceedings, Gotsbachner 1999), and made this orientation their baseline of analytic inquiry (Kallmeyer 1988, 1104; Deppermann 2005, 50). Schenkein's analysis (1978) had, for instance, anticipated this step by working out different ways of treatment all contributing to the same form of identity negotiation (official vs. unofficial identities) specific to an insurance-selling-event, but without using the description of the communicative problem for explicating some constitutive characteristics of the particular event they were observed in.

My aim is to identify the ‘constitutive communicative problems’ of participants in televised political debates on the three levels of activity structure, political ‘narrative’ and social knowledge, and use them to systematize the discursive requirements crucial for interactively asserting an interpretive frame. Condensed to one sentence these ‘constitutive communicative problems’ could be formulated as something like: Political actors try to construct a consistent ‘story line’ from inherently ambivalent political ‘facts’ while simultaneously reacting to adverse questions of the moderator and multiple challenges from opponents, and they do so conscious of performing in front of a heterogeneous audience.

Gaining Control over the Local Distribution of Talking Rights

Among the crucial discursive requirements for asserting an interpretive frame is that discussants defend or even expand their range of self-determination. Different moves of discussants imposing demands on their opponents and escaping those directed at themselves have been systematically conceptualised in the fruitful analytical model of ‘enforcement’ (Kallmeyer/Schmitt 1996). This model refines basic conversation-analytic concepts like ‘conditional relevance’ into complex realms of tactical discursive manoeuvring on the levels of speaking opportunities, utterance meanings, factual representations, discursive actions and social relationships. Losses and gains within debates are dependent on the struggle for dominance on these interdependent levels of activity structure and constitution of meaning. ‘Dominance’ can be observed to a certain degree empirically in participants’ ability to increase demands (by controversial assertions, accusations, calls for legitimation or explanation etc.) on their opponents so that they cannot meet them satisfactorily within a limited timeframe. This ability is dependent on gaining control over the local distribution of talking rights. The empirical examples I will discuss show the close connection of participant roles and participants’ leeway in interaction in the contest over talking opportunities.

My first example is from a panel discussion from 2001 on a referendum by the populist-right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), which proposed blocking the Czech Republic’s entry into the European Union by stating conditions concerning the atomic reactor Temelin. In this discussion the FPÖ party secretary Westenthaler is asked by the moderator about the possible diplomatic damage of an Austrian veto to the EU enlargement. Westenthaler postpones answering the question by claiming to react to a misrepresentation of his opponent. We will see that a constitutive problem inherent to first statements in political panel discussions is that discussants need to open up their interpretive frames on the narrative level while simultaneously demonstrating their commitment to the discussion by answering the question of the moderator. Westenthaler’s “Let-me-firstly...”-preface is a typical minimal solution to this dilemma. The conflict I document in the transcript occurs when Westenthaler, after consuming as much time as his opponent had for his opening statement, still doesn’t prepare to answer the question:

Transcript 1: ZiB-16-11-2001-Temelin

- W: ...and when this reactor joins the grid as it is .hhh we will interpose our veto
- M: Even if [Austria would be internationally isolated]
- W: [This is-] Well this is always the question. You know, France and Great Britain use vetoes all the time and neither France nor Great Britain are isolated when [they veto/] [When]=
- M: [But not against- not] not against the EU-en[largement]
- W: =it (.) Could I once finish speaking? Thanks Mister Adrowitzer. When it concerns vital ...

Technically the moderator's two objections are made for thematical steering, not for taking over the speaking opportunity. When Westenthaler insists on his right to "finish speaking", he had already regained the floor, so his insisting is dysfunctional here, a typical 'enforcing' move. Westenthaler treats the objections as repeated illegitimate interruptions, an interpretation which implicitly challenges the moderator's right to ensure that his questions are answered, and thereby also the moderators role to control talking opportunities. The moderator, in turn, fails to rebuff this implicit challenge. His gestured answer instead demonstrates withdrawal:

