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## Positive discourse analysis and latent euphemisation\*

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The article examines some epistemic aspects of latent euphemisation in argumentative discourse. The purpose of the work is to show that, by focusing on the notion of voice which links talk and context, positive discourse analysis (PDA) can serve as a meta-orientation in analysing alternative discourses. The theoretical framework for the analysis is the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, which discusses methods and tools for improving discussion and reconciling dissensual opinions. According to M. Gerber, some of the potential problems of the pragma-dialectical approach are “ethical deficiencies”, “the risk of amorality” and limitations regarding the method for evaluating arguments in accordance with goals, purposes and consequences. This article argues that the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation can be implemented to identify latent euphemisation as fallacious reasoning. However, the evaluation of language use as latently euphemistic, and consequently, fallacious, is an epistemic judgment that needs to take into account discussants’ epistemic and epistemological boundaries and commitments, including ethical considerations. As communication can lead to miscommunication unless a common epistemological background is shared, latent euphemisation can be seen as a result of inconsistent epistemological positions whose potential motives and consequences need to be addressed.

*Keywords:* positive discourse analysis (PDA), pragma-dialectical approach, latent euphemisation, ambiguity, unclearness.

### Introduction

The purpose of this work is to investigate some epistemic aspects of latent euphemisation in argumentative discourse from the pragma-dialectical perspective [van Eemeren 2018; van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004] pursuant to Gerber’s [Gerber 2011] insights into the potential problems of the pragma-dialectical methodology, and his suggestions for enhancements. Generally speaking, euphemisation is realised in two ways: euphemisation can be regarded as socially accepted polite verbal behavior, and it can be used to conceal/reduce the negative evaluative prosody of the topic discussed. The latter type, latent euphemisation, can, in the Barthian sense [Bart 2015], be viewed as a tool for concealing denota-

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tion under the plane of connotation, by means of which encodings are made to be ambiguous or even contradictory (later discussed with regard to *de dicto* and *de re* ambiguities). A.M. Abrantes [Abrantes 2005: 93] suggests that a single euphemism can perform both the function of veiling and the function of concealing. In other words, identifying latent euphemisation is equivalent to making it manifest that the speaker's point of view is a more optimistic encoding with a potential to hide negative realities of life. Words have their own semiotic potential, and, therefore, it is not only relevant to study *what is*, but *what could be* as well [van Leeuwen 2005: 3–5; 26–27], depending on the speaker's and the listener's commitments. When the listener interprets the speaker's choice of words as *a euphemism for...*, this suggests two things: firstly, the presence of referential/semantic ambiguity and ambivalence that requires an explanation, and secondly, a symptom of the speaker's and the listener's inconsistent epistemic positions as the (interested, epistemically cautious) listener doubts and rejects the speaker's "epistemic authority" [Kutrovátz 2012: 198]. The rejection of the speaker's "epistemic authority" and the euphemistic tone of discourse presuppose that linguistic production often comes from a subjective position (frequently a position of authority) and is by no means a part of natural order. This is related to the issue of epistemic evaluations in regard to metaepistemological backgrounds/commitments.

Linguistic structures are not inherently deceptive, but they can be deceptive if that is the speaker's goal-directed intention [Chilton 2011: 176–189]. This is a topic that has been widely examined within critical discourse analysis (hereinafter CDA). The core characteristic of CDA as an approach that developed from critical linguistics and critical semiotics is that it is an *issue*-, rather than a *paradigm*-oriented type of studies, which makes it open to any appropriate theoretical and methodological approach [van Dijk 1995: 17] in the operationalisation of the conceptual framework for a critical analysis. CDA has been systematically criticized and as a result, its potential and main problems have taken shape (e. g., [Blommaert 2005: 31–37; Breeze 2011; Jones 2007]). The core criticism of the methodology of CDA is that instead of proceeding from a description via explanation to positioning, with interpretation underlying all stages of investigation, positioning is placed first and interpretation is marginal [Verschueren 2001: 69]. Similarly, P.E. Jones's [Jones 2007] critique is that "the attempts by Critical Discourse Analysis to build a method of political and ideological critique out of such entities "the abstract entities of conventional linguistics and pragmatics" is misguided and inevitably leads to a distorted view of the role of communication in society and of the workings of social processes more generally". Jones [Jones 2007: 31] suggests a more personalised approach to communication. Namely, instead of seeing communication as a process in which individuals are only the embodiment of forms and meanings established in advance, we should try to see communication as a form of conscious conduct of particular individuals and real personalities. As for methodology, the search should be guided by rigorous linguistic methodology [Verschueren 2001: 69].

