

“We’re talking about semantics here”: axiological condensation in the South African parliament

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Abstract

This article describes how procedural knowledge is produced in a meeting of the South African parliament’s Portfolio Committee on Transport, using concepts from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). Members of this committee argue over whether or not to amend a draft committee report and in the process co-construct procedural norms for future committee meetings. Participants on both sides of the argument use *axiological condensation*, in which actions and ideas are associated with each other and charged with a particular moral or affective value (Maton 2014: 130) to portray their version of the procedure to be followed as morally superior to that of their opponents. They also use *axiological rarefaction* (Maton 2014: 130) to reinforce their positions by making apparent concessions to those on the other side of the argument. This is revealed through an analysis of the *coupling* of ideation and Appraisal (Martin 2000: 161) in the logogenetic unfolding of members’ talk, combined with elements of Interactional Sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982). The analysis suggests that axiological condensation and rarefaction in this meeting reflect competing visions of what it means to be ‘pro-democracy’ in post-apartheid South Africa.

1. Knowledge-building in the South African parliament

Parliaments are settings in which people from vastly different linguistic backgrounds are involved in the co-construction of knowledge. In this article, we investigate how procedural knowledge is co-constructed through the unfolding of a committee meeting in the Parliament of

the Republic of South Africa. In particular, we analyse a committee debate which one participant trivializes as being “about semantics”, and conclude that indeed, Semantics as a dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT, see Maton 2014) is extremely helpful in understanding the dynamics of knowledge production in this debate and in political discourse in general.

In the South African parliament, as in most parliaments, knowledge is produced through chains of written and spoken texts, which constitute the parliamentary process. We label these as *genre chains*, following Fairclough (2003: 31). Issues are raised in committee meetings, and are then mentioned in written minutes or reports which record the proceedings of those meetings. This can be seen as a process of *recontextualization*, in which ideas are taken out of one context and placed in another (Bernstein 2003). These written records are then commented on or refined in further committee meetings, until those issues are finally presented before one of the houses of parliament, which make the final decisions on whether, for example, a law should be passed or a budget approved. In the following section, we present a theoretical perspective on this process of knowledge production, drawing on LCT.

2. Recontextualization and constellations

LCT introduces valuable concepts that can be used to describe how the production, recontextualization and transmission of knowledge take place. One dimension of LCT, known as Semantics, can be enacted to explore the ways in which knowledge is packaged as it is produced, recontextualized or transmitted. The following description of this dimension draws on Maton (2014). Two concepts form the core of Semantics: *semantic gravity* (SG) and *semantic density* (SD, Maton 2014: 18). SG is the degree to which knowledge is related to its context, while SD is the extent to which meanings are condensed into particular words, phrases or symbols, regardless of context. When knowledge is recontextualized, it can be presented at differing strengths of SG and SD.

In this article, we concentrate on SD, because two ways in which SD can be strengthened are epistemological condensation and axiological condensation, and we have found the latter process most helpful in describing what is happening in the interaction reported on in section 4. *Epistemological condensation* is a process of condensing descriptions of empirical data into progressively shorter statements or sets of symbols (Maton 2014: 130). For example, Einstein's famous formula, $E=mc^2$, is a product of epistemological condensation, since it displays the results of large amounts of empirical research in a few symbols. This could be enacted as a condensation of ideational meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013), because epistemological condensation is concerned with the ideas expressed in a text and their reference to objects in the world. In Siebörger & Adendorff (2015a), a fuller analysis of epistemological condensation in an extract from a parliamentary committee meeting is described. Earlier SFL research on technicality in academic discourse partly inspired the development of Semantics as a dimension of LCT, including the concept of epistemological condensation (Martin 1993, 2011; Wignell 1998; Unsworth 1999). In this article we concentrate more on *axiological condensation*, which is a process of condensing "affective, aesthetic, ethical, political and moral stances" (Maton 2014: 130). For example, axiological condensation has loaded the word *democracy* with meaning: it not only denotes a political system, but is also associated with positive affective and moral values for many people. As these values are most commonly expressed through interpersonal meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013), we have chosen to enact axiological condensation as a condensation of interpersonal meanings.

While it is important to examine how meanings are condensed, it is also important to examine the mechanisms by which meanings are unpacked. One such mechanism, which we focus on in this article, is *rarefaction*, in which SD is weakened (Maton 2014: 130). Epistemological rarefaction would be used when a Physics lecturer explains the equation $E=mc^2$ to her class. Meanwhile, axiological rarefaction would be used when someone picks apart or challenges the affective and moral values associated with a signifier, such as by saying,

“Democracy does not always lead to the fairest results.” In this article we find that rarefaction is used strategically in struggles over institutionalizing knowledge in order to make real or feigned concessions or appear conciliatory towards opponents (see 4.2 and 4.3 for examples). Figure 1 shows visually how we have integrated and enacted some of the concepts introduced thus far in this section. While Figure 1 depicts only SD for the sake of simplicity, it is important to bear in mind that SG also plays an important role in the recontextualization of knowledge. In a more complex visualization, SD and SG can be depicted as axes on a Cartesian plane (as in Maton 2014: 131).

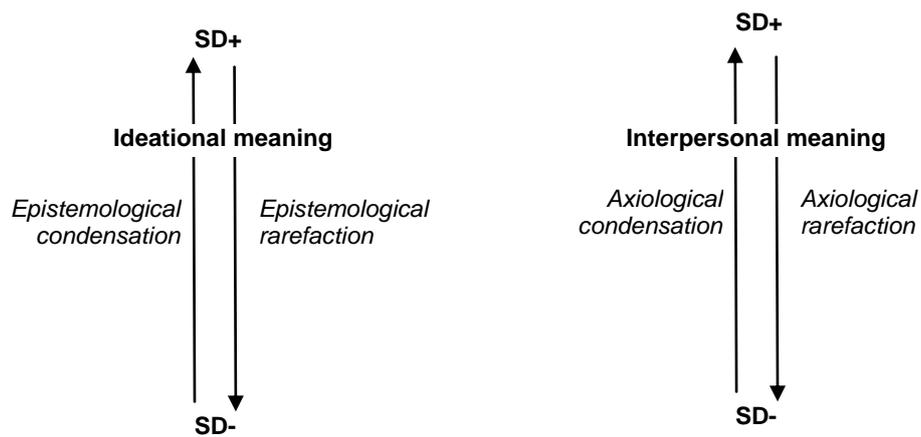


Figure 1. Epistemological and axiological condensation and rarefaction as enacted using ideational and interpersonal meaning

According to Maton (2014), epistemological and axiological condensation both produce hierarchies: epistemological condensation produces a hierarchy of knowledge, or a *hierarchical knowledge structure* (Bernstein 2000), while axiological condensation produces a hierarchy of knowers, which positions some people as being ‘better knowers’ than others in the sense of having a better perspective, holding a more justifiable position or being more morally upright. For both types of condensation, this process of hierarchization entails that knowledge and/or knowers must be *clustered*, *constellated* and *charged* (Maton 2014: 152). First of all, knowledge and/or knowers are clustered together into *constellations* (Maton 2014: 149). Just as

stars in a constellation appear close to each other from the viewpoint of Earth but in reality may be positioned far apart from each other in space, so ideas in a constellation may be completely unrelated in reality, but appear to be clustered together from the speaker's viewpoint. Once they have been clustered and constellated, these ideas are charged: that is, they are assigned a particular value, as being positive, neutral or negative. Often this process works in binaries, so that a positively-charged constellation is contrasted with a negatively-charged constellation.

For example, one could envision a constellation in which the words *liberalism*, *capitalism* and *Western* are associated with *democracy* and charged positively by association with it. A contrasting negatively-charged constellation could contain the words *dictatorship*, *communism*, *totalitarianism* and *Eastern*. These concepts are not necessarily linked to each other in reality, but would be clustered together from the viewpoint of one who (re)produces such constellations.

By the time a signifier has been charged, it has become part of a *structure of feeling* (Maton 2014: 162), around which individuals can affiliate or disaffiliate (Zappavigna 2011; Knight 2010). Thus these signifiers can retain their charging for a considerable amount of time, and in the process of logogenesis (the development of meaning-making resources through the unfolding of a text, see Martin 2010: 1), can also be used to charge other signifiers that they are clustered with. We have observed this to be a crucial part of the process of axiological condensation, as illustrated in section 4.

The meanings carried by a particular constellation are often condensed into a *central signifier* (Maton 2014: 154), a term or symbol that holds the constellation together and provides a shorthand for referring to it. The concepts constellated together with this central signifier are known as *associated signifiers* (Maton 2014: 154). In our example of a positively-charged constellation above, *democracy* could be the central signifier, with the other words in the constellation functioning as associated signifiers. Because axiological condensation creates

hierarchies of knowers, these knowers are assigned the positive, negative or neutral moral charging that is given to the constellations they are associated with. The example constellations mentioned above would create a hierarchy in which Westerners are considered more virtuous than people from Eastern nations. The creation of hierarchies of knowers is shown clearly in the committee meeting we describe in section 4: both members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and opposition party members attempt to use axiological condensation to present themselves as the more virtuous knowers, and their political enemies as less morally acceptable.