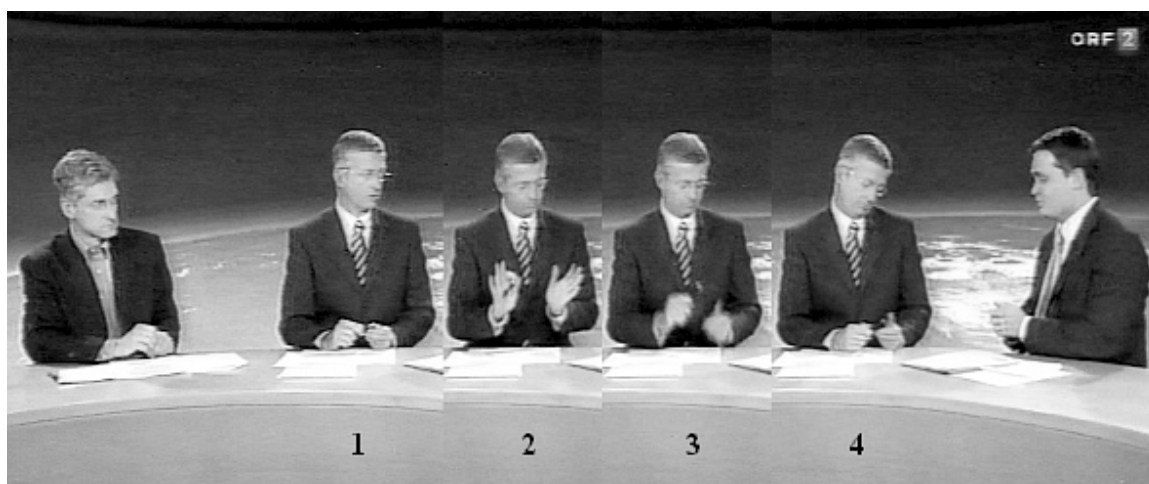


Figure 1

What is at stake in this simple, but inferentially loaded "Could I once finish speaking?" can be revealed only in close attention to the pragmatic/thematical context, where we need an understanding of turn taking mechanisms and organisation, and the implicit negotiation of participant roles. The moderator's implicit, involuntary ratification of Westenthaler's tactical claim – and accordingly the damage to his institutionalised role – have determining effects on the further discussion. So, the damage of the moderator's role can be shown in the further development of the interaction, where we find not only participant's own manifest interpretations of what is happening, but also the emergence of the local interactional order (Bergmann 1994; Kallmeyer/Schmitt 1996). Westenthaler is then able to continue his opening statement to double the length of what his opponent had been allotted, an imbalance which

subsequently influences total talking time and mirrors the moderator's loss of control over speaking opportunities. Westenthaler keeps interrupting his opponents' statements with disturbing remarks and finally delivers an undisguised propaganda speech for the FPÖ-referendum even after the moderator had signalled the end of the discussion.

Using complex CA-models we could register that the moderator's objections fail to renew the 'footing shift' (Clayman 1992) of his initial question, where he had said: "EU-commission-president Prodi has warned in tomorrow's press that Austria .hh a veto to the enlargement could harm Austria very much". In the excerpt above we see that when the moderator renews the gist of his question he makes himself vulnerable by leaving his neutralistic stance, formulating his objections not as citation from an important political player but as his own undistanced, opinionated statements.

But panel discussions in Austrian television from that time show that the rules concerning 'footing shift renewals' were usually not treated as strictly as in Clayman's model (1992, 170f.). More important seems that attacks on news moderators were a recurring discursive tactic of Westenthaler and other FPÖ-politicians in TV-interviews, accusing the broadcasting corporation ORF generally of acting against them in a partisan manner. Drawing on the development of the FPÖ Gotsbachner (2003) analyses how this rhetorical tactic became a recurring interactional resource and part of the FPÖ's long term political strategy – to claim for themselves rebel status against the political/media system, attracting an increasing electorate of protest voices.

Focusing on our baseline of developing the participants' requirements for meeting the 'constitutive communicative problems' in a televised panel discussion and in determining these challenges on the pragmatic level we can see how important enforcing moves are for discussants to expand their range of self-determination. However enforcing moves are also risky, because in the struggle over talking rights they can be reverted, as I will demonstrate from an example of another discussion. This panel discussion (below) was about charges of corruption the Green Party delegate Pilz had raised against Social Democrat politicians, among them his opponent in this discussion, Mayr. When Pilz starts his first statement – asked by the moderator to present evidence for his charges – Mayr interrupts him after only three sentences. Mayr accuses Pilz of lying deliberately and, after getting no adequate reaction, enrages himself into an emotional outbreak, personally and loudly attacking his opponent for deliberate abuses and undemocratic behaviour (see Gotsbachner 2008). According to Kallmeyer/Schmitt's concept of enforcement we can say that the problem with this sudden outburst was its break with the 'ladder of escalation' (1996, 95ff), where personal insults of this strong kind usually occur and can be claimed to be legitimate only after an extended sequence of mutual escalation, which is absent here.

However in the data below we can see how the attacked Green delegate Pilz profited from this outburst. Pilz contrasted Mayr's shouting by responding very slowly and calmly and, after having been interrupted for the seventh time in his attempts to regain the floor, responded:

Transcript 2: ZiB-14-10-1998-Construction-scandal

P: Are you, Mister Mayr,=

M: YOU HAVE CAU- THAT'S WHAT YOU HAVE CAUSED!

P: Mister Mayr, are you ready (0.6) in a discussion=

M: I am completely ready [but I am not ready-]

P: = [in a democracy (.)] to listen for just a few minutes?

M: I am ready to listen for many minutes but I am not ready for this humiliating politics- why did you give this press conference in Carinthia? (0.4) Maybe because of upcoming elections ...

Pilz returns the accusations of undemocratic behaviour by asking Mayr to comply with 'democratic' discussion discipline, but Mayr interrupts again and continues his attacks. The discussion normalizes only after the moderator intervenes for a second time and urges Mayr to allow his opponent to answer the question. Pilz then uses this first opportunity to talk again by turning to the moderator, explaining: "But, but you can imagine roughly how pretty lively things were in the Vienna city council during the time of the absolute majority of the Socialists. This was just a brief impression".

This comment, concluding Pilz' diligent handling of the opening sequence, contains a sublime, inference rich characterisation of Mayr's identity. Pilz had contrasted his opponents' behaviour by systematically slowing down his responses, and not joining or responding to Mayr's escalation, making him even wilder and making this behaviour visible for the audience at the same time. Pilz' metadiscursive question in transcript 2 forced Mayr into discrediting himself as a politician not "ready" to democratic discussion. Pilz immediately builds his next remark on this "impression", alleging the notoriousness of Mayr's behaviour which he just had made visible. Summing up a complex analysis (Gotsbachner 2008) we can say that Pilz succeeds in turning Mayr's fierce endeavours of enforcement against himself, and his *bonmot* about the state of politics during socialist rule becomes widely cited in the next day's press. Mayr was depicted as somebody not used to oppositional critique and its controlling function.