The current research has the following objectives. Firstly, the research aims to show that positive discourse analysis (hereinafter PDA) can be a meta-orientation in analysing alternative discourses. Secondly, the work points out that the pragma-dialectical approach can explain latent euphemisation by analysing higher-order conditions of a critical discussion as a background to first-order conditions of argumentation, and, in this manner, include ethical considerations in the examination of arguments. Thirdly, it is demonstrated that the terms identified as euphemistic are evaluated differently in the public

sphere, leading to reasoning/producing arguments for and against practices these words describe, with the former emphasising the good, and the latter the bad in these practices, thus introducing positive or negative connotations into words. Fourthly, the article shows that epistemic evaluation is instrumental in recognising euphemisation. The evaluation of words as euphemistic or non-euphemistic depends on our own epistemological and metaepistemological positions, which lead us to or distract us from the analysis of any ethical aspects regarding the motives and consequences behind the actions discussed.

## Theoretical models

### *Positive Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis*

As CDA is itself an orientation, rather than a methodology, T. Bartlett [Bartlett 2018] suggests that the limitations of CDA could be improved by adopting another orientation, PDA, so that a positive transformation could be achieved, as suggested by A. Luke [Luke 2002] and J. R. Martin [Martin 2004]. Bartlett [Bartlett 2012: 12] argues for the notion of voice, or alternative voices, as foundational in any critical study, since it is a means of overcoming limitations in creativity and “analysing the effectiveness of alternative discourses in their local context and beyond”. Bartlett [Bartlett 2012: 7–9] points out that PDA has also been subject to its share of criticisms, three of which are prominent: firstly, in rejecting the fatalistic positions in some critical approaches, PDA “will underplay the importance of the determining effects of existing social structures on discourse”. Secondly, “the analysis of complex linguistic features remains resolutely textual, with the rhetorical features of the language employed analysed in relatively self-contained or *universal terms* (my emphasis)” and, thirdly, “there seems to be a reliance on the trained linguist to provide the evaluation of different texts and linguistic resources rather than a concentrated approach to assessing the evaluation and acceptance of these texts within the target communities themselves”. In order to change the situation, Bartlett [Bartlett 2012: 9] advocates for the integration of textual and contextual analyses of communication, language features and social structure. To achieve this, the author concentrates on the sociolinguistic concept of voice, which links “features of talk to the cultural context of their production and uptake”.

The sociolinguistic notion of voice, as indicated by Bartlett [Bartlett 2012: 12–18], has been defined in sociolinguistics in different ways, but what all definitions have in common is the work of M. M. Bakhtin [Bakhtin 1981] and Soviet authors of the 1920’s and 1930’s based on the assumption that using language means reusing words in ever-changing social contexts, which impose their own conventions and contextual constraint. Bartlett explains that, for him, voice is not so much “the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so”, but he suggests that voice is “the means of behaving appropriately through language” or “the customary ways of making oneself understood in different contexts”, which is the reason why assuming a particular standpoint/voice does not have to lead to understanding. This is to say, as Bartlett further argues, that there may be conflicts between different voices, reflecting different codes, and this is especially obvious in cases of competition between voices coming from dominant groups and those coming from less powerful groups. This converges with J. Blommaert’s [Blommaert 2005: 4] idea that “a critical analysis of discourse in contemporary societies is an analysis of voice... the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so”.

## *Pragma-dialectics and Gerber's criticisms*

Pragma-dialectics relies on the critical-rationalist philosophy of reasonableness that we cannot be certain of anything, so in a critical discussion an agreed discussion procedure should be followed to achieve the effect of resolving differences of opinion by testing whether a standpoint can be demerited. It is not a final justification of standpoints that this approach promotes, but rather a critical testing that leads to resolving a difference of opinion on merits [van Eemeren 2018: 29–30].

The pragma-dialectical approach proposes an ideal model of a critical discussion aimed at resolving a difference of opinion, in agreement with the Socratic ideal of subjecting judgements to a dialectical test [van Eemeren 2017: 8; van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004: 57]. It accepts and builds on two lines of thinking: “conventional” Searlean insights [Searle 1969] into the communicative aspects, and “rational” Gricean insight [Grice 1975] into the interactional aspects of argumentative discourse [van Eemeren 2010: 6–7]. As for the former, the pragma-dialectical approach agrees that speaking a language is a rule-governed form of behavior, or performed acts according to a set of constitutive rules [Searle 1969: 36–41]. These are: 1. identity conditions/clarity: a) the propositional content condition (comprehensibility), and b) the essential condition (communicative purpose), and 2. correctness/responsibility conditions: a) the preparatory condition (the speaker needs to be capable of realising a speech act), and b) the sincerity condition (the speaker needs to be sincere in his/her intentions).

The pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation also proposes the principle of communication [van Eemeren 2010; van Eemeren, Grootendorst 1992]. The principle is a combination of the four maxims/rules of conduct: **Be clear**: do not perform any incomprehensible speech acts; **Be honest**: do not perform any insincere speech acts; **Be efficient**: do not perform any superfluous or futile speech act; and **Be to the point**: do not perform any speech acts that do not appropriately relate to preceding speech acts.