The organizing principles behind these processes of axiological and epistemological condensation are called *cosmologies* by Maton (2014). A cosmology is not an ideology, but rather it is what gives an ideology “sex appeal” (Gellner 1959: 2, quoted in Maton 2014: 152), or makes it popular and powerful. Epistemological cosmologies gain their power from their ability to explain and integrate large amounts of empirical knowledge, while axiological cosmologies gain power from their ability to classify diverse groups of knowers. In the example given above, a Cold War-era axiological cosmology could be responsible for the clustering of *democracy* with *capitalism* and *Western* and *dictatorship* with *communism* and *totalitarianism*. In 4.4 we argue that the behaviour of the ruling-party members of parliament (MPs) and their opposition counterparts in the committee meeting we describe is based on two contradictory axiological cosmologies concerning what it means to be ‘pro-democracy’ in South Africa.

3. Investigating knowledge production in the South African parliament

We adopted linguistic ethnography as a point of view from which to study interaction in parliament, as it offers a thick, multi-layered description of context, while concentrating on the

linguistic behaviour of a community using linguistic tools of analysis (Rampton *et al.* 2004). The following sections explain how we enacted this perspective.

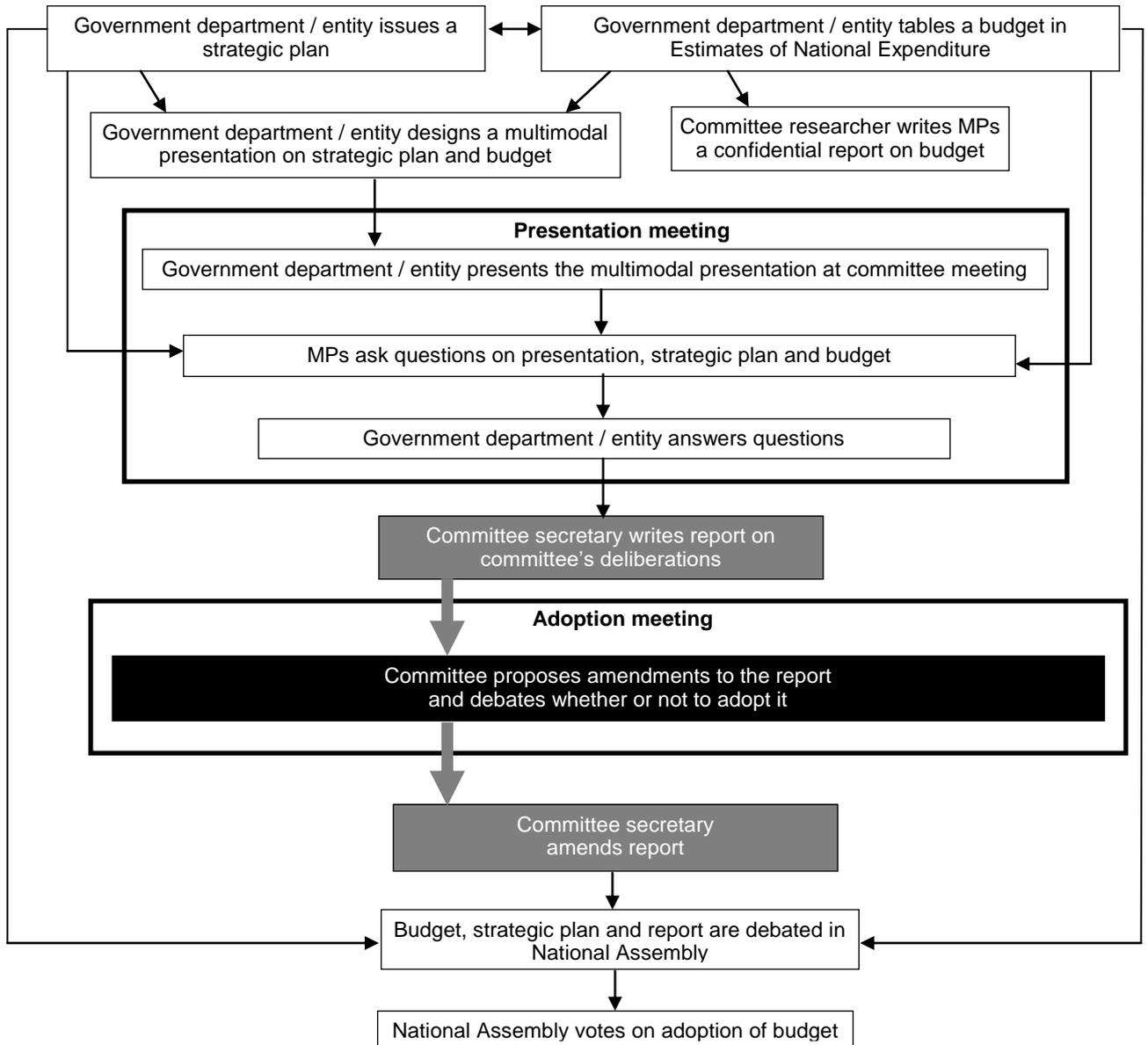
3.1 The South African parliament as context

As mentioned above, parliamentary process consists of a variety of genre chains in which knowledge is recontextualized from one genre of text to another, often switching between written and spoken modalities. The committee meeting examined in this article formed part of one such genre chain, the budget vote process, in which departments present their annual budgets and strategic plans to their portfolio committees for approval. This genre chain is represented in Figure 2.

While the broader structure of the budget vote process is mapped out clearly, committees are left to determine their own internal procedures, a fact which leads to much confusion in the episode described in section 4. This confusion was exacerbated by the fact that this meeting was held in July 2009, only two months after South Africa's general elections, and less than one month after the country's fourth democratic parliament was constituted. This meant that the committee was in the process of negotiating new norms of procedure. Thus, in their first meetings, committees were effectively in the process of building new procedural knowledge, whether their members were aware of this or not.

3.2 Collecting data in parliament

Since we aimed to follow processes of recontextualization and knowledge-building in parliament, we decided to collect data by following the progress of three committees of the National Assembly through the genre chain of the budget oversight process outlined in Figure



Key: The committee process:

Written text
 Spoken text

Text not analysed in this article

➔ Recontextualization analysed in this article

➔ Recontextualization not analysed in this article

Figure 2. The budget oversight process as a genre chain

2. In this article we report on a meeting of one of these three committees. We used five main sources of data in this study:

- Participant observation in committee secretaries' offices
- Interviews with committee secretaries
- Participant observation in, and recordings of, committee meetings
- Interviews with MPs
- Written documents relating to committee meetings

Further information about our methods of data collection is available in Siebörger (2012).

3.3 Enacting axiological condensation and rarefaction in language

Although both axiological and epistemological condensation are active in a text to varying degrees (Maton 2014), we concentrate on axiological condensation and the identification of axiological cosmologies in the committee interaction discussed in section 4, since on close analysis, the sheer volume of axiological condensation in this interaction overwhelmed the epistemic knowledge claims made in it.

Since we linked axiological condensation with interpersonal meanings in SFL, we used tools of analysis that describe interpersonal meaning to explore this phenomenon. In particular, the Appraisal system in SFL is useful as part of an external language of description (Bernstein 2000) for axiological condensation. The following explanation of Appraisal draws on the work of Martin and White (2005), who set out this framework in considerable detail.

Appraisal is a complex framework with many different sub-systems, grouped under three main systems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. Attitude, as its name suggests, categorizes the ways in which senders' lexical choices convey their feelings and opinions about the things they discuss. Engagement examines the ways in which text producers use lexical choices to open and close space for alternative voices, or heteroglossia, in discourse around the subject matter of the text. Lastly, Graduation typifies how senders tone up or down the strength and focus of their expressions of Attitude.

In this article, we concentrate on the Attitude sub-system of Appraisal, and show how this sub-system is particularly useful in enacting axiological condensation. Attitude is divided into three subcategories, Affect, Judgement and Appreciation. Each of these is divided into further subcategories. For example, Affect refers to the feelings which a word expresses, and is divided into Happiness, Security and Satisfaction. If a word or expression encodes happy feelings, such as *elated*, it is coded as explicitly expressing positive Affect: Happiness, while a word or expression such as *depressed* is coded as expressing negative Happiness. In both instances, the attitudinal meaning is said to be inscribed by the expression. A locution can also invoke an Appraisal category implicitly, so one could say that *he was over the moon* invokes positive Happiness. Judgement describes expressions that evaluate other people. For example, *John is lazy* inscribes a negative Judgement: Social Esteem: Tenacity. Appreciation describes expressions that evaluate various things as objects. For example, *That house is well-proportioned* invokes a positive Appreciation: Composition. The full range of subcategories of Attitude is presented diagrammatically in Figure 3.