But in this *bonmot* Pilz not only succeeds to define his opponent's identity in a way relevant to his charges of corruption, he also succeeds in discrediting the important first representation of his opponents' interpretive frame ('ungrounded attacks seeking political profit').

Later, towards the end of the discussion, Pilz is able to realize the interactive implications of his first victory for a second time.

Transcript 3: ZiB-14-10-1998-Construction-scandal

- M: ... instead of keeping employment in [our own country]
- P: [These are the usual] tactics, [the (?...)]
- M: [These are - *Your* tactics]
- Your tactics Mister Pilz are to create a stir and wait until like in CIA-methods you will be passed [documents.]
- P: [Don't start], now please don't start shouting again Mister Mayr.
- M: No I don't °(I do not)°-
- P: Mister Mayr (0.8) we have to accept that the year-long looking-away of politicians has created an unbearable situation...

When Pilz, now himself interrupting his opponent, objects that the Social Democrat's appeal to securing employment was a foul, tactical argument (which he had explained just before – and which I will come back to later), Mayr replies by starting to characterize Pilz' own "tactics". These charges could have been dangerous to Pilz, who had admitted in another press-interview being passed secret documents leaked from political bureaucracy, but he neutralizes them by again switching to the metadiscursive level. Pilz warns Mayr not to start shouting again, and although in fact Mayr doesn't (he only speaks more vivid and pronounced), he implicitly ratifies this interpretation by retracting and becoming silent.

There are some general conclusions to be drawn from these examples. Firstly, they show how an interactional order emerges from turn to turn, binding back the participants by supplying negotiated reference points and orientations they can be shown to adhere to themselves - in example 3 Mayr shows himself aware of his previous 'defeat', as does the moderator Adrowitzer for the rest of the other discussion. Secondly, the examples show how this order is tactically influenced by 'enforcing' moves which succeed to win the at least implicit ratification of the opponent. The risk of enforcing moves is in their interactional success, because, as demonstrated in the examples 2 and 3, they can be turned around. So, the rhetorical assessment of interactional roles and the evaluation of talking behaviour itself (what counts as an 'interruption', or as 'shouting'), is subject to the interactional constitution of meaning (Kallmeyer/Schmitt 1996:33). Even institutionalised roles (like the moderator's) are subject to this negotiation process, so that televised discussions become a primary forum for the placement and initial stabilisation of claims in the socio-political renegotiation of established positions. Losses and gains on the pragmatic level of a panel discussion not only influence the negotiation of participant roles and identities, but simultaneously also the validity of positions in the interactive constitution of meaning (Kallmeyer/Schmitt 1996, 25).

Enforcing moves on the pragmatic level of establishing an interpretive frame are essential to the negotiation process. But they also create points of increased attention

for the opponents' answer in the following turn, which opponents can use to place their own representations. Beside first statements such points are preferred moments to place inference rich utterances which can become key elements of participants' interpretive frames on the narrative level. How important the placement of remarks is for establishing one's frame can be demonstrated via how Pilz' *bonmot* was taken over by the press (Gotsbachner 2008) while Mayr's accusation of Pilz' seeking political profit in example 2 doesn't gain any influence, neither in the discussion nor elsewhere.

In political panel discussions enforcing moves of a thematically provocative kind (more transparent in the next transcripts) are essential for any actor to translate their political agenda and purposes into the very tasks of the discussion, thereby influencing the overall theme of what all the talking is heard to be about and what is regarded to be part of (or distracting from) the discussed topics. So, generally, it is on the pragmatic, activity level that thematical initiatives with all their inferential import on relevancy-, identity- and credibility-claims become interactionally focused objects, engaging the attention of the participants (Müller 1984, 63) and also guiding audiences' interpretations of this interactional negotiation of meaning.

Pilz' behaviour during his interrupted opening statement, and later in his compact disposal of Mayr's critical objection in extract 3 also demonstrates that for establishing one's interpretive frame it is not so important to talk as much and long as possible. Rather what is important is to secure one's control over talking rights in such a way that one is able and legitimated to intervene at the right point and in sufficient detail for an effective involvement in an interaction (Kallmeyer/Schmitt 1996:47).

Framing and Reframing Political Events

I have already mentioned that in first statements (or answers) discussants have to provide a short characterization of the 'punch line' of their position, opening their interpretive frame on the narrative level and provisionally setting expectations for what their whole talking activity will lead to. On this narrative level the overall task for discussants is to introduce different thematical aspects connected to their version of the social or political problems discussed, and to arrange them into a complex, conclusive story line. After presenting an example of framing and reframing I will show that crucial to these efforts is building up a more or less consistent network of tacit, paralogical references between single statements.

The discussion in my fourth example is from 2005. The finance-minister of the then conservative Austrian government, Grasser (ex-FPÖ), is criticised for his budget by Green Party leader Van der Bellen.