The pragma-dialectical approach to fallacies includes considerations of all violations of the discussion rules, not just the logical errors concerning validity [van Eemeren 2018: 65–69]. Euphemisation can be regarded as a lack of clarity or as the opposite of univocality, which the listener needs to disambiguate and/or clarify. This is related to the Language Use Rule (Rule 10): a) *Misusing unclarity* (unclearness fallacy: implicitness, indefiniteness, unfamiliarity, vagueness) and b) *Misusing ambiguity* (ambiguity fallacy). In other words, the norm is that “Discussants may not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they may not deliberately misinterpret the other party’s formulations” [van Eemeren 2018: 61]. This is connected with the rational requirement of the maxim of clarity. Both discussants are responsible for achieving understanding. If understanding poses no problem, this is an optimal formulation [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 1992: 195–207].

Gerber’s [Gerber 2011] criticisms labelled as “ethical deficiencies”, “the risk of amorality” and the limitations regarding the method for the evaluation of arguments in accordance with goals, purposes and consequences are related to the issues of higher-order conditions for a critical discussion. F. H. van Eemeren and R. Grootendorst [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004: 36–37; 188–190], however, were aware that their model of a critical discussion might be seen as a utopia, and they did recognise the importance of higher-order conditions in argumentation. They regarded higher-order conditions as the inter-

nal “second-order” conditions/discussion attitudes, which can be limited by emotional restraints and personal pressure, and the external “third-order” conditions, or social circumstances, such as power or authority. The third-order conditions are also political conditions. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004: 37] view these conditions as circumstances that are related to “the right to a free exchange of information”, voicing criticism, and intellectual pluralism. They further note that “If attention is paid to these conditions as well, then the notion of “reasonableness” acquires, apart from an intellectual meaning, a social meaning as well”.

Specifically, Gerber’s [Gerber 2011: 21–22; 27] criticism focuses on the connection between the pragmatic and the dialectical, on the function of the *pragmatic*, or on how well particular arguments fulfill their rhetorical purposes, and on the function of the *dialectic*, or on whether or not arguments follow the guidelines for fair dialectical processes. Namely, the author argues that pragma-dialectics should have a more clearly defined philosophical and theoretical foundation that provides a more ethical method for the examination of arguments. As for the dialectical side of pragma-dialectics, it is useful as it has been employed in argument criticism. However, although pragma-dialectics investigates the rhetorical implications of arguments, it is not so clear how critics should evaluate the rhetorical elements of arguments. Therefore, “evaluation based upon purpose, goals, or perceived consequences is both incomplete and potentially dangerous”. By way of illustration, “hate speech” must have an ideological, moral component as part of the methodology, so that arguments in support of those goals can be identified. According to Gerber, in the pragma-dialectical model, such rhetoric might be criticised on dialectical grounds [Gerber 2011]<sup>1</sup>.

### *Epistemic evaluation and epistemological background*

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004: 36–37] refer to rules and the epistemological status of the critical-rationalistic philosophy of reasonableness as heuristic, not algorithmic, since argumentation (always provisional) is not a mechanical process but a social activity in which “the production, analysis, and evaluation of argumentative discourse can be raised only by improving the quality of the communication and interaction between the participants”. On the other hand, the epistemological status of the anthropologic-relativistic philosophy is rhetorical as the primary purpose of argumentation is to gain the audience’s approval. As a result, all knowledge should be employed to achieve this goal. In other words, human knowledge is produced by following shared procedures governed by a consensus in a particular community [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004: 34, 128], which can also mean that the same ethical standards and moral values are shared.

As for theories of argumentation, D. Niño and D. Marrero [Niño, Marrero 2015: 53–54], for example, draw attention to C. Lumer’s [Lumer 1990; 2005] classification: rhetorical (the goal is to persuade), dialogical (the goal is to achieve a consensus), and epistemological theories (the goal is to establish truth and justified belief). This is a useful theoretical and methodological demarcation, and, as the extended approach to the pragma-dialectical

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (<https://www.etymonline.com/>), the adjective *pragmatic* comes from Greek *pragmatikos*, which means “fit for business, active, business-like; systematic”, from *pragma* (genitive *pragmatos*) “a deed, act; that which has been done; a thing, matter, affair”. The word can also be used as a euphemism to denote something bad or disgraceful.

“standard theory” suggests, the dialectical theoretical framework has been enriched with a rhetorical dimension since effectiveness in argumentative discourse cannot be ignored [van Eemeren 2018: 113–116]. The decision to accept or reject argumentation depends on the evidence we are given to support or refute it.

Latent euphemisation can be identified when it is analysed in regard to the epistemic issue of *de dicto* and *de re* ambiguities/fallacies. The former type refers to ambiguities concerning the truth of the proposition, whereas the latter type refers to ambiguities concerning the way the properties in the external world are determined [Audi 1999: 211]. If we face an ambiguity problem that cannot be resolved by relying on the first-order conditions of a critical discussion that necessitate specifying meaning for the purpose of facilitating the resolution of ambiguities, we need to resort to other methods or analyse higher-order conditions/epistemological backgrounds that optimise our epistemic evaluation. Another problem that can call for epistemic optimisation at a higher level is underdeterminacy in language. For example, the maxim *be clear* is adjusted in accordance with the speaker’s pragmatic optimum in a given context and the metaepistemological commitment which can be summarised in the question: “What do we mean when we say of some person that he knows or rationally believes some proposition *P*?” [Fumerton 2006: 8]. The maxim *be honest* and the constitutive rules are matters of ethics, so ethical norms are relevant in the analysis of commitments. Both ethics and epistemology discuss norms, and our views of what is right and wrong affect the way we acquire knowledge.