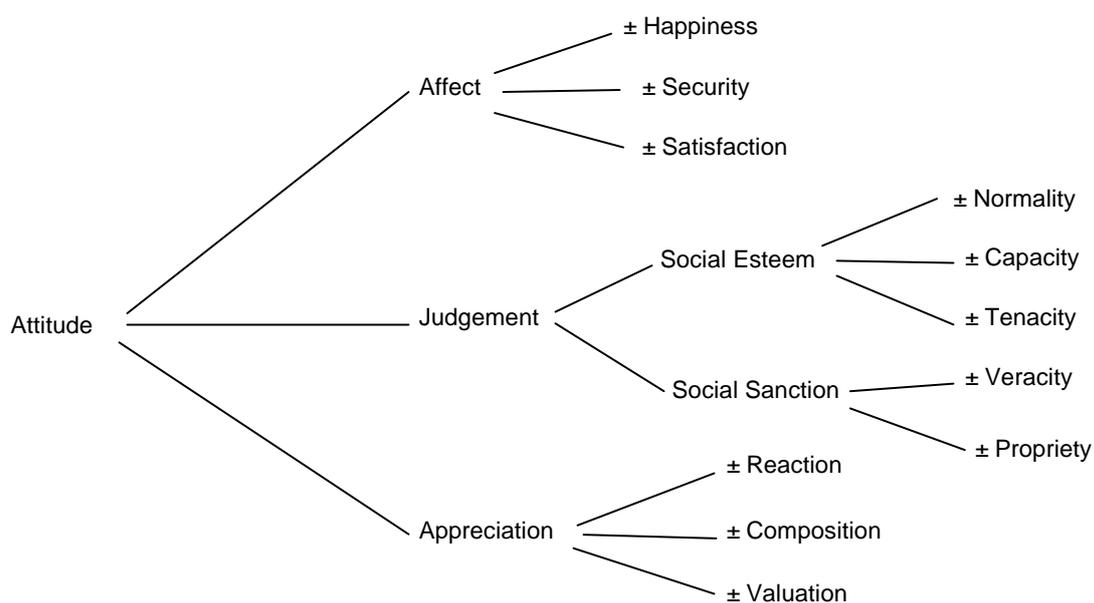


Figure 3. The APPRAISAL system of Attitude. Adapted from Martin and White (2005)

The other systems of Appraisal, namely Graduation and Engagement, are also referred to where useful in section 4. We also employ some concepts from Transitivity, another system from SFL used to characterize the contribution of different constituents to the ideational meaning of clauses. In particular, we refer to Processes, which describe the action or state of being encoded in a clause and are normally realized by verbs. We also refer to Goals, which describe who or what is the receiver of the action in Material Processes such as *Sue kicked the chair*. In this clause, *kicked* realizes the Process, while *the chair* is the Goal.

Interpersonal meanings such as those described in the Appraisal system are often associated with ideational meanings through coupling (Knight 2010). A coupling is a combination of meanings from different systems of language or modes of communication (Martin 2000). For example, the phrase *Palestinian terrorists* couples the ideational meaning of *Palestinian* as a nationality together with the negative Judgement invoked by the word *terrorist*. In many, but not all, cases, the instance of Attitude couples with the locution that it appraises, and so charges that locution with interpersonal meaning. Thus coupling is an important mechanism by which ideational meanings can be axiologically charged. The Attitude sub-system's classification of expressions of evaluation into positive and negative allows analysts to observe the charging of signifiers. Thus if a particular signifier is coupled with positive Appraisal by a speaker, that meaning will usually become positively charged. There are some exceptions to this, including instances of irony and sarcasm which may constitute *discordant couplings* (Martin 2000:164).¹ As argued in section 2, once the signifier is axiologically charged, it retains its charge, or in other words, the signifier carries an axiological value as well as its ideational meaning. If this positively-charged signifier is used repeatedly in the text, it can in turn be coupled with other signifiers and charge them positively in the process of producing a positively-charged constellation. If a corresponding set of signifiers is coupled with negative appraisal by the same speaker, then these signifiers are being clustered into a negatively-charged constellation.

Once one has established what constellations are produced in a text, one can analyse how these constellations relate to different groups of knowers, particularly in the case of axiological constellations (Maton 2014). This, in addition to determining whether the primary basis of the constellation's claims to legitimacy is axiological or epistemological, allows one to discover the cosmologies at work in these constellations (Maton p.c.).

In addition to using Appraisal and other tools from SFL, we have used analytical tools from Interactional Sociolinguistics to understand the role of context in the interaction reported on in section 4, particularly the micro-context of dynamics in the committee room. Interviews with participants help interactional sociolinguists to come to a better understanding of exactly what aspects of context are being indexed in a given interaction. In section 4, we refer to information from interviews with the various participants in the interaction where this helps to clarify the context.

4. Axiological condensation and rarefaction in a committee meeting

In this section we describe an episode from a meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Transport. The committee was composed as follows at the time of our fieldwork, in 2009:

- Eight members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC)
- Two members of the Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition
- One member of the Congress of the People (COPE), a smaller opposition party
- One member of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), another smaller opposition party.

As with most South African parliamentary committees, the chair of the Portfolio Committee on Transport (referred to as C below) is an ANC member of parliament (MP).

¹ We wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

The meeting described in this section was what is referred to as an adoption meeting in Figure 2. In such meetings, the MPs can suggest amendments to a draft committee report, and vote on whether or not it should be adopted as a report to the relevant house of parliament, in this case, the National Assembly.

The episode which we analyse below consists of a heated 30-minute debate over what is usually a fairly routine point of procedure: the adoption of the committee's report on the Department of Transport's budget and strategic plan. In this episode, the MPs were polarized into two camps, the ruling ANC and the opposition parties.

We have identified seven stages in this episode in which distinct patterns of axiological condensation and rarefaction emerged. These stages are:

Stage 1: Discovery of difference of opinion

Stage 2: Supporting arguments on either side

Stage 3: Proposal and rejection of changes in wording

Stage 4: Acceptance of abstention as a resolution

Stage 5: Vote

Stage 6: Reiteration of positions

Stage 7: Recording of the decision.

In what follows we present analyses of brief extracts from the first three stages, and then give a description of what happens in the remainder of the episode. For each of the extracts, our analysis is necessarily selective, focusing on couplings and instances of clustering which we have identified as important in building the constellations involved in this debate. Table 1 lists the main participants in the episode, giving the abbreviations by which they are referred to in the following sections and their party affiliations.

Pseudonym	Role in meeting
C	Committee chairperson, ANC member
D1	DA committee member
D2	DA committee member
A1	ANC committee member
A2	ANC committee member
A3	ANC committee member
A4	ANC committee member
I1	IFP committee member
Co1	COPE committee member

Table 1. Participants in committee interaction

4.1 Discovery of difference of opinion

The disagreement between the ANC and opposition party members is only discovered after there has been discussion about a few details in the report, and C, thinking that the topic is exhausted, calls for someone to move for the report to be adopted. The following extract records the discussion that ensues. This, and the other transcripts in this article, have been marked up to show significant ideational-interpersonal couplings in the text. Particular instantiations of Attitude (marked using bold type) have been marked with a subscript letter that matches a subscript letter following the ideational meanings (marked using underlining) that they are coupled with. As explained in 3.3, signifiers that have been axiologically charged in one coupling retain their charge, and are used in many cases to establish prosodies that continue throughout the episode under analysis and charge other signifiers. Such signifiers are marked using bold type and underlining in the transcripts.²

² Transcription conventions:

bold_a	Instantiation of Attitude discussed in this article
<u>underline_a</u>	Ideational meaning coupled with instantiation of Attitude
<u>bold underline</u>	Signifiers that have been axiologically charged in previous couplings
<...>	Softer “off-mic” utterances
[...]	Overlaps
(0.9)	Pauses (measured in seconds)
(....)	Unclear speech on recording
((...))	Non-linguistic sounds
?	Rising tone

- (1) C: Can we then have a- a mover for the adoption of the- (1.4) of the report_a?
Honourable (D1)?
- D1: I'm **sorry_a** just one- one thing I just want to- (0.4) we- we- we're **agreeing_b** to pass (0.7) this report_b (1.1) that's what we're- that's what we're **agreeing_b** to?
- C: <Mhm>
- D1: Because um (0.6) the heading_c may be mis- a bit **misleading_c** and perhaps it should just be rephrased- the beginning (0.8) um (0.8) recommends that we pa- that we **agree_b** to this report_b not **the budget** that's what it's implying over here (2.8) did I make myself_d **clear_d** (5.6)
- C: I'm- I'm **not clear_d** (0.6) the report- the report is on the budget

What D1 refers to as *the heading* is the opening clause complex of the report, which reads as follows:

- (2) The Portfolio Committee on Transport, having considered the budget of the Department, Vote 33: Transport, recommends that it be passed.