Transcript 4: ZiB-2-3-2005-Budget-speech

vdB:(...) .hhh My criticism is essentially this .hhh Minister of Finance Grasser has succeeded during these years .hh to turn, from a generally appreciated (.) uuhm member of government

(.) into a minister (0.3) who (1.5) assiduously, *strongly* and *energetically* works – during all these years – at undermining his credibility. And I'll give you two examples, one (0.3) dating back and a current one. .hh (1.0) ((clears his throat)) It is not so long ago that you tried, in your budget-speech .hhh uhm to make us believe that the budget for education and science would be raised for 700 million Euros per year (.) I needed some hours to find out, that these were simple double-countings (.) .hh in the course of autonomizing the universities ...

In this extract Van der Bellen uses an assumption of the minister's identity to frame his critique of budgetary cuts in education and science, starting his characterisation with “assiduously, *strongly* and *energetically*”. These three words are Grasser's own preferred ones to characterise his own politics, and the camera catches him listening with a radiant smile. However Van der Bellen then concludes by actually formulating that ‘Grasser undermines his own credibility’ – and here the camera shows Grasser's freezing face. Van der Bellen gives an example of the minister's ‘creative accounting’ – admitting that he himself (having been introduced as a “Professor of Economics” and referred to as such by Grasser in his answer below) had needed some time to unveil the trick. In his second example (not shown here) his main point is that despite the minister's contrary accounts in the recent budget-speech the financing of federal teachers had in fact been reduced.

We could say that this opening of a storyline is rhetorically well constructed, not only because Van der Bellen succeeds in catching his opponent interactionally in the trap of revealing – evidently to all – his publicly known vanity while presenting an argument regarding his credibility. He also exemplifies the ‘trickiness’ of the ministers' ‘creative accounting’ on descriptions footing in the ministers' own representations (vdB: “you will recognize these numbers ((shows the report)) these are your numbers, not mine”). But Grasser is a political professional, and his answer argumentatively and emotionally copes with the challenge of his opponent:

Transcript 5: ZiB-2-3-2005-Budget-speech

- M: Please let's have the Minister of Finance answer to these accusations
- G: Lets deal with (0.3) credibility, Mister Professor (.) uhhm (.) and, you said ‘professor’, I say, obviously *too* uhm *party* leader uhm Van der Bellen.
- vdB: I do represent that too, [frankly speaking]
- G: [Firstly/] (.) And for that you also sit here.
- vdB: *Surely*
- G: uhhh When I said 12 million *more* for federal teachers in my budget speech .hh then you obviously have overlooked that this occurs in the chapter of *financial adjustment*=
- vdB: [Very true]
- G: =[and in] *financial adjustment* it is part of an agreement with the federal regions to give 12 million *more* to the regions under the title of *financial adjustment*.
- vdB: [(These are the ?)]

G: [Federal] teachers. I therefore record, it is (.) *completely* (.) *right*. Objectively provable (.) *Fact*. .hhh Second: I don't think it is serious or credible when *you* say, and you did this yesterday already (.) on federal teachers we economize, you say and there's [less money]

vdB: [Cut] not
econom[ize, cut]

G: [Cut] Ok (.) But you don't mention, and I would expect this from a (.) serious personality who claims to be credible himself .hh you don't mention that in the realm of federal teachers we have at the same time twelve to thirteen-thousand pupils less ...

Actually Van der Bellen was right, the budget for federal teachers *was* cut by 30 million. I don't have the space here to prove that in technical detail, but the point is, neither had Van der Bellen in the discussion itself. However, the moderator hadn't allowed him to go much deeper into explanations on education expenses, as the topic of the discussion was the budget as a whole, and the complexity of factual relations still left leeway for 'creative accounting', so finally Grasser was able to establish his interpretation in the discussion. The success of this is revealed through a detailed analysis of Grasser's answer.

Grasser takes up the numbers Van der Bellen had used in the second example and accuses him of inaccuracy, thereby returning the accusation of lacking credibility and seriousness. His answer touches the core of his opponents' attack by firstly addressing the challenge to his identity. Grasser corrects the moderator's introduction of Van der Bellen as university professor and adds that his opponent's role in the discussion was as opposition leader, i.e., guided by party interests, which Van der Bellen, scowling, ratifies (mind how this is similar to the way Van der Bellen had addressed the minister's popularity in the tabloids – as the 'ideal son-in-law' – before tilting this very picture). The insisting and condescending tone in which Grasser then addresses Van der Bellen, like speaking to a petulant pupil, and the irritated way Van der Bellen reacts, further deprives the latter of his professorial aura.

Grasser insists that his depiction of rising expenses for federal teachers was "... right. Objectively provable. Fact", by shifting the focus of his statement to a technical subset of the budget, where this actually was true. This shift of focus is an example of 'ontological gerrymandering' (Potter 1996, 177), ironically parrying the accusation of misrepresentation. Grasser's second argument works similarly. Here, too, he veils his shift of focus by lengthily claiming that to consider the falling numbers of pupils would have been a requirement of objectivity which Van der Bellen had failed to observe.

Again, we see that identity ascriptions are crucial in tilting opponents' representations, and indeed this is a general pattern I have observed in numerous political panel discussions. Reframing interpretive frames works primarily through attacks on the opponents' identity, and additionally by engendering a shift of focus in the narrative account. It is a general function of framing and reframing (and not only by means of

‘ontological gerrymandering’ like here) that even a minor shift of aspects can tilt the whole assessment of relevancies, truth-values and moral evaluations of a case.

The central challenge of interactively establishing a frame on the level of political narrative is to create a network of mutually supporting, pseudo-logical references between single statements spread over the whole discussion. These networks can become interpretive frames to which all arguments are heard to be related, allowing for certain types of inferences and excluding others, making certain phenomena salient and letting others fade into the background.