### A case study analysis

What follows is a detailed examination of the euphemistic use of the verb phrase *balance the budget*. The examination is digitally intertextual because three digital sources were consulted in the analysis. The analysis started with the online *Cambridge Dictionary*<sup>2</sup> definition of the mentioned verb phrase, following the assumption that (even though this is a corpus-informed dictionary) the definition would be neutrally connoted. Following this, the second digital source, the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE)<sup>3</sup> was consulted to check whether euphemisation had already been recognised in real life communication (in journals, newspapers, analyses, commentaries, on Amazon Books websites) with regard to political issues. Finally, the phrase was examined in the context of the debate “Balanced budget amendment to the US Constitution” given on *Debatepedia*, an internet encyclopedia of pro and con arguments/voices on critical issues<sup>4</sup>. The pro and con arguments, where the latent euphemisation was identified, were taken as the bearers of the positive or negative connotations attached to the expression.

### Connotation and higher-order conditions

T. van Leeuwen [van Leeuwen 2005: 29–46] considers two key principles of semiotic invention: metaphor (and also metonymy) and connotation<sup>5</sup>. As for connotation, it can

<sup>2</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/> (accessed: 04.03.2019).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/> (accessed: 04.03.2019).

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:\\_Balanced\\_budget\\_amendment\\_to\\_US\\_Constitution](http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Balanced_budget_amendment_to_US_Constitution) (accessed: 09.03.2019).

<sup>5</sup> See van Leeuwen [van Leeuwen 2005: 37–42] for a more detailed discussion of the linguistic and semiotic approaches to the issue of connotation.



be viewed as the lexico-semantic criterion because euphemisms are identified as neutrally or less negatively connoted forms than its potential paradigmatically related substitutes. However, connotation, i. e., positive or negative values attached to an expression, cannot only be observed through the lexico-semantic lens. Attaching connotation is also an epistemic evaluation (of inference) that relies on higher-order conditions in argumentation, and these are emotive, ethical, social components relative to our interests, motives, and ensuing consequences. Connotation can be viewed as the primary motive for creating/importing euphemisation into a lexical item/an utterance, or the tone of discourse on the whole, and it also prompts the creation of novel non-metaphoric, metaphoric and metonymic euphemistic expressions.

### *Analysis and discussion*

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the phrase *to balance the budget* in the following way: “to make the amount of money spent in a budget (= financial plan) equal the amount of money taken in during a particular period”. This definition provides the basic information about the meaning of the lexical item, on the basis of which we can conclude that this neutrally connoted phrase is used in the jargon/context of economics and all the related jargons/contexts/topics, such as politics, science, finance, newspapers, journals, blogs, commentaries. This is a neutral reading that teaches us the specific “*word-to-world* direction of fit” [Searle 1979].

The next step was to check whether the lexical item was identified as a euphemism in the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbe). GloWbE includes samples from different varieties of English (US, CA, GB, IE, AU, NZ, IN, LK, PK, BD, SG, MY, PH, HK, ZA, NG, GH, KE, TZ, JM), and it also includes samples taken from journals, newspapers, analyses, blogs, commentary, and Amazon Books website (some sources could not be accessed). At the time the research was done (access date 4 March 2019), there were 1092 instances of the verb phrase *balance the budget* in the corpus, but only one instance where this verb phrase was identified as a *euphemism for*, so it was a hapax legomenon in this corpus. Only the form *balance the budget* was included in the research, not the forms *balances the budget* or *balanced the budget*. As for the term *euphemism for*, there were 1054 examples in the corpus, suggesting that euphemisation was related to many other words and phrases. The plural form *euphemisms for* was not included in the research.

The article where the verb phrase was identified as a euphemism is entitled “Michael Hudson: My Take on Obama’s Big Win”. At the time the research was done, the article was followed by 86 comments, which suggests that it did achieve public impact:

Having appointed the Bowles-Simpson commission members who seek to shift the tax burden off business onto consumers, the President will pave the way for Bush-type privatization. In his first debate with Mitt Romney, Mr. Obama assured his audience that they were in agreement on the need to **balance the budget** (his *euphemism for scaling back* Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid). By christening this “the Great Bargain,” President Obama has refined Orwellian doublethink. It is as if George Orwell went to work on Madison Avenue<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Example 151 in GloWbe. Michael Hudson: My Take on Obama’s Big Win. Naked capitalism: *Fearless commentary on finance, economics, politics and power*. Posted on November 9, 2012 by Yves Smith.