D1 expresses negative Affect: Satisfaction using the clause “I’m sorry”. In this case, the source of the dissatisfaction is “the adoption of the report”, or C’s call for a mover to adopt the report. He asks if the committee is agreeing to pass the report, coupling the word *agree*, a token of positive Satisfaction, with *the report*. He continues to say that the first clause complex of the report “may be a bit misleading”, making a negative Appreciation: Valuation of it. His next words, “and perhaps it should just be rephrased”, project the wording he suggests for this heading, “the beginning (0.8) um (0.8) recommends that we pa- that we agree to this report”. In this reformulation, *agree* is again coupled with *this report*, reinforcing its positive charging. *The report* is contrasted with *the budget*, which is the word actually used in the first clause complex of the report, and so *the budget* attracts a negative charging. This process of axiological charging is depicted in Figure 4.

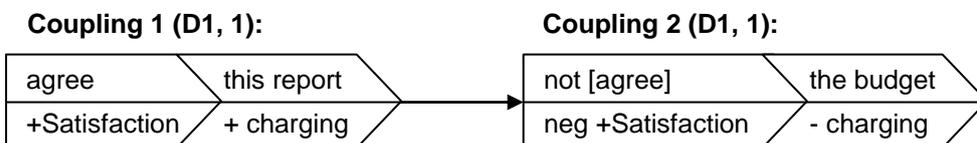


Figure 4. The negative charging of *the budget* by D1 in utterance (1)

D1 asks if he has made himself clear, a coupling of positive Satisfaction with *myself*. C responds that she is “not clear”, expressing negative Satisfaction of her own at D1’s utterance. This response comes after a long pause, perhaps indicating that she is unsuccessfully trying to make sense of his utterance. The couplings in the above extract are summarized in Table 2 for ease of reference.

Opposition couplings							
Positive				Negative			
Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser	Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser
agreeing	this report	+Satisfaction	D1	sorry	the adoption of the report	-Satisfaction	D1
agreeing	this report	+Satisfaction	D1	misleading	the heading	-Valuation	D1
agree	this report	+Satisfaction	D1	not [agree]	the budget	Neg +Satisfaction	D1
clear	myself [D1]	+Satisfaction	D1				
Ruling-party couplings							
Positive				Negative			
Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser	Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser
				not clear	D1’s utterance	-Satisfaction	C

Table 2. Summary of couplings in Stage 1: *Discovery of difference of opinion*

If one takes C’s utterance at face value, when she says “the report is on the budget”, she appears to express confusion over how one can agree to the report without passing the budget, as D1 implies when he says “recommends that we pa- that we agree to this report not the budget”. Thus C appears to be clustering the report and the budget together as part of the same constellation which the committee must either accept or reject in its entirety, while D1 clearly treats the two as different entities in his utterance. D1 believes that the wording of the draft report should be changed to allow MPs to register their disagreement with the budget; C

believes that no such change is necessary. This disagreement is the focus of the debate that unfolds in the following stages of the interaction.

4.2 Supporting arguments on either side

In the next stage, an opposition MP speaks in favour of D1's viewpoint and a ruling-party MP supports C's viewpoint, broadening the disagreement into an inter-party dispute. D2 enters the room from another meeting as D1 is speaking in (1), quickly reads the first clause complex of the report and assesses the situation as he hears what his colleague and C say. Then he says the following:

- (3) D2: Madam chair first of all my apologies for being late ((*clears throat*)) (0.8) um- I had other meetings (0.7) If you look at the first opening paragraph there of **the report** (it is) **the report** of a tabled report which was presented to us (1.0) relating to matters pertaining to the department and **this budget** (1.0) but it's not passing **the budget** (1.0) that has got to be done through the appropriation process in parliament on Friday (0.8) when we stand up and debate **this budget** (0.8) and by necessity it might not mean that every one of us here is going to pass **that budget** (0.6) () (0.7) so **that word pass there_a** is **incorrect_a** (4.5) recommends or considers **this report** (3.3) we're not **passing_b** **the budget_b**

In his argument for a change of wording, D2 reinforces D1's attempts to differentiate the report from the budget, arguing that the report is "not passing the budget". He refers to "the first opening paragraph there of the report", rewording D1's reference to *the heading*, the part of the draft report that he and D1 believe needs changing. D2 attempts to draw on the committee members' knowledge of parliamentary procedure to build a case for his colleague's viewpoint, referring to "the appropriation process in parliament on Friday (0.8) when we stand up and debate this budget". Because D2 aligns with D1, *the report* and *the budget* continue to carry positive and negative charges respectively in D2's utterance. In saying "so that word pass there is incorrect", he couples the word *pass* with a negative Valuation. Later, D2 clusters the word *pass* with *the budget* and its pre-established negative charging, and intensifies this

negative charging through the repeated use of the Engagement resource Contract: Disclaim: Deny, coupled with *pass* and *the budget*.

Next a ruling party MP, A1, appears to make concessions to the opposition parties:

- (4) A1: Ch- Chairperson this is a report_a (1.9) um (1.6) that we as a committee a () committee has **deliberated** (0.8) **on**_a what (0.7) the department (0.5) came to us on Monday talking about (0.7) their strategic plan for this financial year (1.1) and so because of the budget that we've been given (0.9) they have to come and report to this House or to this committee on what they have done with the budget whether whether they've (0.3) e- used the whole budget (0.3) or they didn't (0.4) you know (0.5) so (0.4) as I understand this this- this is what we (0.6) as this committee understands (0.5) from the budget vote (1.0) and I think- **I don't see anything wrong with**_b that_b I **agree**_c with what you are saying the Appropriation Bill (0.3) will be going to be passed on Tuesday_c (0.3) I **agree**_d with you_d on that (0.4) but we're talking about the budget vote which (0.6) e- the department (0.4) can produce **a** (0.8) **committee report** on

In the beginning of her utterance, A1 defines the report in terms of the budget, apparently responding to the distinctions that D1 and D2 have drawn between the two. She invokes a positive Valuation of the report by saying that it is something that the committee “has deliberated (0.8) on”. This positive Valuation is repeated when she says “I don't see anything wrong with that”, referring to the report. She then uses the word *agree* twice, which is both an instance of the Engagement resource Contract: Proclaim: Concur: Concede and an invoked instance of positive Satisfaction, indicating that she shares common ground with the DA members on the notion that the budget will still have to be debated in the National Assembly. Her agreement with some of what D1 and D2 say runs counter to her colleague C's statement in (1) that she is “not clear” and therefore dissatisfied with what D1 was saying. This represents a limited reversal of the ruling party members' disagreement with the opposition MPs, and with it a limited positive evaluation of the DA members. This is an example of axiological rarefaction, where a participant works to weaken axiological SD, and therefore undo some of the negative charging or clustering of signifiers in a nascent constellation.

However, A1 also marks out the limits of this rarefaction using the word *but*, an instance of the Engagement resource of Contract: Disclaim: Counter, which introduces the point she raises in support of C: “we're talking about the budget vote which (0.6) e- the department (0.4) can

produce a (0.8) committee report on”. Since the committee report has been positively valued earlier in A1’s utterance, it retains its positive charging in this context. This echoes C’s clustering of the report with the budget in her statement, “the report is on the budget” (1). The argument that A1 appears to be presenting here is that the opposition parties will have a chance to oppose the budget at a later opportunity in the genre chain, and so there is no reason why they should oppose the adoption of the draft report in the committee. What she does not appear to understand is that the DA members are concerned that adopting the report as it stands, without altering its opening paragraph, would remove their right to disagree with the budget later in the genre chain, when the budget comes before the National Assembly. This concern has not been articulated overtly in D2 and D1’s utterances, but D2’s statement that “we’re not passing the budget” can be read as a cue indicating that he sees adopting the report without amending the first clause complex as being tantamount to passing the budget, thereby excluding the possibility of disagreeing with it in the National Assembly. A1 has failed to recognize this cue.

C, on the other hand, by now seems to have a clearer understanding of the DA members’ concern. She gives a lengthy explanation of the procedure pertaining to the meeting under discussion, as she understands it:

- (5) D2: Can I in[terject]
 C: [My un-] (0.2) my understanding of the process is as follows (1.9) the committee will be presented with- er by the department with the budget (1.8) the committee will deliberate on the budget (1.5) em (0.8) looking e- also at the performance of the department in the previous ye[ar]
 A1: <[Mmm]>
 (1.4)
 C: Before (1.3) the budget (0.6) also gets passed in the House (1.0) the committee (0.8) also have to say whether (0.7) they are passing (0.4) the budget or not (0.6) as a committee because what happens also in the House (1.1) is what comes from us (1.6) so we have to pronounce whether we are **in agreement with_a** (0.5) this budget_a (0.6) want **this budget** (0.6) to be passed or not (1.8) and (0.4) there could be **different_b views_b** (0.6) in terms of (0.6) which would be minuted (0.8) just as the report- (0.6) and if there are dif- **dissenting_c views** (0.4) within the portfolio committee_c that that gets recorded that e- (0.8) Party So-and-So_d was **not in agreement with_d** the parts that relate to the passing_e of **the budget_e** at committee_e level

In this utterance, C both clusters additional signifiers together, and continues the axiological charging of these clusters. In her statement, “what happens also in the House (1.1) is what comes from us”, she clusters together the National Assembly (*the House*) with the committee (*us*), indicating that if the budget is to be passed in the National Assembly, it must first be passed in the committee. At the end of her utterance, she recontextualizes the first clause complex of the report as “the parts that relate to the passing of the budget at committee level”, a nominal group which clusters together *passing*, *the budget*, and *committee*.