How Grasser strategically selects certain ‘facts’ to support his overall argumentation, is one crucial step for preparing an argumentative ‘storyline’, another requirement is creating a certain ‘wording’. To construct a consistent framing of political facts, problems and constellations politicians need to create a suitable ‘wording’ for casting these ‘facts’ into a pregnant categorisation. Creating a suitable ‘wording’ today is believed to be a basic skill of political actors and their communication advisors,¹ because a characterful categorization underlines the ontological quality of representations: Through ‘wording’ which highlights certain aspects – and backgrounds others – a strategically selected meaning is transferred into an ‘innocent’ descriptive term where the implicit valuation and argumentation appears as inner logic of matters themselves.

In transcript 3 Pilz depicted the presumed involvement of socialist politicians in the construction-scandal as “the year-long looking-away of politicians”, *nominalising* as an intentional behaviour what later turned out to be just his own presumption. In the confrontation with Van der Bellen Grasser speaks of a “governmental focus on education” – which is nothing more than ‘symbolic politics’ (Edelman 1990) to demonstrate his concern in spite of his budgetary cuts on schools and universities. Another one of his slogans, “zero deficit” became almost a ‘business card’ for Grasser’s politics. In the discussion analysed here he used the popular slogan to create the impression of a “sinking financial debt” (another strategic ‘wording’...), although when confronted with actual numbers the ‘zero deficit’ turned out to be only a political goal he tried to invoke. So, a clever ‘wording’ and a suitable interactive positioning of introduced representational elements are both important to the effort of constructing one’s interpretive frame.

What in fact is crucial for constructing the core of an interpretive frame on the narrative level is creating the impression of a coherent ‘story line’, which builds on the pseudo-logical relations between these representational elements, as well as their relation to the adversarial frame presented by the other discussant. If we try to

¹ ‘Wording’ in German has become a technical term with a narrower sense than in English, also used by communication advisors who train Austrian politicians: To secure a homogeneous appearance in the press, party leaders, when discussing how to handle a certain affair or new situation, develop ‘wordings’ which they then give out to all party representatives who could be picked for media-interviews. (fieldnotes Meyn 20.7.07, Wagner 10.9.07, Besenböck 29.10.07)

condense the narrative elements of the adversarial frames in the debate on the budget speech for 2006 in a combined figure, it would look somewhat like in figure 2.