The text contains the information that Michael Hudson is a Research Professor of Economics at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and a Research Associate at the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College. The information is relevant as it shows that this euphemistic metonymical transfer, where the instrument of the action *scaling back* is related to the action *balancing the budget*, was noticed by someone well-versed in economics. Therefore, this can be a de dicto ambiguous term, and the ambiguity/fallacy is resolved by resorting to a de re reading, by means of which the reader/expert observes the instrument of the action and the consequences of the action to make a metonymic connection. In this way, the reader changes the *word-to-world* to “*world-to-word* direction of fit” (Searle 1979: 4). Thus, the phrase *to balance the budget* is de dicto ambiguous, and the ambiguity is latent and cannot straightforwardly be resolved unless observed as a de re ambiguity/fallacy, which implies a critical observation of the word-to-world and world-to-world directions of fit.

It should be noted that although the euphemised use of the phrase is a hapax legomenon in the corpus, it does not mean that it is associated only with positive connotations in other contexts (even though it is not explicitly labelled as a euphemism). It is also used in a neutral/not so negative sense and a highly negative sense. This is shown in the second and third examples.

The second example was taken from the article “A New Way to Look at Prices” from 1996. The context is highly relevant in the evaluation of the phrase:

That suggests the following policy. No one wants to politicize the bureau’s deliberations and procedures. *So it should proceed quickly*, but on its own, *to adopt the fixes* that both it and the commission desire. The fixes could in fact take years, even if pursued expeditiously. In the meantime, *Congress will come under intense pressure to cut programs to **balance the budget***. But rather than whacking public programs needlessly, Congress and the White House could jointly agree to use the commission’s figures to adjust Federal spending and taxes by less than the bureau’s measure of inflation. *That is a good way to reduce the deficit* and spread the pain across most of the population. *But to protect the poor* from a possible overcorrection, *Congress would insulate* Supplemental Security Income and other programs for the poor from the adjustment<sup>7</sup>.

Namely, as G. Brown and G. Yule [Brown, Yule 1983: 234–238] suggest, our processing of incoming discourse can be viewed as the combination of (at least) two activities. Bottom-up processing consists in working out the meanings of the words and structure of a sentence, as well as constructing a meaning for the sentence. Simultaneously, our understanding of any discourse includes top-down processing, which consists in connecting the context with the composite meaning of the sentences already processed so that we can predict what the next sentence means. In other words, the latter type of processing implies that a specific background knowledge/knowledge of the world provides the reader with an epistemic advantage in text interpretation and possibly the assessment of the author’s metaepistemological position regarding motivations, duties, ethical considerations (that the reader may agree or disagree with). Some of the things that should be done are the fol-

<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2012/11/michael-hudson-my-take-on-obamas-big-win.html> (accessed: 04.03.2019).

<sup>7</sup> Example 65 in GloWbe. Opinion: A New Way to Look at Prices. The New York Times. December 5, 1996. [nytimes.com/1996/12/05/opinion/a-new-way-to-look-at-prices.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/05/opinion/a-new-way-to-look-at-prices.html) (accessed: 04.03.2019).



lowing: *So it should proceed quickly... to adopt the fixes, Congress will come under intense pressure to cut programs to balance the budget, This is a good way to reduce deficit, But to protect the poor... Congress would insulate.* The measures can have positive or negative consequences. The last recommendation has positive ethical connotations as it deals with the way the poor can be protected. This is another example of *de dicto* and *de re* ambiguities that need to be resolved by the reader who evaluates the measures and the consequences of the actions described in the text as negative or not so negative.

The third example shows the critical responses to the article “Federal Reserve Actively Preparing for the Possibility of U.S. Default”. The phrase *to balance the budget* is interpreted highly negatively, albeit without being explicitly labelled as a euphemism for a negative situation:

That got me thinking. What if we adjusted the Federal Budgets for inflation? Loading comments... # I wonder Has president Obama, VP Biden, or any member of congress recommend that they take a cut in pay and benefits to help **balance the budget**? I know they all agree that Disabled Veterans, the elderly, sick, and the poorest among us should. # Janice Josephine Carney: I wonder Has president Obama, VP Biden, or any member Loading comments... # The Republicans are once again being totally unreasonable, just as they were during the Bush years, when they would not even tell Democrats where meetings were being held! now, the wacko tea party, straight out of Alice in WONDERLAND, is holding the entire nation hostage<sup>8</sup>.

One of the comments is a proposition to reduce the president’s high officials’ pay and benefits, and not only cut pay to Disabled Veterans, the elderly, sick, and the poorest people. The Republicans are qualified as unreasonable, and one of the consequences is “holding the entire nation hostage”. The three readings of the phrase show that positive, neutral or highly negative connotations are not fixed but variable features, which means that the phrase can have controversial readings.