C attempts to accommodate the opposition MPs by using the Engagement resource of Entertain (instantiated by “if there are dif- dissenting views (0.4) within the portfolio committee”) to offer an alternative way for the opposition parties to adopt the report without agreeing to the recommendation that the budget be passed. However, she associates a negative evaluation with this option of disagreeing with the budget. This is revealed most strongly in the word *dissenting*, which in this context expresses a negative Appreciation: Reaction to the opposition MPs’ *views*. This negative Reaction is also expressed, albeit less strongly, through the word *different*. Both of these words also invoke a negative Judgement: Social Esteem: Normality on the opposition MPs. The suggestion that *Party So-and-So* may be “not in agreement with parts of the report” couples negative Satisfaction with these parties. By contrast, she couples positive Satisfaction with *this budget* in the locution “whether we are in agreement with (1.1) this budget”. Although this is phrased hypothetically, the contrast with the negative Attitude expressed towards the opposition MPs’ views suggests that the ideal situation would be for the committee to approve both the report and the budget so that the budget can be approved in the National Assembly. Thus C does not continue with A1’s axiological rarefaction, but gives a clear negative charging to the opposition parties for resisting the approval of the report and the budget, and, by implication, a positive charging to those who would approve the budget, as well as to the entire cluster including *the report*, *the budget* and *passing*.

Table 3 summarizes the new couplings established by both sides of the argument in this stage of the debate.

Ruling-party couplings							
Positive				Negative			
Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser	Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser
deliberated on	a report	+Valuation	A1	different	views	-Reaction, -Normality	C
don't see anything wrong with	that [report]	+Valuation	A1	dissenting	views within the portfolio committee	-Reaction, -Normality	C
agree	what you [D1 and D2] are saying	+Satisfaction	A1	not in agreement with	party So-and-So [opposition parties]	-Satisfaction	C
agree	you [D1 and D2]	+Satisfaction	A1				
in agreement with	this budget	+Satisfaction	C				
Opposition couplings							
Positive				Negative			
Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser	Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser
				incorrect	that word pass there	-Valuation	D2

Table 3. Summary of new couplings in Stage 2: *Supporting arguments on both sides*

In the ruling party's couplings, one can see how both *the report* and *the budget* are positively charged, and how A1 uses axiological rarefaction in making a limited concession to the opposition MPs. These markers of axiological rarefaction have been shaded in grey to distinguish them from couplings which further axiological condensation in the debate.

While Table 3 shows how axiological charging operates through coupling in this stage of the debate, Table 4 offers a view of the operations of clustering in this debate so far.

Ruling-party constellations			
Positive		Negative	
Signifier	Clusterer	Signifier	Clusterer
the report	C	D1's objections	C
the budget	C		
the House	C		
the committee	C	"party So-and-So" (opposition parties)	C
"passing"	C		
Opposition constellations			
Positive		Negative	
Signifier	Clusterer	Signifier	Clusterer
		the adoption of the report	D1
		the heading (of the report)	D1
the report	D1	the budget	D1
		that word "pass" there	D2

Table 4. Constellations produced in Stages 1 and 2

In this table, we have grouped together the signifiers clustered together by the speakers thus far into a positively-charged constellation and a negatively-charged constellation for both the ruling-party MPs and the opposition MPs. Where possible, we have tried to put signifiers that are directly contrasted with each other on the same line. This allows one to see how the opposition MPs endorse the report in general (apart from its *heading*), while rejecting *the budget*, and how they object to the use of the word *pass* in the first clause complex of the draft report. Table 4 also shows how C has clustered together the action of *passing*, *the report*, *the budget*, *the House* and *the committee*, arguing that the committee and the House must accept the report and the budget as a complete package. One difficulty with this cluster is that while it is clear that *the report* and *the budget* are positively charged by the ruling party MPs, it is not clear that *the House* and *the committee* are positively charged in their own right, but only insofar as they allow the clear passage of the budget. Still, there is no easy way for us to portray their clustering with *the report* and *the budget* except to place them in the positively-charged

constellation with these signifiers. We return to this problem in section 5. The opposition MPs' views are negatively regarded as a hindrance to this process of passing the report and the budget.

4.3 Proposal and rejection of changes in wording

The situation depicted in Table 4 creates a deadlock, which D1 attempts to alleviate by proposing changes to the wording of the first clause complex of the draft report, engaging in some axiological rarefaction in the process. However, C remains unimpressed and rejects both proposals. In the following extract, D1 makes his first proposal:

(6) C: Honourable (D1)?
(0.7)

D1: Thanks Madam Chair I think () everything the honourable members have said_a has been **correct**_a I think it's just a matter of (0.6) how we interpret it I'd like to make the following (0.3) recommendation (0.5) that we just add on two words and change one and that is at the top where it says (0.6) the portfolio committee on transport having considered **the budget** of the department vote thirty-three transport (0.6) recommends that **this report**_b be adopted_b (0.7) and that's really all I'm saying (0.3) cause what what we did_c is **quite correct**_c but (0.4) you know we we w- (0.5) **the actual budget** is being debated and stuff approved or rejected in the House and that's all I'm saying is **this report's** being ad[opted]

D2: <[adop | ted]>=
D1: =If- if

that would be acceptable_d [I would be **grateful**_d]
D2: <[(])>

D1's suggested wording, "recommends that this report be adopted", couples the word *report* with *adopted*, which would be labelled a Process in a Transitivity analysis. This coupling occurs twice in his utterance, and in the second occurrence is echoed by D2, lending his support to the use of this Process. This word becomes the opposition MPs' new recommended alternative to the Process that appears in the first clause complex of the report, *pass*, and so is added to their positively-charged constellation. The charging of the word *adopted* is illustrated in Figure 5.

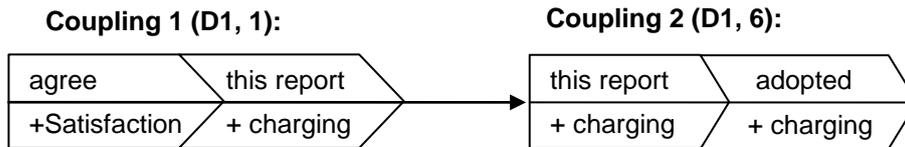


Figure 5. The axiological charging of *adopted* in (6)

In the process of motivating for a change in wording, D1 uses two positive Valuations of “everything the honourable members [including the ANC MPs] have said” and “what [the committee] did” as being *correct*. These positive Valuations show that D1 is engaging in axiological rarefaction in a similar way to A1 in (4). Also similarly to A1, he marks out the limits of his concessions by following them with instances of the Engagement resource of Counter: “it’s just a matter of (0.6) how we interpret it” and “but (0.4) you know we we w- (0.5) the actual budget is being debated and stuff approved or rejected in the House”. D1 engages in axiological rarefaction in the hopes that it will make C more amenable to his proposal.

Despite his efforts, C rejects D1’s proposal with the following words:

- (7) C: That’s **not the usual_a procedure_a**
 (1.0)
 D2: <**Adopt the report**>
 (1.0)
 C: That’s **not the usual_b procedure_b** (0.8)...

C twice displays a negative Reaction to D1’s proposal. The fact that she repeats her response gives it added Graduation: Force, ratcheting up the tension in the meeting. D2’s interjection, “Adopt the report”, repeats the opposition MPs’ favoured wording. By now these words have become so axiologically charged that D2’s utterance comes across as an aggressive reaction to C’s refusal to change the wording of the report.