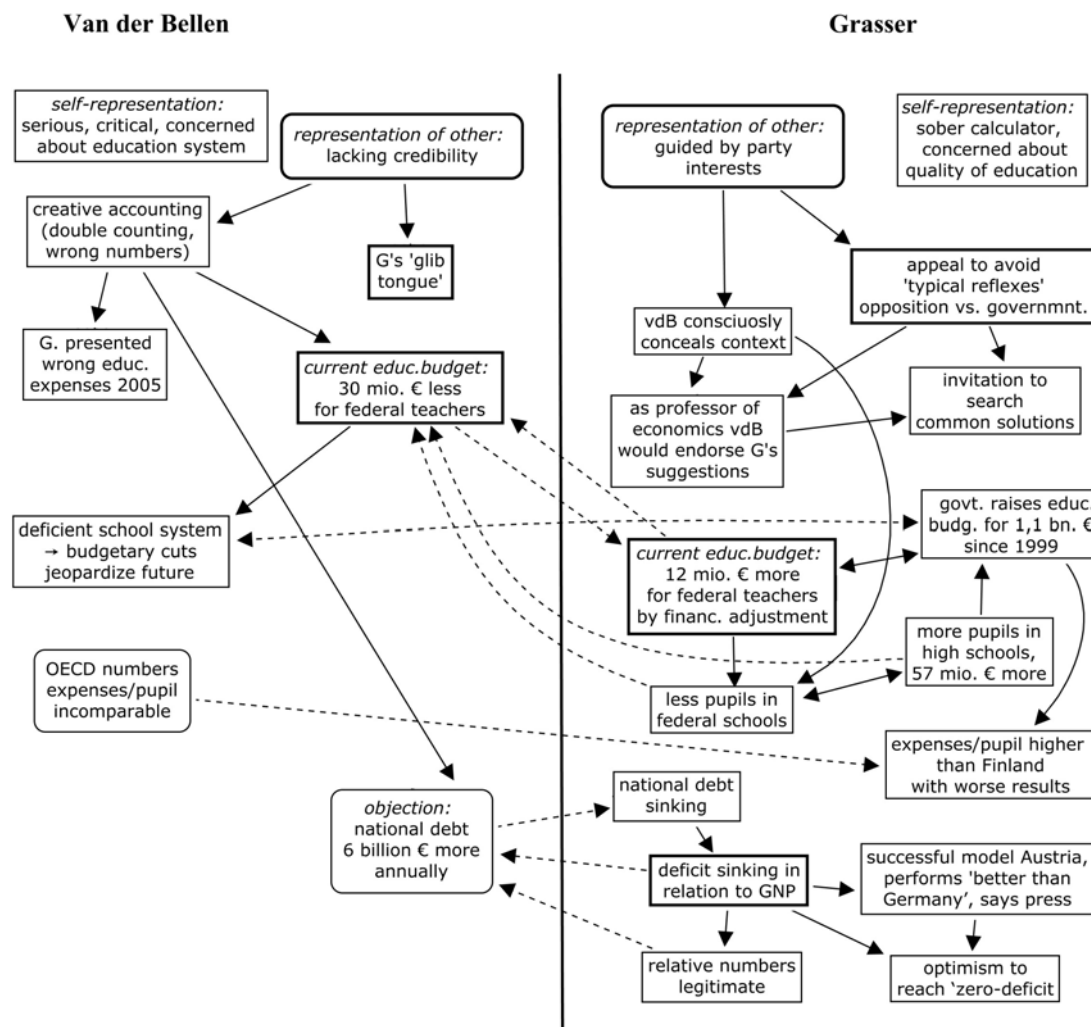


Figure 2

In summing up the narrative lines in this panel discussion there are some noticeable differences in what the two discussants present as their contradictory interpretive frames of education expenses and the budgetary situation. Not only does finance-minister Grasser's representation touch on more aspects to support his interpretation, there are also richer paralogical argumentative references between the elements of his narrative representation than in Van der Bellen's storyline.

The argument over Van der Bellen's main criticism that the current budget of federal teachers was cut, clearly goes to Grasser. Grasser brings in sinking pupil numbers on federal schools and alleged higher expenses for high schools to 'win' this important first argument, suggesting a rise in educational expenses relative to pupil numbers. He also starts to press his opponent that as a university professor Van der Bellen would need to admit the regularity of this calculation, thereby reinforcing his identity-ascription (party-leader vs. professor) and embedding his education-expenses-argument in an appeal to Van der Bellen to stop 'polemics' and seek

common solutions. Grasser asserts that expenses for education would be rising since the start of the conservative government, which finally stands unchallenged, although Van der Bellen had criticised budgetary cuts on education from the very beginning.

Grasser also settles another critical argument for himself, where Van der Bellen derogates his statement “The financial debt is sinking?”, which urges Grasser to admit “In relation to the GNP, of course, when you look in here/” and he goes on to assert that relative numbers were ‘more objective’. Van der Bellen adds that an annual rise of 6 billion € could not be regarded as ‘sinking financial debt’, but this – originally striking – objection is finally ‘parried’ by Grasser who emphatically expresses optimism that Austria nonetheless is going towards ‘zero-deficit’, and cites several international newspapers which he says had congratulated him for a ‘better performance than Germany’. In fact it needs some enthymemic thinking to see how this argument paralogically relates to Van der Bellen’s critique of the raising national debt: It works only on one aspect, namely not on the fact itself, but on the (implicit) accusation, Grasser would try to euphemise the budgetary situation, where citing the ‘compliments’ from ‘*Financial Times*’ and ‘*Neue Zürcher*’ provides the supposition that euphemisms would not be necessary, because ‘international authorities’ depicted the situation of the Austrian budget as good. Van der Bellen in turn fails to doubt this construction.

Breaking down arguments into different aspects is the job of media-communication-advisors when preparing politicians to create handy formulas for every aspect in countering arguments they can expect from their opponents.² Grasser’s ‘richer’ paralogical references between his statements appear as such a superior ‘*aspectisation*’. On another panel debate Gotsbachner (2008) shows how ‘argumentative dominance’ is manufactured by building a narrative ‘storyline’ on networks of paralogical references, touching on more and stronger aspects of a political problem than the opponent. On the level of political narrative we need an analysis of argumentation patterns – who introduces what propositions, how they are treated by the opponent, and what is finally left as unchallenged – to reconstruct the competing storylines which make up for the different framings and how they relate to each other (van Eemeren et.al 1993).

Whilst analysing the ‘rhetorical force’ or even dominance of argumentative patterns is a complicated question to be treated with diligence, we can see that Grasser wins considerably more speaking time than Van der Bellen and opens more challenges his opponent cannot answer. Though of course this attests dominance only on the level of activity.

Observing developments in this panel discussion we can say that although Van der Bellen had built his narrative frame of the budget-situation on his critique of the ministers’ ‘creative accounting’ from the beginning, he shows himself unable to

² Fieldnotes Meyn 20.7.07, Wagner 10.9.07

reveal the ministers' practices when being interactionally confronted with them. That is to say that Van der Bellen fails to assert the cuts in educational expenses on the very case he had introduced, when Grasser does what Van der Bellen had predicted he would do repeatedly.

Still, if we consider which interpretive frame succeeds in paralogically 'overruling' the arguments of the opposite framing, the picture is ambivalent. Grasser 'wins' the argument over the question, if the budget on education is rising or cut, but Van der Bellen, although finally unable to counter the presentation of a rise of educational expenses, had somewhat pre-empted this by pointing to Grasser's 'creative accounting' and 'glib tongue'. In the end however it depends on which interpretive frame is regarded to be more credible,³ if and how the true addressees of these adverse framings, the television audiences, ratify the contradictory accounts, or how they make sense of them. To analyse these framing effects of political panel discussions it would need an equally subtle and extensive reception research across socio-culturally and politically different groups of television consumers.⁴ What we can analyse in panel discussions themselves is only what political actors do and how they do it.

Social knowledge and dominant frames

To achieve a kind of 'frame resonance' (Snow et.al 1986) the main task for political actors on the third level is to build their framings on socio-culturally established frames, values and ideologies which their narrative accounts of a political situation claim to be legitimate instantiations of. In the strict sense the narrative storylines of political discussants, although carrying some characteristics of 'frames' already, are not yet proper 'interpretive frames', i.e., semantic structures of 'social knowledge'. Nevertheless this is what the rhetorical efforts of political actors are all about, trying to disseminate their framings to the wider public so that they are taken on as appropriate, close-to-experience definitions of social reality.