### *Debatepedia*

The next thing to do was to examine the use of the phrase *to balance the budget* in relation to the debate “Balanced budget amendment to the US Constitution” given on Debatepedia. The analysis highlights the importance of contrasting different views on the same topics (the pro and con arguments). Following Bartlett’s [Bartlett 2012: 9] recommendation to integrate the textual and contextual analyses of communication, language features and social structure, the research reveals that it is important to pay attention to the source of information/the social actor who addresses the public (this is relevant to CDA and PDA). Defending one’s standpoint should satisfy the identity and responsibility conditions. However, if argumentation is provisional (which means that it is defeasible), it is expected that argumentation will be based on optimal pragmatic formulations [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 1992: 195–207]. The debate on the abovementioned topic does not have a concluding stage (this is digital communication), but the critical examination of different standpoints at least leads to the acknowledgement and clarification of differences.

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<sup>8</sup> Example 173 in GloWbe. <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/> (accessed: 04.03.2019).

Latent euphemisation, here analysed as the misuse of the Language Use Rule, can be detected when opposing voices are compared and contrasted. The misuse of language can be revealed in inconsistent epistemological positions behind the formulations which are ambiguous, and these de re ambiguities and inconsistencies can be examined in light of motives and consequences behind the actions ambiguously described. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst [van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004: 36–37] qualify the epistemological status of the critical-rationalistic philosophy of reasonableness as heuristic, so it is up to the reader, who also has his/her own interests (not only the author of the article), to decide which interpretation to endorse.

The debate “Balanced budget amendment to the US Constitution” was elaborated into four topics, provided in Table. The four topics were followed by pro and con arguments/voices. At the time the research was done, the total number of the con arguments/voices (14) outnumbered the pro arguments/voices (10). All 24 arguments/voices are presented in the Appendix<sup>9</sup>. In this work, differences of opinion are illustrated by means of the pros and cons in regard to the first topic, *Deficit: Will balanced budget help solve debt/deficit*. Specifically, differences of opinion are illustrated with examples of pro arguments (1) and (5) and contra arguments (3), (4) and (5) given in the text following Table.

*Table. Four topics related to the debate “Balanced budget amendment to the US Constitution”*

Topics	Pro arguments — ten	Con arguments — 14
Deficit: Will balanced budget help solve debt/deficit?	5	6
Economy: Is balanced budget amendment good for economy?	3	5
States: If states have it, should the federal government?	2	2
2/3 approval: Is supermajority rule for approving deficits wise?	0	1

The pros and cons are the two confronted positions/two groups of opposing voices/beliefs that allow the reader to evaluate alternatives critically, since they inform us of a range of the whys and wherefores for implementing or not implementing *balancing the budget* in accordance with possible consequences. The examples (a) “Balanced budget amendment will help solve fiscal crisis” and (b) “General statements in favour of balanced budget amendment” are illustrations of the arguments which support the balanced budget amendment:

- (a) This constitutional amendment is necessary to force Congress and the President to confront and resolve our cancerous fiscal crisis. It will end the annual budget deficit and stop the bleeding. And it will prevent future Congresses or Presidents from relying on tax increases or borrowing to balance the budget.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This Debatepedia page was last modified on August 9, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Jim Garlow Chairman, Renewing American Leadership Action. The Case for a Balanced Budget Amendment Now. Statement before the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution. May 13, 2011. [http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:\\_Balanced\\_budget\\_amendment\\_to\\_US\\_Constitution](http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Balanced_budget_amendment_to_US_Constitution) (accessed: 04.03.2019).

- (b) This is a responsible, commonsense plan that would hold Congress accountable, get the country's fiscal house in order and make sure everybody has some skin in the game, all while protecting Social Security and not forcing an end to Medicare as we know it.<sup>11</sup>

These viewpoints show that the BBA to the Constitution can be seen as a duty (much as it can be unpleasant) to force Congress and the President to confront and resolve the fiscal crisis, end the annual budget deficit, stop relying on tax increases or on borrowing to balance the budget. In (b), the positive connotation is reinforced by the premise that Social Security will be protected.

However, the con arguments express concerns regarding this amendment, and when negative consequences become negative connotations, other *de dicto* and *de re* readings are proposed. The examples (c) "Balanced budget Amend violates intended flexibility of Const", (d) "Unworkable to measure and define balanced budget", and (e) "Amend would create Const. crisis, court battle w/ each budget" are illustrations of the arguments which criticise the balanced budget amendment:

- (c) and (d): Our Constitution outlines in the broadest terms how the federal system works. It contains few numbers, is by design remarkably flexible, and assumes that underlying comity and good intentions will prevail despite strong partisan passions. Amending it is a complex process for good reason, and we should do it precisely and with foresight and caution. A balanced-budget amendment violates those criteria.<sup>12</sup>
- (e) Since arguments over whether a budget is truly and honestly balanced are endless, a constitutional requirement of balance would make resolving the argument the province of the federal court system, raising two critical problems. Timing: The president proposes a budget to Congress around Feb. 1 to take effect Oct. 1. At any point in that process, lawsuits could be filed by members of Congress and other citizens and interest groups. Typically it takes two or three years to get a case to the U.S. Supreme Court, and there likely would be thousands of cases annually, many frivolous. Thus we could never be sure that any budget actually met the constitutional requirement until it was far too late. Power: In resolving the conflict, federal judges would have the unwanted power to decide how to balance it — what to cut and what revenues to raise. As lifetime appointees, they would be beyond the reach of citizens or Congress if their decisions were unacceptable or inadequate. The primary power of the legislative branch — the purse — and the primary power of citizens — the vote — would be nullified [Merritt 2011].