At this point, D2 expresses considerable frustration:

- (8) D2: Can I- can I follow up madam chair? (1.6) we’re talking about_a semantics_a here ((clears throat)) your colleague here who’s just been talking about (0.6) **adopting a report**- what do we do? we **adopt a report_b**, we **accept_b** it as we see it here (0.7) but **to pass a report_c** is a different story because then you are endorsing it

you are actually **rubberstamping** it saying this is (1.0) **that is the difference in English...**

Here D2 gives a negative Valuation of the committee's current discussion as being "about semantics", thereby trying to trivialize it in the eyes of the committee members. At the same time, it is clear that the argument is not as trivial as D2 makes it out to be, otherwise he and the other opposition MPs would not be pursuing it. D2 charges the phrase "adopt a report" with additional positive Affect by using the word *accept*, a synonym of *adopt* that includes a meaning of positive Satisfaction. He then contrasts this with the action of passing the report, saying that this would be tantamount to "rubberstamping it". In the South African parliament, this word invokes a severely negative Judgement: Social Sanction: Propriety. In the beginning of South Africa's Fourth Parliament (which had been constituted a mere two months before this meeting) much emphasis had been placed on improving the rigour of oversight provided by parliament and on preventing blind approval, or *rubberstamping*, of departments' and state-owned entities' plans. Through the history of South Africa's democratic parliament, the word *rubberstamping* has attracted a strong negative axiological charge. Thus D2 here was drawing the committee's attention to the fact that they risked doing exactly what MPs from all parties had committed themselves to avoiding. Lastly, D2 invokes a severe negative Judgement: Social Esteem: Capacity toward the ruling party MPs by explaining "the difference in English" between passing and adopting, implying that they cannot understand the language properly. In terms of Transitivity, D2 concentrates so much on the Process *pass* that he seems to forget about the Goal, *the budget*, which the opposition MPs also claim is faulty, and instead uses *a report*. Thus although D2 minimizes the disagreement between the two sides of the argument, he does so in a way that could well be construed as an insult to the intelligence of the ruling-party MPs. This charges the ANC MPs with negative evaluations, having already clustered them with the negative action of *passing* the report.

The tension between the two sides of the debate continues to increase, as shown in the following extract:

- (9) C: Our **duty**_a is to pass (0.8) this (0.9) and recommend to the House to do the same_a (0.9) that_b is our **responsibility**_b
D2: <but it_c's **semantics**_c>
C: And (0.5) and (0.7) among us (0.5) are people (0.2) that would say_d (0.2) we are **not in favour of**_d this budget and those people should come forward and say so (1.1) if we need to vote in the committee we need to vote in the committee and say (0.5) those_e **that are in favour of**_e the- o- o- of passing the budget=
A1: =<mmm>=
C: =should say so and those_f **that are not in favour of**_f (0.2) and then that would happen even in the House

C invokes the notions of *duty* and *responsibility* to associate strong positive Judgements of Propriety with the action of passing *this* and recommending to the National Assembly to do the same. It is unclear whether *this* refers to the report or the budget, but since the National Assembly can only pass the budget and not the report, it appears that the budget is meant here. These strong positive Judgements contrast sharply with D2's repetition of the word *semantics*, making a negative Valuation of the significance of the very actions that C is valorizing. This shows clearly the intensity with which the word *pass* has attracted opposite charging for the MPs, depending on which side of the debate they are on: strong positive charging for the ruling-party members, and strong negative charging for the opposition party members. In the remainder of her utterance, C distinguishes between these two groups of people: those who, in line with their *duty* and *responsibility*, "are in favour of" passing the budget; and "those who are not in favour of" this budget and by implication are evading their duty and responsibility. It is also very clear that, by this point in the debate, there is no, or very little, epistemological evidence being offered in support of either side's position. All that C does in this utterance is to report her understanding of the procedure to be followed. Since there are no procedural guidelines for the committee to follow, there are no authorities that she or the opposition can cite in favour of their argument, other than a vague notion of what the *usual procedure* is.

A1 again speaks in support of C in the following extract:

- (10) A1: Uh I'm just speaking to what you're saying Chairperson_a **that's exactly what wha- e- what should happen_a**
 C: =<mmm>=
 A1: =because I feel we_b are in **disagreement_b**
 (0.5)
 C: <mmm>
 (3.0)
 A1: because [()] and in fact only if it's on Tuesday (0.4) there will be
 C: [Honourable (DI)]
 A1: given time (0.2) to- to- to make their declaration (0.4) and I think DA_c has (0.1) I mean they'll have the ample time to actually say they **don't agree_c** to **the budget** because of A B C D (0.1) and we'll vote in the House

In this extract, A1 gives a positive Valuation of the procedure that C has sketched in the previous extract, saying it is “exactly what wha- e- what should happen”. She expresses negative Satisfaction with the position that the committee is in, saying “we are in disagreement”. The source of this dissatisfaction is obviously the opposition MPs who are disagreeing with the wording of the draft report. This is brought out more clearly in a second instance of negative Satisfaction where she says that the DA members will have time to say that they “don't agree to the budget” in the National Assembly.

During a long pause in A1's turn at speaking, D1 puts up his hand to speak, and C notes it before realizing that A1 is actually continuing to speak. Thus D1 is allocated the next turn at speaking, in which he gives a second proposal to change the wording of the report:

- (11) C: <mhm> (1.6) Honourable (DI)?
 D1: Thanks thanks madam ch- I wonder if I could come up with a proposal_a as a **compromise_a** (0.8) that we leave the word **pass** but instead of the word it (0.7) that we say recommends that **this report** be **passed** (0.5) would that_b be **acceptable_b**

D1 labels his proposal as a *compromise*, therefore giving it a positive Valuation as a possible solution to the dispute. Transitivity analysis reveals that this proposal tries to disrupt the existing wording of the report as little as possible, changing only the Goal *it* (referring to the budget) to *this report*. D1 may think that this second proposal would be accepted because in (3), D2 had focused the debate on which Process should be used in the clause complex: *passed* or *adopted*, rather than on whether the Goal of the Process should be *the report* or *the budget*.

This created conditions in which conceding that the word *passed* did not need to be changed could appear to be a genuine compromise. However, D1 is far more concerned over whether the Goal of the clause should be *the budget* (negatively charged by the opposition) or *the report* (positively charged by the opposition). He then tries to couple greater Satisfaction with his proposal by asking if it would be *acceptable* to C.

However, this proposal also fails because C's attention has not been drawn away from the Goal at all. She shows many signs of agitation in her rejection of this proposal of a change in wording:

- (12) C: It's not **a report** that gets **passed** it's **a budget**
(2.0)
D2: ()
C: It's **a budget** (0.8) **you**_a have the right to **abstain**_a you have the right to vote **not in favour of** but **we**_b cannot (1.4) **fail to do our duty**_b because **the DA**_c is **not in agreement with the budget**_c (1.3) our **duty**_d is **to ensure that the department of transport has got a budget** (1.0) and the House deliberates on **that budget** (0.5) and **the budget** gets **passed**_d

C departs slightly from her earlier trend of clustering *the report* and *the budget*, and confirms that *passed* is an inappropriate Process to use in conjunction with *a report*, but that only *a budget* can be *passed*, and therefore D2's second proposal of a change in wording is procedurally incorrect.

C's mention of the word *abstain* invokes a negative Judgement here, because one month previously, the DA MPs had abstained from voting for C as the committee chairperson because of concerns over her involvement in a corruption scandal known as Travelgate.³ We learned from another parliamentary observer that C viewed their abstention from the vote as a personal affront. Thus in the Portfolio Committee on Transport, and particularly in C's ontogenesis (the development of her meaning-making resources over the course of her lifetime; see Martin 2010: 1), *abstain* attracted strong negative axiological charging. This is only one of many Judgements

of Propriety in this extract. C repeats the word *duty*, which she had previously used in (9), to couple a positive Judgement of Propriety with her approach to passing the budget, and a negative Judgement of Propriety, “fail to do our duty” to describe what would happen were D1’s proposal to be accepted. This negative Judgement’s Force is upscaled through extra stress on the word *fail*. *The DA* is once again coupled with negative Satisfaction for being “not in agreement with the budget”, and is therefore construed as an obstacle to the committee’s execution of its duty.

Once again, C reinforces her clustering of the *budget*, *the House* and the Process *passed* in the final clause complex of her utterance. This high degree of Force in C’s utterance, as well as the side-comments offered by D2 while C is speaking, reinforces the antagonistic tone of the interaction at this point. Table 5 summarizes the new couplings made by speakers from the ruling party in this stage of the interaction, while Table 6 summarizes the new couplings made by opposition speakers.

³ In the Travelgate scandal, C was one of five MPs who pleaded guilty to defrauding parliament through the misuse of funds allocated to them for travel on official Parliament business; she resigned from Parliament, but was re-elected as an MP in 2009 (Mthembu 2006).

Ruling-party couplings							
Positive				Negative			
Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser	Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser
duty	to pass this and recommend to the House to do the same	+Propriety	C	not the usual	procedure [D1's proposal]	-Reaction	C
responsibility	that [to pass this and recommend to the House to do the same]	+Propriety	C	not in favour of	people [opposition MPs]	-Satisfaction	C
in favour of	those [ruling party MPs]	+Satisfaction	C	disagreement	we [the committee]	-Satisfaction	A1
that's exactly what... should happen	what you're saying chairperson	+Valuation	A1	don't agree	DA	-Satisfaction	A1
duty	to ensure that the department of transport has got a budget and the House deliberates on that budget and the budget gets passed	+Propriety	C	abstain	you (DA MPs)	-Propriety	C
				fail to do our duty	we [the committee, because the DA is not in agreement with the budget]	-Propriety	C
				not in agreement with the budget	the DA	-Satisfaction	C

Table 5. Summary of ruling-party couplings in Stage 3: *Proposal and rejection of changes in wording*

Opposition couplings							
Positive				Negative			
Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser	Attitude Instantiation	Ideational meaning	Resource	Appraiser
correct	everything the honourable members have said	+Valuation	D1	semantics	what we (the committee) are talking about	-Valuation	D2
	adopted	+Satisfaction (<i>through clustering with "this report"</i>)	D1	rubberstamping	to pass a report	-Propriety	D2
quite correct	what we [the committee] did	+Valuation	D1	that is the difference in English	[ruling party MPs]	-Capacity	D2
grateful	if D1's first proposal would be acceptable	+Happiness	D1	semantics	it [to pass this and recommend to the House to do the same]	-Valuation	D2
a report	accept	+Satisfaction	D2				
compromise	[D1's second] proposal	+Valuation	D1				
acceptable	that [D1's second proposal]	+Satisfaction	D1				

Table 6. Summary of opposition couplings in Stage 3: *Proposal and rejection of changes in wording*

The sheer number of couplings shown on Table 5 and 6 are an indication of how axiologically charged the debate has become in this stage of interaction. D1's attempts at axiological rarefaction are marked in grey shading.