Analysing what kinds of established frames and values political actors draw on in their narrative accounts is not difficult. Researchers, considering the unstated assumptions in the enthymemic construction of paralogical arguments, can analyse what discussants treat as social knowledge or value, if or how others challenge or ratify these instantiations, or how discussants compete about who is the legitimate representative of a certain stance (e.g. Grasser and Van der Bellen concurring in their concern about education – who 'stands' for a 'better' education system).

Many types of 'social knowledge' are socially bound and what certain social or political groups regard as close-to-experience 'knowledge', for others is pure

³ Schön/Rein (1994:30) about the very logic of 'frame conflicts': "Evidence that one party regards as devastating to a second party's argument, the second may dismiss as irrelevant or innocuous."

⁴ In our 'Frame Project' (9/2008-3/2011), funded by the Austrian Science Foundation P20814-G03, we will explore the alignment of frames in audience reactions.

ideology. While seeking ‘frame resonance’ a basic problem for political actors is that their addressees are highly heterogeneous in terms of political orientation and socio-cultural background. That political statements are subject to different reinterpretations by various audiences with different experiences and interpretive repertoires is due to the recognizability of certain ways of speaking as bound to a specific ‘Weltanschauung’ and perspective, the problem at the core of how understanding via interpretive frames works. In panel discussions we can often observe rhetorical tactics which suggest that political actors orient to these heterogeneous understandings. Although culturally available interpretive frames are saturated with patterns of values, belief and perception, this does not prevent them from being highly adoptable or appropriable. In fact, while trying to construct a credible narration of current political events on the narrative level, political actors often use *heteroglot rhetoric* drawing on popular topics of their opponents and thereby trying to make their own specific framings plausible even for those parts of the public, who are not (yet) part of their electorate. For example where a Green politician uses the nationalistically loaded term “Heimat” (homeland), or a right populist invokes women’s emancipation. Whilst on the face of it seemingly disjunctive with the political frame of the speaker, the first was in a discussion of minority rights while defending the right to a ‘Heimat’-feeling even for ethnic minorities, and the second part of an argument discrediting immigrants with respect to Muslim women’s headscarves. Only in considering the complete frame the rhetorical character of such heteroglossia becomes accessible, comparing how certain politically ‘recognizable’ arguments are used to pre-empt expected critique during the construction of an interpretive frame of a different political orientation.⁵

An example less transparent in its rhetorical endeavour is one we have already discussed in the construction-scandal-debate when Pilz, regaining the floor after Mayr’s eruptive accusations, uses his first turn to express his concern about employment. His appropriation on the level of who-stands-for-what-kind-of-issues and who is regarded as competent and politically equipped to talk about them, is part of Pilz’ bigger strategy. The provocation for Mayr, who again interrupts Pilz loudly (see transcript.2), lies in the heteroglot ‘appropriation’ of the social-democrat’s ‘own’ theme, through which Pilz starts to block his opponents’ interpretation.

Later in the panel-discussion Pilz turns Mayr’s argument against Mayr himself. Pilz knows the argument from socialist politicians’ previous newspaper-comments – that he would endanger working-places by ‘unfounded accusations’– and he reasonably could expect that Mayr would use it also in the debate. He explains: “That is the usual development in such scandals. In the beginning the responsible politicians say: that’s all not true, lie, defamation - we have heard this already.” Referring to Mayr’s own words Pilz starts to explain, how his opponents’ argumentation usually

⁵ Preliminary observations of TV-receptions show that audiences still are vulnerable to such tactics, taking over interpretive elements of parties they do not sympathise with, or starting to use their inferentially loaded wordings while describing what is going on. See also Gotsbachner (2003)

develops, going on to explain that in the next step, “when the facts, the evidence, the testimonies are on the table” social-democrats usually conceded there were some “black sheep”, until, as Pilz explains, during investigation “...all sheep turn out to be black. And the next step is: Ok, we knew it, but it was all for securing employment. We now approach this last rescue argumentation.”

In reframing his opponents’ arguments, beginning with those heard some minutes before, then going on with suppositions about alleged “facts” and “evidence” (which Pilz actually failed to supply) and ending with a prediction of the arguments which will follow, Pilz constructs a double-bind-dilemma for Mayr, who then is unable to escape it (see the beginning of transcript 3). Mayr, finally, undermines his own argument by involuntarily ratifying Pilz’ prediction while introducing “employment” as an important element of his own interpretive frame.

The strength of Pilz’ tactics for constructing his interpretive frame around his opponents’ recurring argumentation lies not only in interactively catching Mayr in a double-bind. Its plausibility is also created through connecting the ‘directly perceptible’ with established ‘social knowledge’: Most audiences could easily recognize the recurring social-democrat argumentation – that different political nuisances need to be accepted in order to prevent unemployment.

To ‘reframe’ the political behaviour and strategy of the opponent in line with one’s own explanatory patterns is an increasingly common rhetorical strategy of political actors in TV debates, because revealing his or her ‘ideology’ and political motivations can ‘tilt’ the assessment and perception of the antagonist’s whole framing. If successful, it can have the effect that this opponent – by following his argumentative routines – increasingly exposes himself to the interpretations bestowed upon him and involuntarily and unconsciously can be heard to support an interpretive frame contradicting his own (see Gotsbachner 2003; 2008).