Namely, from these points of view, amending a budget is a complex process for good reason. In addition, arguments over whether a budget is honestly balanced are endless, and a constitutional requirement of a balanced budget would make resolving the argument the province of the federal court system, which leads to further problems some of which are timing and power. The former means that there are no guarantees that any budget actually met the constitutional requirement until it was far too late, and the latter means that in resolving the conflict, federal judges would have the unwanted power of de-

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<sup>11</sup> Missouri's U.S. senators, Democrat Claire McCaskill. [http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:\\_Balanced\\_budget\\_amendment\\_to\\_US\\_Constitution](http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Balanced_budget_amendment_to_US_Constitution) (accessed: 09.03.2019).

<sup>12</sup> Davis Merritt. Balanced-budget amendment is unworkable. The Wichita Eagle. August 2, 2011. [http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:\\_Balanced\\_budget\\_amendment\\_to\\_US\\_Constitution](http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Balanced_budget_amendment_to_US_Constitution) (accessed: 09.03.2019) [Merritt 2011].

cluding how to balance the budget, what to cut and what revenues to raise, so the legislative branch and the power of citizens would be nullified.

## Conclusion

Lumer [Lumer 2005] criticises the rhetorical approach as its goal in argumentation is persuasion, the establishment and amplification of a belief defended by the speaker [van Eemeren et al. 2014: 395]. This, as further noted, eventually leads to a situation where we do not strive for truth and knowledge, but we often end up with false beliefs, and disorientations about the world we live in, which can have extremely negative consequences. The research shows that we can have different opinions about the same issues depending on our epistemological commitments and our understanding of the relation between words and the world. This suggests that a dialectical approach to argumentation is more promising as it shows that only if limitations are accepted, can we overcome them. Also, the constitutive rules stipulate that, when different opinions are expressed, arguing for or against an issue makes sense only in the name of responsibility and sincerity. From this it follows that a dialectical approach to developing, defending and rejecting argumentation is, in accordance with the constitutive rules, more committing.

This specific analysis shows that latent euphemisms can be understood as instances of violating the dialectical Language Use Rule. Pragmatically optimal formulations can be identified as fallacious if and when they are tested with other formulations proposed by other social actors. Finally, the problem of misusing unclearness and ambiguity can be more easily identified if language use is examined against the background of critical epistemology. In this sense, the Language Use Rule is a dead letter unless second and third-order conditions are taken into account. Higher-order conditions allow methodological enhancements, by means of which we are more likely to understand why we talk at cross purposes and less likely to disregard and marginalise a relevant issue as a non-issue.

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## Позитивный дискурсивный анализ и скрытая эвфемизация

**Для цитирования:** Radulović M. Positive discourse analysis and latent euphemisation. *Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. Язык и литература*. 2021, 18 (4): 893–909. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu09.2021.416>

В статье рассмотрены эпистемиологические аспекты скрытой эвфемизации в аргументативном дискурсе. Цель статьи — показать, что позитивный дискурсивный анализ (ПДА) может служить метаориентацией при анализе альтернативных дискурсов. Теоретической базой исследования стал прагма-диалектический подход к аргументации, который обсуждает методы и инструменты для улучшения обсуждения и примирения разногласий. Согласно М. Герберу, потенциальные проблемы прагма-диалектического подхода — это «этические недостатки», «риск аморальности» и ограничения в отношении метода оценки аргументов. В статье утверждается, что прагма-диалектический подход к аргументации может быть реализован для выявления скрытой эвфемизации как ошибочного рассуждения. Однако оценка использования языка как скрытно-эвфемистической и, следовательно, ошибочной является эпистемическим суждением, которое должно учитывать обязательства участников дискуссии, включая этические соображения. Поскольку сообщение может привести к неправильным выводам, если не распространить его на общий эпистемиологический фон, скрытая эвфемизация может рассматриваться как результат несовместимых эпистемиологических позиций, чьи потенциальные мотивы и последствия необходимо учитывать. Проведенный анализ показывает, что скрытые эвфемизмы можно понимать как случаи нарушения диалек-



тического правила использования языка. Прагматически оптимальные формулировки могут быть определены как ошибочные, если и когда они проверяются другими формулировками, предложенными другими социальными субъектами. Наконец, проблему неправильного использования неясности и неоднозначности можно легче определить, если изучать использование языка на фоне критической эпистемологии.

*Ключевые слова:* позитивный дискурсивный анализ, прагма-диалектический подход, скрытая эвфемизация, двусмысленность, неясность.

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## Appendix

**Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbe).** <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>. (accessed: 04.03.2019).