Using information from these tables and Table 4 above, it is possible to chart the constellations produced by both the ruling party and opposition MPs in the sections of this debate that we have examined. These are presented in Table 7.

Ruling-party constellations			
Positive		Negative	
Signifier	Clusterer	Signifier	Clusterer
the report	C	D1's objections	C
the budget	C		
the House	C		
the committee	C	the committee in disagreement [because of opposition MPs' dissent]	A1
passing	C		
those in favour of the budget	C	those not in favour of the budget	C
C's view of the correct procedure	A1	D1's proposals	C
		party So-and-So [opposition parties]	C
		the DA	A1
Opposition constellations			
Positive		Negative	
Signifier	Clusterer	Signifier	Clusterer
		the adoption of the report	D1
		the heading [of the report]	D1
the report	D1	the budget	D1
adopted	D1	that word pass there	D2
D1's proposals	D1		
		the committee's discussion about semantics	D2
		ruling party MPs	D2

Table 7. Ruling-party and opposition constellations at the end of Stage 3: *Proposal and rejection of changes in wording*

Relatively few signifiers have been added to both sides' constellations if one considers the number of new couplings shown in tables 5 and 6. This indicates that, to a large extent, the different stages serve different functions in the processes of axiological condensation taking place in the debate: stages 1 and 2 functioned to establish the constellations, and much of stage 3 served to pronounce or amplify the charging on these constellations, rather than to cluster new signifiers into them.

Most of the new items clustered into the constellations refer to people or groups of people. Thus what can be observed in this stage is a personalizing of the dispute between the ruling and opposition parties. This should perhaps not be surprising, as the final step in axiological condensation is to associate constellations with different kinds of knowers, thereby portraying some as better or as more virtuous than others, creating a hierarchy of knowers. The ruling party and opposition's competing hierarchies of knowers are clearly displayed in this stage of the debate. The ruling party MPs consider themselves to be dutiful, responsible parliamentarians while the opposition are irresponsible in obstructing the passage of the Department of Transport's budget. The opposition MPs consider themselves to be correct in challenging C's view of the procedure to be followed, while the ruling-party MPs quibble over semantics and run the risk of rubberstamping the budget.

4.4 Cosmologies

The strong axiological charging and condensation observed in 4.1–3 leads one to ask what cosmologies lie behind the constellations shown in Table 7. A comment made in the following stage of the debate, Stage 4: *Acceptance of abstention as a resolution*, assisted in cuing us to the cosmology behind the ruling-party members' version of the procedure to be followed. In it, A4, an ANC MP, says,

- (13) Er comrade chairperson can we (0.6) proceed (0.4) cause I can see that er (0.8) the honourable members from the DA have got their small caucus within the em eh- (0.4) portfolio committee so can we (0.5) just (0.3) they've got their opposition (0.2) let them hang on it (0.6) then we are moving (0.3) *the country's waiting eh (0.4) for development* ((italics ours))

The assumptions behind the italicized portion of A4's comments are particularly revealing: the country is waiting for development while the committee argues over the wording of the report, implying that development can only happen once this report is passed along the genre chain to the National Assembly. This effectively clusters the development of the country in the same constellation as the report and the budget: if one is for development, one must accept the report

as it is. The progress of the report (and of development) would continue regardless of the opposition's attempts to obstruct it. This means that one can add another signifier to both sides of the ruling party's constellations: those in favour of the budget's passing were 'pro-development', while those not in favour must, by inference, be 'anti-development'.

This logic appears to have deep roots in the history of the ANC, or in SFL terms, its phylogenesis, the development of its meaning-making resources over the period of the group's existence (Martin 2010: 1). De Jager (2009) explains that since the ANC's 1969 Morogoro Conference, the party's project of transforming South Africa was referred to as the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The NDR became a central signifier, or what Stenglin (2004: 406) calls a *bonding icon* or *bondicon*, around which the ANC rallied and built its policies. As such, it was charged with a great deal of positive axiological meaning as well as ideational meaning. In some circles this made the party's project and its policies inadmissible topics for critical debate. This seemed necessary given the exigencies of life in the anti-apartheid struggle, when there was a need for united co-operation against a common enemy. However, it also opened space for those within and outside the ANC that did not agree with the leadership's policies to be cast by some as *counter-revolutionaries*. De Jager (2009) writes that this leads to a situation in which some ANC members in the post-apartheid era view those who oppose the government's policies as *counter-revolutionaries* obstructing the NDR, although others recognize the necessity of robust parliamentary opposition.

Thus when opposition MPs objected to the wording of the committee's report, they could also be labelled as enemies of the NDR, or *counter-revolutionaries*, another bondicon which has become charged with a great deal of negative axiological meaning through phylogenesis during the anti-apartheid struggle. In fact, one can view the signifier *counter-revolutionary* as a condensation of all the signifiers in the ruling party's negative constellation. By contrast, the signifier *revolutionary* may be applied to their positive constellation. And, since the *National Democratic Revolution* clusters together *democratic* and *revolution*, one could apply the

signifier *democratic* to the positively-charged constellation, and *undemocratic* to the negatively-charged constellation.

The existence of the concepts *revolutionary* and *counter-revolutionary*, and the *NDR* as bondicons do not necessarily mean that the ANC only accepted their version of *democracy* as being democratic, or that ANC MPs were incapable of arguing from rational premises rather than axiological ones; it simply meant that they had a socially powerful apparatus by which to win debates through axiological condensation where this was required, reinforced by their moral standing as a democratically elected anti-apartheid liberation movement and their numerical superiority in parliament.

The opposition's response also reveals insights into their cosmologies: the opposition parties were concerned with defending the integrity of South Africa's democratic institutions, including parliament, and to them, this entailed defending their right to argue against the department's budget in the National Assembly. Of course, it is more difficult to conceive of a unitary cosmology shared by the opposition, made up of representatives of a variety of parties, than it is for the ANC, but we argue that these MPs have enough in common in this debate to view them as holding the same cosmology.

The opposition speakers in the stages of the episode described above come exclusively from the DA, and indeed they led the opposition's argument throughout the episode. This means that the phylogenesis of the DA may play a significant role in forming the opposition's cosmology. Although the DA has only existed under its current name since 2000, it is descended from a fairly old tradition of liberal opposition politics in South Africa. This tradition stretches back to the Progressive Party, best known for Helen Suzman, its sole parliamentary representative from 1961 to 1974 (Southern 2011). Suzman was a vocal critic of apartheid policies and advocate for

human rights in her opposition role (Southern 2011). Tony Leon, the leader of the Democratic Party who presided over its relaunch as the DA, said,

In 1994 I set out –with a handful of colleagues –with a mission and a purpose: To establish and entrench the concept of opposition as a legitimate and absolutely essential cornerstone of our new democracy. (2006, quoted in Southern 2011:290)

Leon’s clustering of *opposition* with *democracy* reveals a crucial component of the DA MPs’ cosmology: opposition to government policies and practices is seen as necessary to the health of a democracy. Thus the more opposition parties exercise their right to oppose these policies and practices, the healthier the country’s democracy is.

In the episode under investigation, the other opposition parties show support for this cosmology by siding with the DA in the final vote taken on whether or not to amend the first clause complex of the committee’s report. The two smaller opposition parties represented in the committee differ from the DA in their histories and constituencies, but arguably would agree with them in clustering *opposition* with *democracy*. COPE was formed when a number of ANC members loyal to former president Thabo Mbeki broke away from the ANC after it “recalled” Mbeki from the presidency of the country (Ramagaga 2009). The IFP is broadly regarded as a Zulu nationalist party with a history of bitter and often violent conflict with the ANC. Both of these parties have a vested interest in clustering their right to oppose the government with the integrity of South Africa’s democratic institutions and the concept of *democracy* in general.