If and how certain framings actually become accepted by different groups of recipients of course depends on many factors. In specific cases like the debate on the construction-scandal, one can show how the interpretive frame of Pilz was taken over by different opinion leaders and newspapers: Pilz’ *bonmot* became a crystallisation point for explanations which started to take the charges of corruption serious, building their evidence on presumptions about the political situation during socialist majority. Journalists started to gather, select and arrange new information according to the storyline of Pilz’ framing (Gotsbachner 2008), which is a strong indicator for how this storyline was taken on as an interpretive frame to comprehend social and political reality.

Summary

Enlightening details of how politicians try to establish their interpretations of political issues against concurring representations needs to analyse the interplay of a broad range of interactive and semantic elements. Indeed, Fig.1 has shown that even a

gesture can be an important move eminently influencing the development and settlement of a whole panel discussion. How these different elements develop their 'force' is revealed through analysing the assertion of 'interpretive frames': a "framing paradigm cautions researchers not to take fugitive components of messages and ask, how they *might* be interpreted" (Entman 1993, 56), but helps to reconstruct fundamental processes of actual understanding and constitution of meaning.

The approach sketched in this chapter tries to integrate different strands of rhetorical endeavours in political panel discussions around their contribution to establishing an 'interpretive frame' on the levels of interaction, political narrative and social knowledge. Successful rhetorical operation on each of these interdependent three levels depends on at least satisfactory treatment of the others. The level of activity structure is basic to the negotiation of the interactional order: the local distribution of talking rights, the negotiation of participant roles and identities, and the definition of thematical foci of the discussion. To make their own political themes relevant, actors need to translate them into challenges for their opponents, like controversial assertions, accusations, calls for legitimation, or more subtly, for concession and cooperation, etc. They do so by manifold enforcing activities which expand their range of self-determination and which also carry implications for their identities. On the pragmatic level interpretive frames mainly are established as the lively enactment of representations, which are introduced by inference-rich talking activities preferably on certain points of a discussion, either introductory statements, or 'points of increased attention' created by critical challenges of an opponent. Actors essentially need to assert a certain grade of control over the local distribution of talking rights on the interactional level in order to enable them to coherently develop their descriptions on the second, narrative level.

On the level of a political 'narrative', required in establishing a certain 'storyline' of what is happening, actors in televised discussions need to occupy certain cornerstones of the pending debate: definitions of the current social/political problem and the distribution of roles, which assert who is responsible for what, and who is competent and equipped to do something about it. I have named this level political 'narrative', although the thematical representations I consider under this level are mostly only partially realised in the conventional narrative form. However they accomplish their rhetorical effect only as paradigmatic, prototypical 'narrations', as a 'plot' or 'storyline' interpreting a current political constellation or state-of-affairs. The narrative level is central in a way that an established 'storyline' can set the terms of relevance for all arguments and activities in the whole discussion, namely also for those of an opponent: it can tilt perceptions and determine what answer, what measurement etc., is relevant for what kind of pending problem. I have argued that the prudent selection, categorisation and 'wording' of certain aspects of reality is basic to creating a coherent narrative and political representation, establishing or hiding certain responsibilities, or setting relevant certain 'causal' connections and 'truth

values'. However, eventually this is dependent on the ability of political actors to create a network of 'paralogical references' in their enthymemic arguments spread over the discussion. Creating such a network enables them to establish their interpretive frames at this level.

A main route for 'reframing' an opponent's argument or tilting a whole frame is to address and reframe their self-representations through adverse ascriptions of an identity. I have shown how these ascriptions can become relevant on all three levels, the activity level redistributing talking rights, on the narrative level determining the validity of positions, and on the third, socio-cultural level for renegotiating who-stands-for-what-issues. Basic to all reframing-devices is that they can tilt the whole interpretation of a certain case by considerably minor changes or refocusing of aspects which become eminently meaningful.

The positioning of interpretive frames on the third, socio-cultural level builds on the actor's awareness that appeals to 'common knowledge' are crucial to validity claims of narrative political accounts. However at the same time these intrinsic appeals to 'common knowledge' for most audiences are recognizable signs indicating the 'ideological position' of political discourses, which these audiences may not necessarily share. To influence the who-stands-for-what-kind-of-issues-dimension over a certain period, political actors in televised panel discussions need to enact their command over certain themes on the activity and narrative levels of their performance. An observable effect is that they often appropriate socio-politically allocated themes – keywords, social definitions and values – of opposite camps to blur the recognizability of their own ideological position and to address audiences, which are not (yet) convinced of their views.

Analysing the assertion of interpretive frames in televised political discussions needs a combination of methodological approaches adequate for each of these three different levels: a sequential analysis which expands the conversation-analytic premise – that answers indicate interpretations of preceding utterances – into realms of strategic interaction, tracing how discussants take up certain aspects of their opponent's enforcing moves; secondly, an analysis of argumentation-patterns sketching the paralogical references between single arguments, working out how the two 'storylines' relate to each other and how their fabrications of 'consistency' work. And lastly it requires an ideographic analysis to reconstruct how a certain discussion contributes to the redrawing of thematical/ideological boundaries, which may lead to a sociologically significant analysis of how certain interpretive frames become treated as 'social knowledge' by certain groups of interpreters and thereby influence the social career of political representations.

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