Phrase: *balance the budget*

1. *Balance the budget*. Example 65 in GloWbe. Opinion: A new way to look at prices. The New York Times. December 5, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/05/opinion/a-new-way-to-look-at-prices.html> (accessed: 04.03.2019).
2. *Balance the budget*. Example 151 in GloWbe. Michael Hudson: My Take on Obama's Big Win. Naked capitalism: *Fearless commentary on finance, economics, politics and power*. Posted on November 9, 2012 by Yves Smith. <https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2012/11/michael-hudson-my-take-on-obamas-big-win.html> (accessed: 04.03.2019).
3. *Balance the budget*. Example 173 in GloWbe. Critical reactions to the article Federal Reserve Actively Preparing for the Possibility of U.S. Default. <https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/> (accessed: 04.03.2019).

### **Debatepedia: pro and con arguments**

*Debate:* Balanced budget amendment to US Constitution. [http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:\\_Balanced\\_budget\\_amendment\\_to\\_US\\_Constitution](http://www.debatepedia.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Balanced_budget_amendment_to_US_Constitution) (accessed: date 04.03. 2019).

### **Pro — ten arguments:**

1. *Topic: Deficit: Will balanced budget help solve debt/deficit? (five)*
  - Balanced budget amendment will help solve fiscal crisis. Dr. Jim Garlow Chairman, Renewing American Leadership Action. The Case for a Balanced Budget Amendment Now. Statement before the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution. May 13, 2011.
  - Amend needed to address systemic, runaway spending. Dr. Jim Garlow Chairman, Renewing American leadership Action, Statement before the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution. May 13, 2011.
  - Politicians can't make hard choices; BBA necessary Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.
  - Plenty of wasteful spending to cut with BBA. Dr. Jim Garlow Chairman, Renewing American Leadership Action. Statement before the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution. May 13, 2011.
  - General statements in favour of balanced budget amendment. Missouri's U.S. senators, Democrat Claire McCaskill.
2. *Topic: Economy: Is balanced budget amendment good for economy? (three)*
  - Balanced budget could allow for debt during recession/war. Edward Glaeser. Balanced Budget Suddenly looks more Appealing. Bloomberg. Aug 1, 2011.
  - Reducing spending w/ BBA frees-up money for job-creation. Dr. Jim Garlow Chairman, Renewing American Leadership Action. The Case for a Balanced Budget Amendment Now. Statement before the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution, May 13, 2011.
  - Spending limits creates certainty for job creation: Ohio Republican John Boehner [...].

3. *Topic: If states have it, should the fed government? (two)*
  - States have balanced budget amendments, why not US government? Republican Roy Blunt.
  - Balanced budget will bring fed spending in line with states. Edward Glaeser. *Balanced Budget Suddenly Looks More Appealing*. Bloomberg. August 1, 2011.

**Con — 14 arguments:**

1. *Topic: Deficit: Will balanced budget help solve debt/deficit? (six)*
  - Balanced budget amendment undervalues loans and debt. Kathy White. *Guest Commentary: A federal balanced budget amendment would hurt the economy*. Denver Post. July 24, 2011.
  - Constitution gives govt power to run-up deficits. Doug Kendall and Dahlia Lithwick. *Off Balance The Balanced Budget Amendment would make the Framers weep*. Slate. July 15, 2011.
  - Balanced budget Amend violates intended flexibility of Const. Davis Merritt. *Balanced-budget amendment is unworkable*. The Wichita Eagle. August 2, 2011.
  - Unworkable to measure and define balanced budget. Davis Merritt. *Balanced-budget amendment is unworkable*. The Wichita Eagle. August 2, 2011.
  - Amend would create Const. crisis, court battle w/ each budget: Davis Merritt. *Balanced-budget amendment is unworkable*. The Wichita Eagle. August 2, 2011.
  - 18 % spending rule would not fit w/ other timeless Amendments. Doug Kendall and Dahlia Lithwick. *Off Balance The Balanced Budget Amendment would make the Framers weep*. Slate. July 15, 2011.
2. *Topic: Economy: Is balanced budget amendment good for economy? (five)*
  - Balanced budget Amend makes fighting recession harder. Kathy White. *Guest Commentary: A federal balanced budget amendment would hurt the economy*. Denver Post. July 24, 2011.
  - Formulaic balanced budget amend ignores circumstances. Kathy White. *Guest Commentary: A federal balanced budget amendment would hurt the economy*. Denver Post. July 24, 2011.
  - Balanced budget takes/diminishes important programs from people. Kathy White. *Guest Commentary: A federal balanced budget amendment would hurt the economy*. Denver Post. July 24, 2011
  - Politicians will favor corporate interests w/balanced budget. Jack Lohman.
  - Congress shouldn't make Amend if it can't make good fiscal leg. *On a balanced-budget amendment*. The Economist. August 2, 2011.
3. *Topic: If states have it, should the fed government? (two)*
  - States need fed to be able to run deficit to back them up.
  - Balanced budget amend in states is often a bad thing.
4. *Topic: 2/3 approval: Is supermajority rule for approving deficits wise? (one)*
  - Supermajority approval creates dangerous minority rule. David Merritt. *Balanced-budget amendment is unworkable*. The Wichita Eagle, August 2, 2011.