This explains why the opposition MPs valued their right to argue against the Department of Transport’s budget in the National Assembly so highly, and why they did not want to see the committee pass the budget along the genre chain of the parliamentary oversight process unchallenged, merely *rubberstamping* it. By contrast, they portrayed themselves as those providing rigorous oversight of government departments and their budgets. While this

cosmology has historical roots, the negative charging of *rubberstamping* has only intensified in recent years, through successive waves of initiatives aimed at tightening parliamentary oversight. Most recently, these have been manifested in increasingly tense confrontations in the National Assembly between the ANC and the opposition, emboldened by the tactics of the new Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party (Joubert 2015).

To summarize, the opposition parties tend to use axiological condensation to cluster their right to oppose the department's budget with the health of South African democracy. According to their cosmologies, they are pro-democracy, and so this item can be added to their positive constellation. Meanwhile, those who do not follow this line of argument are anti-democracy, a signifier that can be added to their negative constellation. Needless to say, *democracy* is a bondicon which has been hyper-charged with positive axiological meaning for the ruling party and opposition alike, through phylogenesis in the course of South Africa's transition to democracy.

We did not identify any central signifiers for the ruling party or opposition's constellations in Table 7, because none of the signifiers in this table stood out as being prominent or recurrent enough to warrant this status. *The report* and *the budget* were the most frequent signifiers by far, but these were problematic. The opposition were in favour of the report, but this favour was not unqualified, as they were dissatisfied with its first clause complex. The ruling party had both the report and the budget in their positive constellation, leaving only D1's objections as the most likely central signifier in their negative constellation. Stage 3 personalized the debate to the extent that *ruling party MPs* and *opposition MPs* could almost have been used as central signifiers. However, all the time the participants seemed to be orienting to norms external to the interaction, suggesting that the real central signifiers may lie outside the committee's discourse, as unarticulated aspects of the participants' cosmologies. Thus in Table 8 we repeat the list of signifiers in each of these constellations, putting *Pro-democracy* and *Anti-democracy* as the

central signifiers of each positive and negative constellation respectively, and underneath that placing signifiers that may link the constellations as established in the interaction with these central signifiers according to the participants' cosmologies.

Ruling-party constellations	
Positive	Negative
Pro-democracy	Anti-democracy
National Democratic Revolution	Counter-revolutionary
Development	Anti-development
the report	D1's objections
the budget	
the House	
the committee	the committee in disagreement [because of opposition MPs' dissent]
"passing"	
those in favour of the budget	those not in favour of the budget
C's view of the correct procedure	D1's proposals
	"party So-and-So" [opposition parties]
	the DA
Opposition constellations	
Positive	Negative
Pro-democracy	Anti-democracy
Rigorous oversight	"Rubberstamping"
	the adoption of the report
	the heading [of the report]
the report	the budget
"adopted"	that word "pass" there
D1's proposals	
	the committee's discussion about "semantics"
	ruling party MPs

Table 8. Ruling-party and opposition constellations with possible central signifiers

4.5 The outcome

After Stage 3, D2 takes up C's offer in (12) that the opposition parties may abstain from adopting the report as it stands. This is necessitated by the fact that the ruling-party MPs hold more political power in the committee than the opposition MPs do, both because they are in the

majority, and because C, as chairperson, is in control of the procedural direction that the committee takes, and has shown no signs of making further concessions to the opposition MPs.

D2's acceptance of C's suggestion that the opposition parties abstain from adopting the report initiates Stage 4: *Acceptance of abstention as a resolution*. Following this, there is a vote on whether to adopt the report or not, constituting Stage 5: *Vote*. The ANC MPs vote for the adoption of the report, while all the opposition MPs abstain. Following the vote, I1 and Co1, as representatives of the smaller opposition parties, the IFP and COPE, reiterate that they are abstaining because they are obliged to consult their caucuses before deciding whether to pass the budget or not. This makes up Stage 6: *Reiteration of positions*. Once this is complete, the committee's decision is recontextualized back into the written report in Stage 7: *Recording of decision*.

The final wording of the report's opening and closing paragraphs is as follows:

- (14) *Opening paragraph:*
The Portfolio Committee on Transport, having considered the budget vote of the Department of Transport, Vote 33 reports as follows:
...
Closing paragraphs:
The Democratic Alliance (DA), Congress of the People (COPE) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), while accepting the contents of the report, abstained from recommending the acceptance of the Budget Vote because they had not consulted with their relevant parties in caucus.

The Portfolio Committee on Transport recommends that Budget Vote 33 be passed.

Thus the committee officially recommends that the budget and report be passed along to the National Assembly, accompanied with a note stating that the opposition parties have abstained from this recommendation.

5. Conclusion: talking about Semantics in parliament

Our analysis shows that 'talking about Semantics' in parliamentary committee discourse can reveal insights into the interaction between LCT and SFL, which could help in developing both theories further and suggesting new avenues of research.

In this study we have been able to observe the process of clustering and charging through examining the coupling of signifiers with expressions of Attitude. However, ideational-Attitude couplings are only one type of coupling, and future research is needed to show in more systematic detail how other semiotic systems are involved in axiological and epistemological condensation. Almutairi (2014) shows how Engagement interacts in complex ways with ideational-Attitude couplings, and his research will be useful in further investigation of this area.

We have also observed how previously charged signifiers retain their axiological charging throughout the logogenesis of a text and can be used to charge other signifiers. This is best illustrated in Figure 4, where *this report*, which has been positively charged through a coupling with *agree*, is then in turn used to charge the Process *adopted* positively, as acceptable wording for the report according to the opposition MPs.

One conceptual problem we encountered is that two signifiers which C clustered together with *the budget* and *the report*, namely *the committee* and *the House*, did not seem to attract any charging in themselves, either through couplings with expressions of Attitude or by association with *the budget* and *the report*. Instead, they were seen as the mediums by which *the budget* and *the report* could be *passed*, and thus would attract positive charging if they did pass the budget, but negative charging if they did not. It was difficult to know where to place these two signifiers in binary constellations. We put them in the positively-charged constellation with *the report* and *the budget*, but possibly a more sophisticated analysis would be to consider them as groups of knowers which have been clustered together but are yet to be positioned, depending on which constellation they favour. Future research could determine whether such yet-to-be-constellated groups of knowers are a common feature of other discourse types, such as educational discourse, and how attempts are made to align them with one constellation or another.

We observed that MPs on both sides of the debate at one point reversed the couplings that fellow members of their parties had made in order to appear conciliatory, using axiological rarefaction before continuing with the process of axiological condensation. Maton (2013) and others, including Matruglio et al (2013) and Macnaught et al (2013), have investigated how regular fluctuations in SG and SD form what are known as semantic waves in exemplary classroom discourse that facilitates cumulative knowledge-building. It has been observed that MPs also use semantic waves to recontextualize concerns from their constituencies in ways that make them relevant on a national scale (Siebörger & Adendorff 2015b). These waves are normally thought of as the result of epistemological condensation and rarefaction, but this study illustrates that axiological condensation and rarefaction may also take on a wave form. In Maton's (2014) terms, these would be referred to as knowledge code semantic waves, and knower code semantic waves respectively. The existence of knower code semantic waves makes sense intuitively, as many axiological arguments consist of concessions followed by strong negative evaluations of another. An example would be stereotypical racist arguments which begin with the statement "Some of my best friends are black / white but...", before giving negative evaluations of the race that is 'othered'. There is scope for plenty of future research into knower code semantic waves, investigating, for example, whether there is a particular 'optimal' wave pattern that can be used to produce hierarchies of knowers, just as some knowledge code semantic waves work better than others at building cumulative knowledge.

This study has also demonstrated how the central signifiers of constellations may not be explicitly mentioned in the logogenesis of a text, but may be recoverable from participants' cosmologies, as developed through the phylogensis of meaning-making resources in their respective subcultures. One would expect this to be the case in instances where participants are unaware of what holds together the constellations they produce, or where they fear that revealing the central signifiers of their constellations would not advance their cause. This is

possibly the case in the interaction discussed in this article, where, if either side overtly labelled the other as ‘anti-democratic’, they would risk being ruled out of order for using unparliamentary language, or accused of prejudice. It is possible that there are more cases in which the central signifiers of constellations are recoverable only from the ontogenesis of speakers or the phylogensis of meaning-making resources in their subcultures than those in which they are mentioned in the logogenesis of a text. This is because revealing the central signifier of a constellation would make the speakers’ cosmologies more explicit, which in turn would reveal the ideologies of the speaker, rendering those ideologies less powerful in manufacturing consent (Fairclough 2001). This is another speculation which could be confirmed or disconfirmed by future research into the relations between the LCT concept of cosmologies and logogenesis, ontogenesis and phylogensis in SFL.

To summarize, ‘talking about Semantics’ in the parliamentary debate we have analysed reveals interesting insights about the nature of axiological charging, and the ways in which axiological condensation is used to polarize knowers into ‘camps’ and hierarchize them through the logogenesis of a debate. Such use of axiological condensation is not unique to parliament, but may prove to be crucial to many debates in public discourse, polarizing opinions on a societal scale. This means that Semantics, far from being trivial, has much potential to aid us in understanding the forces that shape contemporary public discourse.

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